



BULB LOG 14.....7<sup>th</sup> April 2021



Saxifraga and Rhodendron



My routine for the Bulb Log is to have the images by the weekend then on Sunday I will select the pictures that I will use - then the words appear over Monday and Tuesday ready for the Log going online by midday on Wednesday. We enjoyed a relatively sunny although not particularly warm period since last week but warm enough to bring many plants into flower which kept me busy taking hundreds of pictures. The saxifrages ,many of which have been flowering for a few weeks reached their peak display hence they feature on the cover.



I often state that nature is our partner in the garden and it is not always predictable especially with regard the weather it brings. As I went to bed on Sunday night snow was blowing about in strong winds: the blizzard conditions they had forecast had arrived right on time and by the time I got up on Monday everything was covered in white. The Saxifrage flowers are tough and I am sure they will come out from under the white blanket still looking good.



Now back to the garden before the snow arrived where I look around some of the troughs.



To see how the troughs have performed it is useful to look back to the scene in 2016.



I like the challenge of keeping troughs going by allowing the plants to grow as naturally as possible which means they are not always in prime condition. It is easy for a trough to look good when it is planted up with perfectly grown plants and we see many pictures like that; but how do they look after a number of years of exposure?

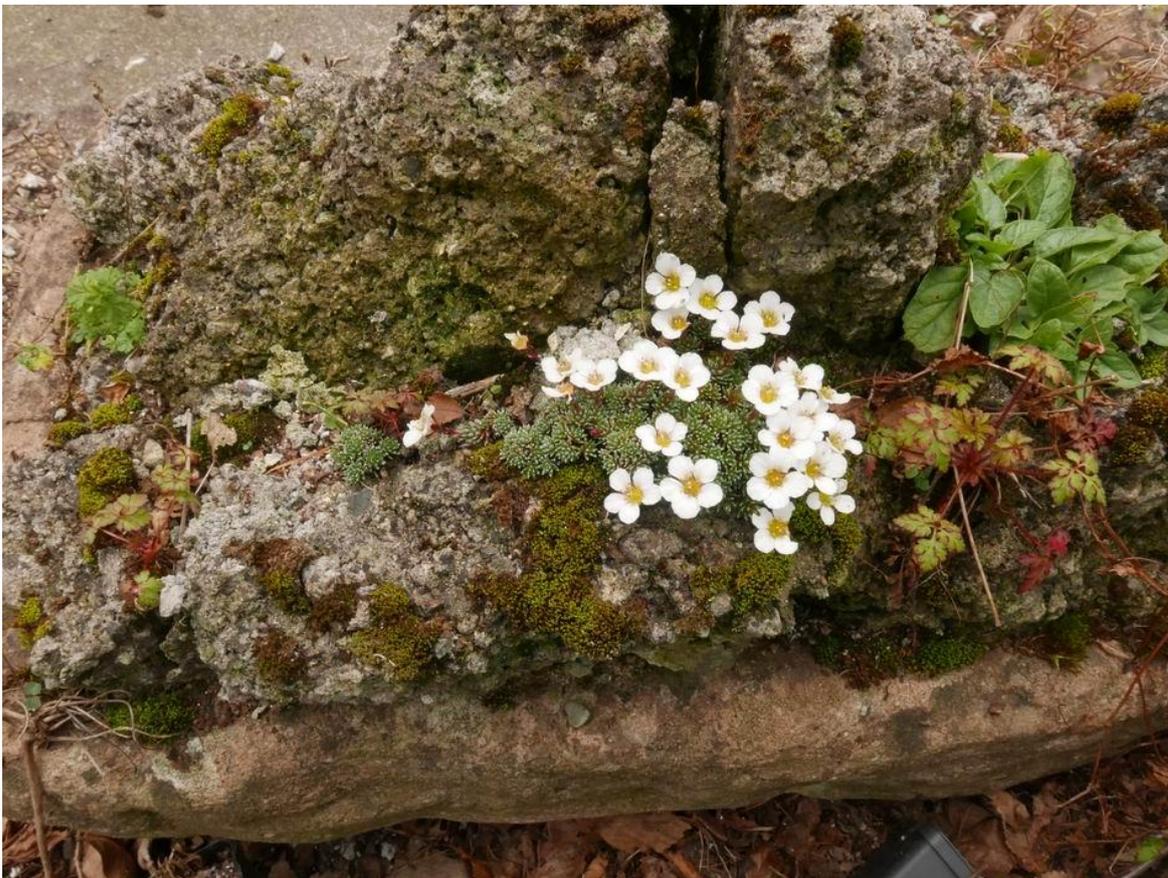
The trough on the right was planted up with bought-in plants but when planting up a trough I prefer using very small plants such as rooted cuttings so I can enjoy the journey observing and recording how they grow. Some will inevitably do better than others such as the well flowered yellow ***Saxifraga x apiculata*** 'Gregor Mendel' which is having a particularly good flowering this year.



