



SRGC

# Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

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BULB LOG 06.....12<sup>th</sup> June 2024



Rhododendron 'Curlew' and Rhododendron yakushimanum



I love woodland habitats and that is obvious even from our front garden, known locally as the jungle, because it is so densely planted. The dense planting is so different from the all too many front gardens that have been converted to barren impervious carparks completely covered in hard concrete or tar products which provide no benefit at all to the natural world. In contrast our 'jungle' with all its biodiversity offers plenty natural habitats providing foraging for food and cover with at least three nests, Wood pigeon, Black Bird and Gold Crest, that I know of.

It has been proven that being around trees benefits our wellbeing and we feel that in our garden haven, where we enjoy the plants and wildlife that visits and also calls it their home.



We do exercise some control - witness the exposed branch structure of the nearest 'dwarf' Rhododendron where I had to cut great chunks away where its growth was starting to affect access to the drive and pathway. I also have to do regular pruning to keep the growth from spreading out over our front wall. There is more room for ground level planting of bulbs and herbaceous plants than there appears from this picture but over the years the trees and shrubs have grown and I do judicious pruning and cutting back, sometimes even removing a plant to keep some open planting areas in the centre and around the edges.





Two of the best for flower power that I would recommend are the yellow **Rhododendron 'Curlew'** just appearing in the bottom left and **Rhododendron yakushimanum 'Koichiro Wada'** now well over two metres wide and covered in glorious white flowers that have a pink flush when they first open, see below, fading out to pure white.

