



BULB LOG 02.....14th February 2024



Eranthis hyemalis and *Leucojum vernum*

Every year my spirit is boosted by the re-appearance of the early flowering bulbs. The biggest lift I get is from the lovely yellow ***Eranthis hyemalis*** flowers.

Unlike many of the other early bulbs the *Eranthis* flowers are brave enough to face the sky, looking upwards to soak up any sunshine that we may get. At this time of year I find myself in harmony with these flowers and when we see it I find myself with eyes closed my face towards the sun to absorb some of its power just like the *Eranthis*.



The evolution of these early growing plants has conditioned them to grow and flower early in the year taking advantage of the additional access to space and light available because many plants have not yet woken from their winter state. Most of the early bulbs have adaptations to deal with the changeable and wet conditions; for instance *Galanthus* point their flowers downwards acting like an umbrella however the *Eranthis hyemalis* flowers face upwards but have the ability to shut tight into a yellow ball in low temperatures protecting the reproductive parts from any rain, sleet and snow that we may get.



Some years our temperature does not increase enough to trigger the *Eranthis* to open their flowers but on February 5th Aberdeen was, unusually, the warmest place in the country at 15C and all the butterball buds opened wide.





These mild conditions did not last long and the next day we were back to more familiar, colder wet windy conditions, and the flowers closed up again. I am not sure what pollinates the *Eranthis* because I am not aware of seeing many flying insects this early in the year except for the small swarms of midges performing their cascading dance in the sunlight so it maybe they are involved. Perhaps the flowers self-pollinate: whatever transfers the pollen we always get a good seed set leading to ever expanding colonies across the garden.

Gardeners often have irrational fears - I used to worry that tiny seedlings would be unable to grow through the thick mulch laid down by the leaf fall, if I left it in situ, when in fact the seedlings all manage to rise perfectly well through the mulches often producing stronger growth as a result. The older I get the more I accept that nature knows best and is a far better gardener than I am.



Walking round the garden my eyes were drawn to a single small white flower in the bed beside the pond and I was delighted to see it was one of a number of *Eranthis pinnatifida* tubers that I planted out a few years ago which had produced a flower. We have had a few flowers since we planted them but I am ambitious to have a small colony of them growing and self-seeding here.



There are several pots of seedlings including mature plants growing in one of the frames which always provides me with some seeds to collect and sow. I have to admit that last year I forgot to check regularly enough for the seed to ripen and by the time I remembered the few seeds that had set were already shed into or between the surrounding pots. It would be much better to have these growing in the bed bedside the pond where they could self-seed as much as they want to so, what has stopped me planting more out? It is a psychological barrier that many gardeners will be familiar with, where we have a tendency to be overprotective with some of these rarer more difficult to acquire plants, often to their disadvantage. For some reason we think we can do better than nature when my experience is it is more often the other way round so this year I am resigned to planting out at least half of the mature plants.



We have a good number of forms raised from seed so have a good mix of clones to help establish a fertile colony but despite me pollinating them with a paint brush, the weather at flowering time does have an effect on the rate that seed is set.

As well as the obvious visual difference **Eranthis pinnatifida** also diverges from other Eranthis by having a single seed leaf also the flowers do not open and close in the changing conditions - in fact the immature flowers are open and unprotected by any form of bud even as they push through the

ground - the petals then continue growing until they achieve their full size and the pollen ripens.



We have several pots of flowering sized seed raised plants each producing a range of different forms. Read more about these plants in [Bulb Log 0320](#) or check the index for many more references back as far as BL 0408.



Another irrational fear preventing me planting them out is they may suffer competition from other plants. Again nature proves this not to be the case as can be seen here where a number of other plants including *Erinus alpinus* have seeded into this pot of *Eranthis pinnatifida* seedlings and all the plants are growing perfectly happily. These small plants can be at risk from slugs but that threat is equally true in the frames as well as the garden.



Eranthis byunsanensis is a close relative that looks very similar to *Eranthis pinnatifida*. As well as in previous Bulb Logs you can read more about these and the other *Eranthis* in an excellent article written by Wim Boens and published in the free online magazine [International Rock Gardener number 49](#).



***Galanthus plicatus* 'Glenorma'**

Snowdrop flowers are emerging all across the garden and you could be forgiven for thinking we collect them. In a sense we do but I use them like an artist uses paint to create an effect rather than a true collector who wants to have as many different labelled forms as possible.



Galanthus woronowii

Part of the reason that we have so many snowdrops is that the bulbs divide, forming ever bigger clumps. The clusters eventually become too big for their own good.

In time the competition for the same amount of water and nutrients means there is no longer sufficient to



support all the densely packed bulbs to grow and flower. It is good practice to lift and divide the bulbs before they get to that over-congested stage which raises the question of when is the best time to do it? Ideally it is best to lift the bulb when it is not in growth so you will not damage the roots but that is not always possible; the next best time is when they are just starting into growth. Carefully lifting, dividing and replanting them to minimise any damage to the leaves and roots is often better than leaving them to decline even further as they get even more congested.