I do not like plant labels in the garden and think they look especially out of place in a trough so if you wonder how I remember all the plant names – I don't. I refer to the picture (below) of the labels lying beside the plants when I first planted the trough



The same trough when newly planted in 2016 with the labels in place to remind me of the plant names.



Hidden in the shade of the broken concrete this white flowered saxifrage planted as a small cutting is looking good and flowering well it has taken three or more years to grow to about the size of plant that you might buy from a nursery. We did originally buy and were given, a range of Saxifrages, a number of which have not persisted but I regularly take cuttings from those that are doing well in our conditions.



This is one of the troughs that was planted up with cuttings some of which have grown very well. I planted them in the crevices between the bits of rock and now they are spreading out nicely to form a hard mat slowly covering the broken concrete.





This large plant of *Saxifraga marginata* has been growing and flowering well in this trough for around fifteen years.



A hybrid of *Saxifraga oppositifolia* spills over the corner of this trough while another easy early flowering alpine *Primula marginata* 'Napoleon' flowers profusely every year.



And then the snow arrived but I have no fear of this display because I know from experience that these Primula flowers will emerge unscathed from under the snow.



**Primula marginata** is a plant that can survive and flower in harsh often dry conditions: such as this plant which, along with all the others in this tiny trough, were placed there as unrooted cuttings during a demonstration I did in 2008 - all have rooted and survived and the Primula flowers every year.



**Primula marginata**

We grow a range of *Primula marginata* such as the two small forms shown on this page they are similar in all features until you look carefully at the leaves then you will notice that the leaves of the form below have deeper serrations along the edges.





### **Primula marginata**

Primula marginata is very easy to propagate from cuttings which can be taken at any time of the year. The new growth forms at the end of the stems which elongate as the plant gets older then when they get too long you can cut off the growing tip and root it as a cutting. By removing the dominant growth you will encourage secondary buds to grow lower down the cut stem rejuvenating the original plant.



### **Primula marginata**

This is a group of cuttings that I took last year, rooted them in a box of sand and planted them in the autumn.