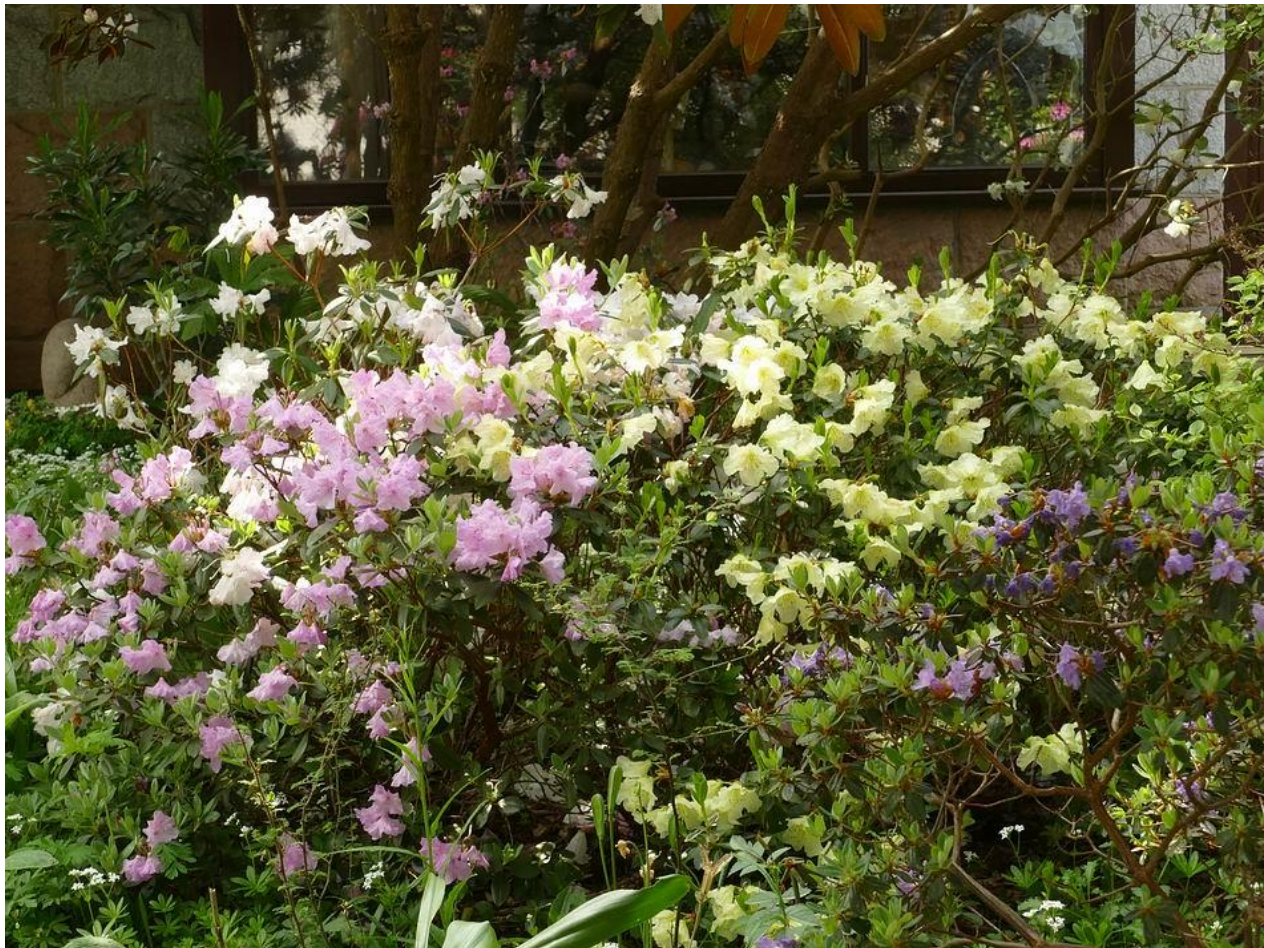


**Rhododendron yakushimanum 'Koichiro Wada'**





Daphne, Hypericum, Ledum, Rhododendron, Sorbus and Acer are some of the woody plants that greet us as we walk in to the drive to reach our front door.



There is a pathway into the middle of the 'Jungle', a bit like a secret garden, and to keep it open some Rhododendron have been cut right back to almost ground level a number of times. Many, especially the smaller leaved types, respond well by budding and growing back from the old wood such as the three in this group of pink

**Rhododendron 'Wigeon', yellow R. 'Curlew' and white R. 'Dora Amateis'.**





Growing over four metres high is a large old **Rhododendron bureavii** covered in flowers, which can be best seen looking out from our upstairs windows, but equally impressive is the view that you get standing below looking up to the flowers with an equally spectacular vision standing underneath looking at the underside of beautiful foliage.



Like many Rhododendrons its best flower display comes every second year with a lesser flowering in between but the decorative leaves are with us all the time.