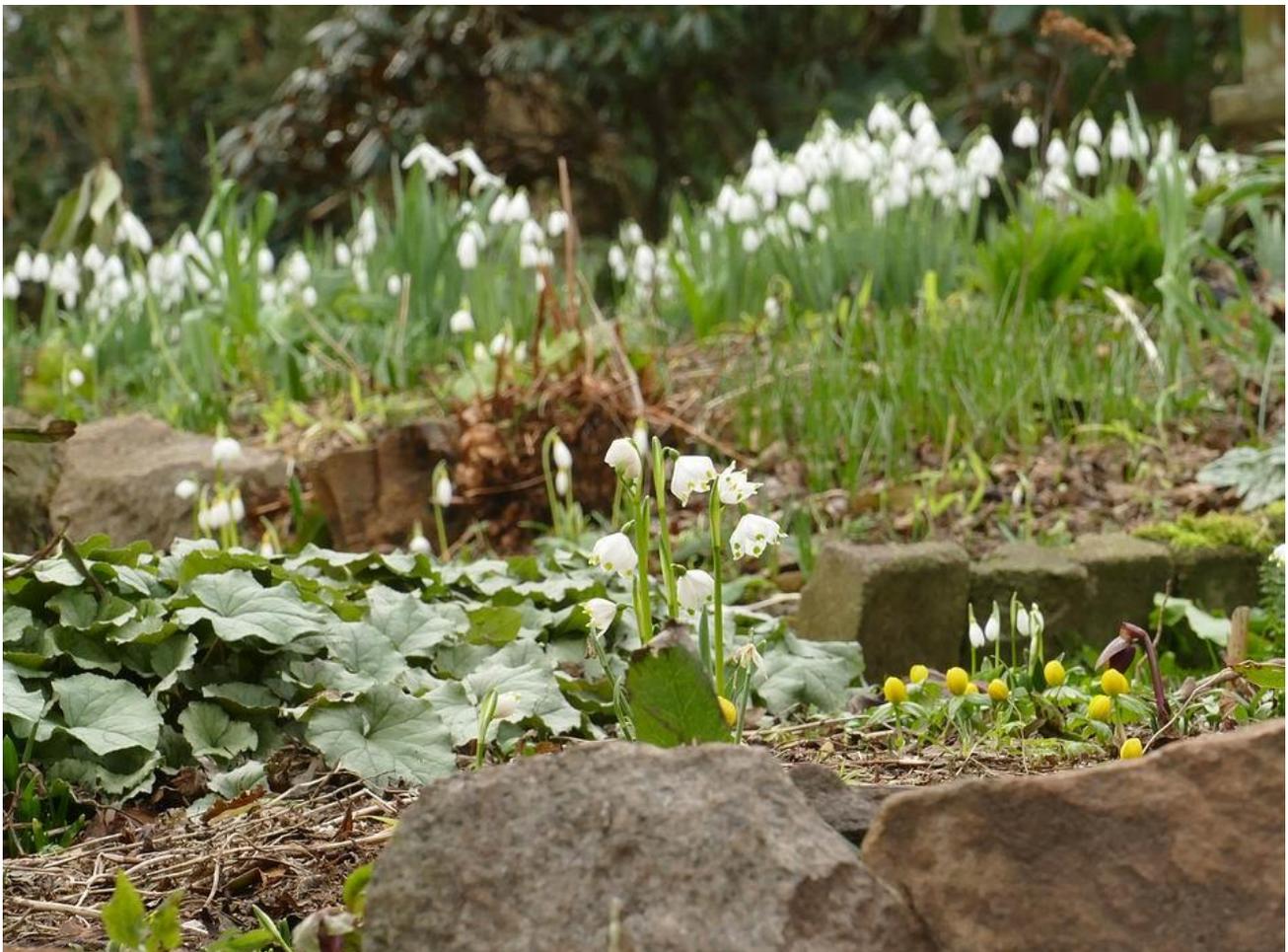
I like it best when bulbs are growing spaced out affording each individual the space to be seen, which is more like they grow in the wild, or as they form small groups but they will progress to form big clumps which while impressive is not my preference.



I encourage mixed plantings in the garden rather than isolated 'specimen plants'. I also want to have natural populations where all ages of a plant from seedlings up to elderly are present rather than just a clump of a plant all the same age.



Galanthus 'Trumps'



Even this early in the year there are many scenes in the garden combining different plants in flower.



Crocus abantensis



Cyclamen coum



Cyclamen coum





We enjoyed just the one warm day which was followed by a return to more wind and rain when the Eranthis turned back into butter balls as they closed their flowers to protect the reproductive parts.



Since last month's Bulb Log we have had two periods of snow during the first one when we had more than 15cms I made a [Bulb Log Video Diary](#) then this week we had around 5cms and again the Eranthis take these weather events in their stride.



The beautifully scented winter flowering shrub **Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill'** is in full flower in the front garden.





I will leave you this month with another picture of **Eranthis pinnatifida** growing in the garden as a reminder to me to remember and collect the seeds this year and to plant more of the tubers currently growing in pots into the garden and to encourage everyone to let nature be your guide.