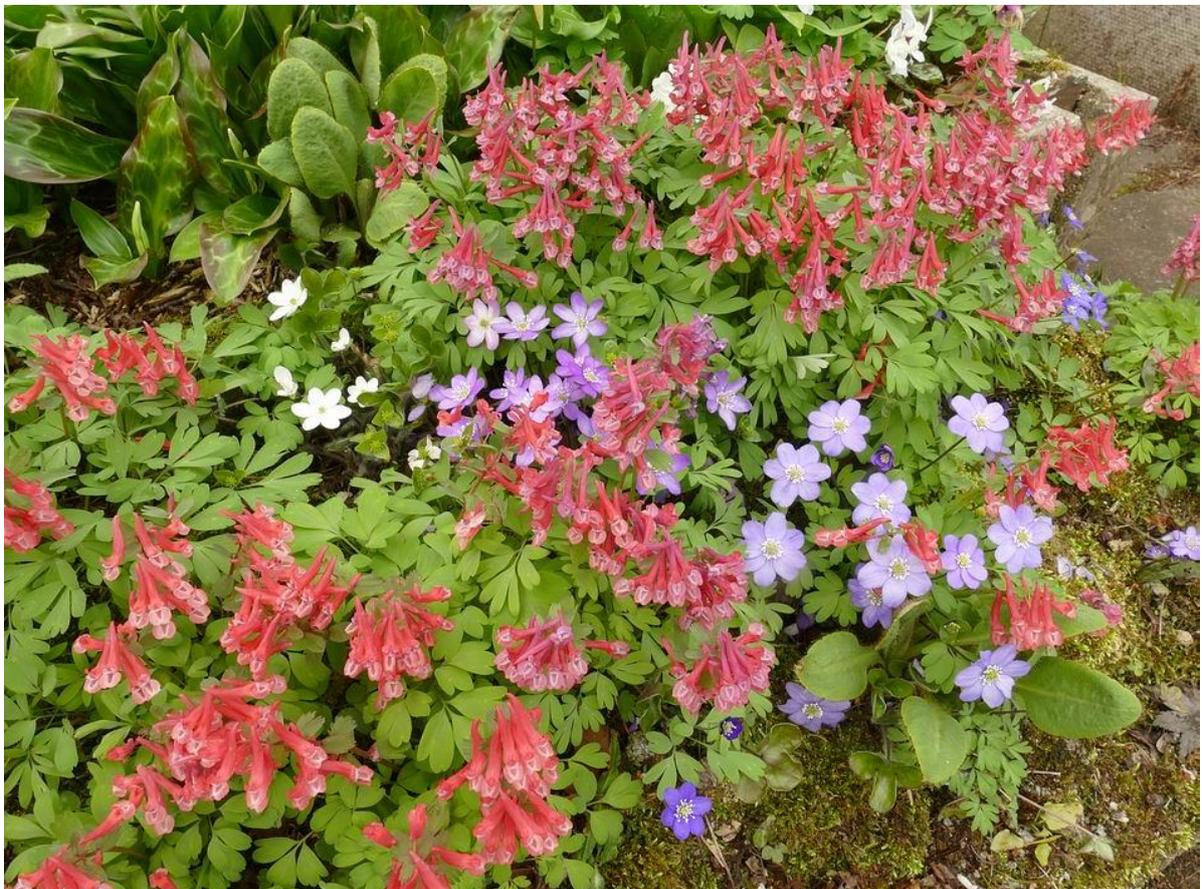
A slightly larger leaved **Primula marginata** with a darker flower.



Troughs and slab beds.



Looking across the Rock garden Bed on the left, and the Erythronium plunge frame on the right, you will see the growth is accelerating and now we can no longer see the ground – in the foreground the Corydalis now dominate the narrow bed.



The **Hepatica nobilis** flowers peak out through the **Corydalis solidia** foliage that will die back next month to allow the light in for the Hepatica leaves which emerge as their flowers turn to seed.



The **Fritillaria imperialis** flowering stems are looking suitably majestic as they approach their full glory, sadly the snow blizzards put a stop to them.



I am not sure if the flower stems will recover from the freezing snow and strong winds that we are experiencing – since I took this picture we have had another 24 hours of the wind and snow and the stems are now almost flat on the ground.



From this area I get glimpses through the trees to some of the larger Rhododendrons that are in flower.



**Rhododendron thomsonii**



At about four metres high most of the flowers of **Rhododendron thomsonii** are well above my head.



**Rhododendron pachysanthum** is a lower growing shrub with more of a spreading habit. Here it is growing below the *Rhododendron thomsonii*.



Now the *Rhododendron pachysanthum* flowers have been trashed by the snow, even before they got fully open. We will have to wait for another year to enjoy their display.



*Rhododendron pachysanthum* flowers now looking more like used teabags.



We enjoyed a lovely sunny period with mild days occasionally reaching 14C which encouraged the flowering and I took hundreds of pictures.



Encouraged by the sunshine the floral display of the large Rhododendrons was building up nicely towards a grand display.



**Rhododendron uvariifolium** with **Rhododendron elegantulum** appearing at the right.



**Rhododendron elegantulum**



**Rhododendron uvariifolium**



And then on Sunday night the cold arctic front moved over us and when I looked out it was like one of those globe snow scenes I had as a child, which were filled with a liquid that you shook to create a snow scene with the 'snow' swirling about in every direction. It is all very pretty in the snow with the blue skies and pink flowers but it leaves behind a disappointing legacy.



*Rhododendron uvariifolium* after one night of snow.



***Rhododendron uvariifolium***

Under more normal spring weather the flowers would have lasted for two or three weeks but the following day all the flowers had their time cut short by the cold conditions and there was not a single flower left.