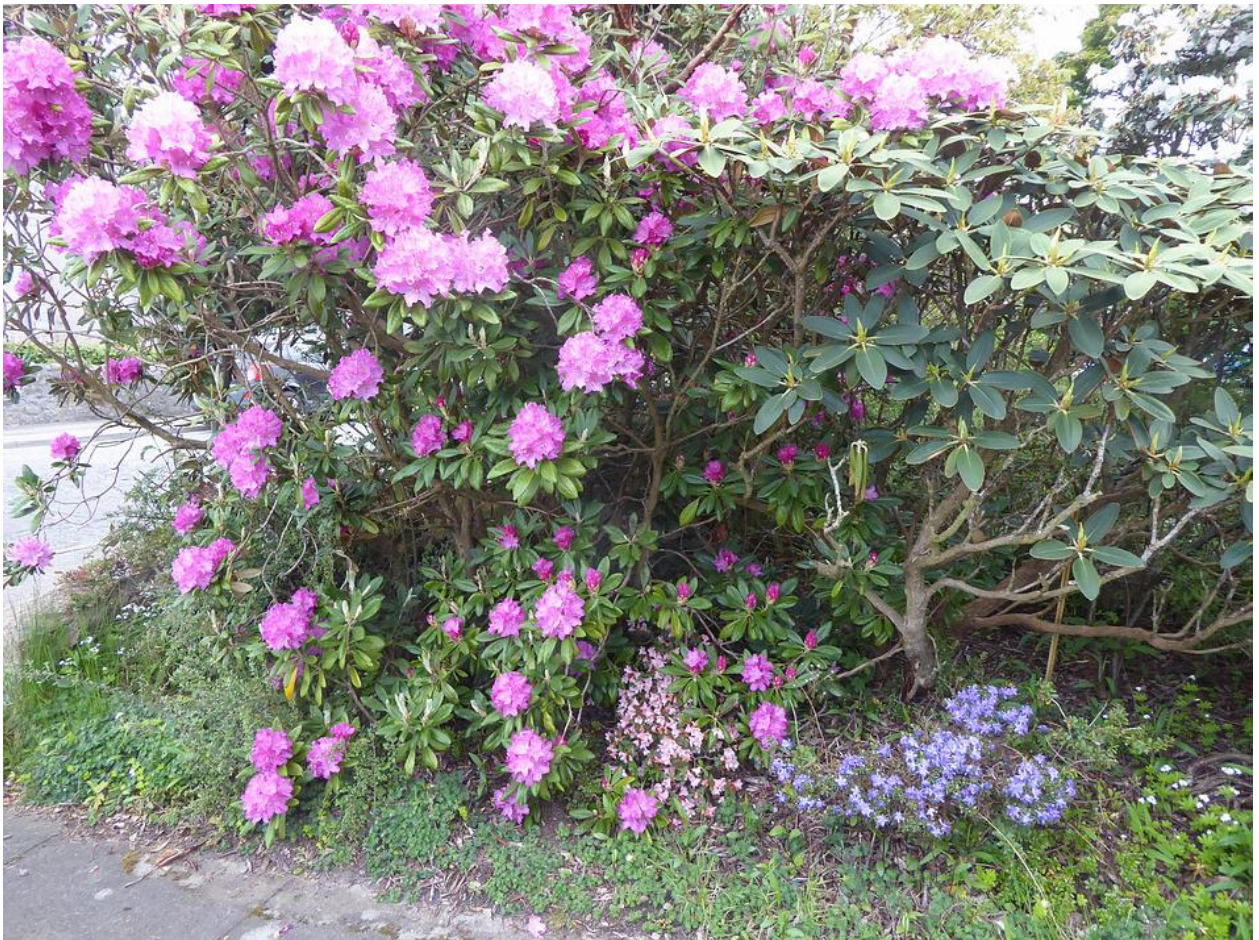


Growing out at an angle to escape the shadow of the *R. bureavii* is a **Rhododendron williamsianum** hybrid 'Cowslip' which despite growing in the shade of its larger cousin is also putting on an exceptional display of flowers this year. As well as restricting light the trees and shrubs, especially these evergreen ones, create a rain shadow effect and while these low light often pretty dry areas can be seen as a problem area there are plenty plants that will grow there.



The ground is covered in **Convallaria majalis** and **Galium oderatum** which have both spread into this area from more open parts. Many plants also seed in and grow here including the shrub **Daphne pontica** that must have been deposited by a bird because before this one appeared we have not grown this plant.





This **Rhododendron shweliense** has a flat side because it has to be cut back to allow access into the drive but it is one of the the ones that will bud from old wood and so the cycle of grow and cut back continues.



At ground level and trying to get out from below the above is the dwarf hybrid Rhododendron '**Ginny Gee**'.





There are plenty more trees and shrubs in the back garden including **Rhododendron orbiculare** that create our small woodland habitats.



Our plantings are tiered from ground level, where carpets of mostly early flowering bulbs and plants delight us, stepping up to the small to medium sized shrubs then rising up to the large rhododendrons with the trees topping off the canopy high above my head.





For the first five months of the year it is the ground level plants attracting our attention then as their flowers are going over the small to medium rhododendrons become the flowering attraction just ahead of the blooming of their large relatives

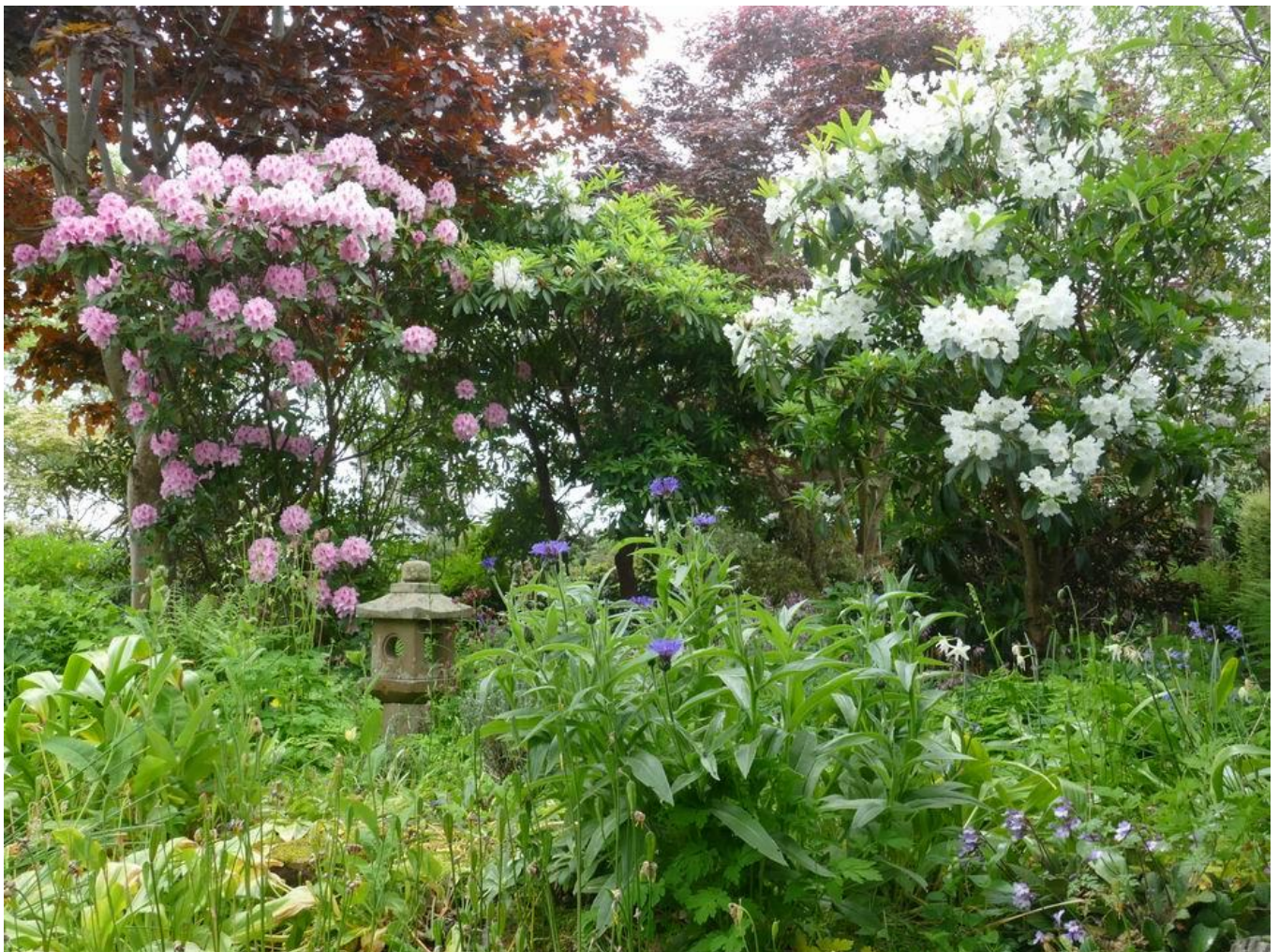


One of the medium sized shrubs is this beautiful **Rhododendron yakushimanum x recurvoides**.





**Rhododendron yakushimanum x recurvoides**



The large pink hybrid **Rhododendron 'Albert Schweitzer'** with an equally large white flowered **Rhododendron sp.** we raised from wild collected seed that seems close to *R. decorum*.





**Rhododendron 'Albert Schweitzer'**



**Rhododendron sp. aff. decorum?**



This is what **Rhododendron fortunei** looks like some forty years after we sowed the seed. Like many of the others we grow we have removed the lower branches to keep the large area of ground that lies below open for planting. Its high canopy, thick trunk and branches making it look more like a medium sized tree than a large shrub.



At the other end of the size range is a dwarf plant of a similar age **Rhododendron 'Maricee'** a cultivar form of *R. sargentianum*. With tiny leaves it forms a mound that covers itself in white flowers. For many years it remained compact, the given size at ten years old is 60cms but after forty years it is over a metre high with a bigger spread.





This is a bed where we planted a number of the dwarf rhododendron and for many years they formed compact domes. If they were looking good at the time of an SRGC Show we would dig them up put them in a pot, exhibit them at the Show replanting them immediately after.

As the years passed they grew wider than tall and started to weave their twisted mass of branches into a single mass forming a dome of foliage across the entire bed. Looking below you can see the branches which I have started cutting back selectively which encourages new lower growth. If I had the courage I would cut them all back at the same

time but I am not ready for such a drastic change so I will do it progressively.



Since I started cutting them back a few years ago I found the small **Rhododendron keiskei** 'Yaku Fairy' struggling to compete until I removed some of the competing growths which has encouraged it to flower.





We have another form of **Rhododendron keiskei** in one of the raised walls where its growth tumbles down flowering among the moss covered rocks.



There are still many more plants to come at ground level, their flowers taking over from the early colour.





Blue Bells - we have both the native *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and the introduced *Hyacinthoides hispanica* which hybridise in the garden giving a variation of intermediate forms.