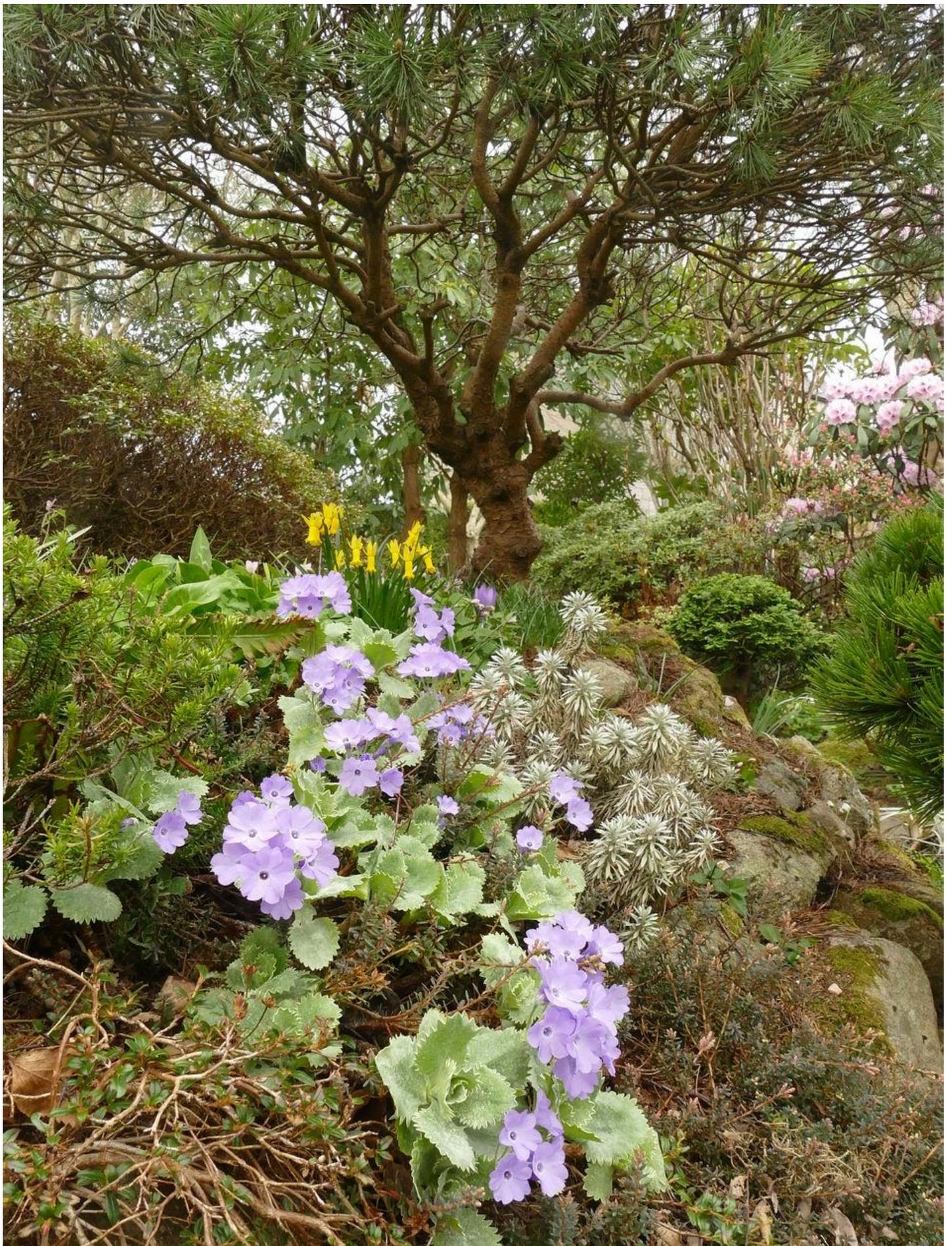


Coming back to *Primula marginata* here I use it in the troughs and the small crevice that I built to resolve what was an ugly gap between the two troughs that form part of the edges of the new bed beside the pond.



***Primula marginata***

The rocks of this small crevice spill out from the bed to sit on the slabs hence there is very little soil and it can get quite dry however *Primula marginata* grows and flowers.



This should have been a week when I celebrated the flowering of the large Rhododendrons however nature played a cruel card and cut that short. We have been gardening long enough to know that this is just a seasonal blip and that in a few weeks some of the later flowering Rhododendrons will burst into bloom and most of the plants emerging from the ground will rise up from their current prone position and we will move on from this episode. To finish on a positive note while we have lost some flowers but all the plants are hardy enough to survive and thrive click the link for the latest [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) looking at the garden before the snow.....