While it is desirable to keep any native Blue Bell woods pure they are all good plants for the garden. They can be vigorous so as soon as the flowers fade I pull the flowers stems and leaves off which prevents them seeding and taking over.



Alongside the Blue Bells we have the yellow flowered North American Merrybells, **Uvularia grandiflora**. These we leave to seed around with the plants on the right self-seeded into the gravel edge of the path.





I always prefer the variation you get from seed raised plants much more than a single clonal form. The flowers of this seed parent plant of **Uvularia grandiflora** (above) has deeper yellow colour than its seedling (below).



**Uvularia grandiflora**





***Uvularia perfoliata*** also seeds around but I have not noted any great variation in the seedlings yet.



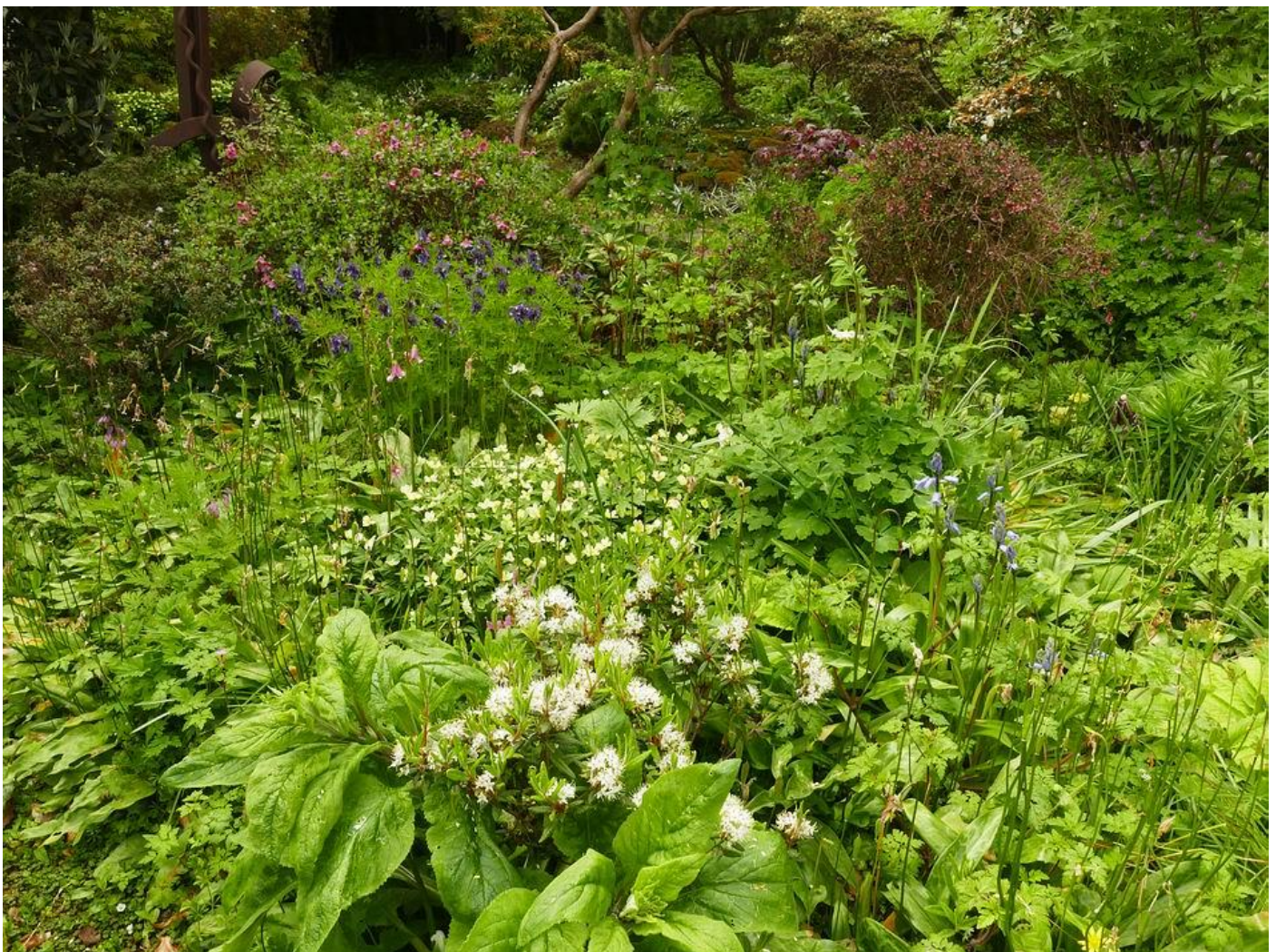
***Uvularia perfoliata***





The Bluebells and Merrybells work well together. I recommend that you allow all your bulbs to seed and I strongly disagree with the commonly repeated opinion that allowing them to set seed weakens the bulbs. My trials show it is quite the opposite as bulbs setting seed grow for some weeks longer often turning out larger bulbs than those that have their seed removed. My exception is with the Spanish and hybrid Bluebells where I do remove

the growth after the flowers have faded.



There is a lovely green period when the ground is covered in the mixed foliage of the early flowering plants and bulbs as they set seed and dies back naturally but there are plenty more subjects flowering through this carpet.

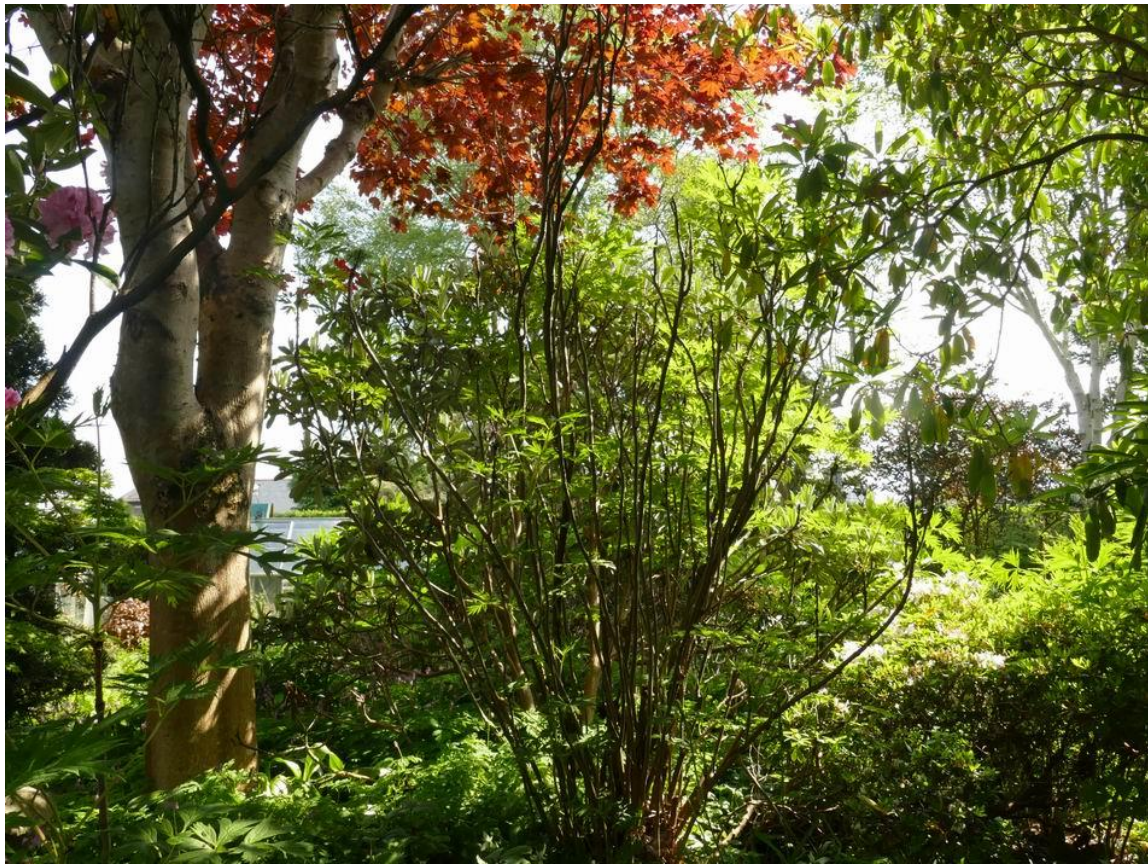


One you may have noticed in the previous picture is **Corydalis 'Craigton Purple'**. This is the original plant still growing where it seeded from *Corydalis capitata* the pollen most likely coming from 'Craigton Blue'. I found a number of seedlings of the same parentage in this area and selected this one as the best to name - a decision that has turned out well as many of the others shared the short lived habit of the seed parent plant while this form has sustained and increased well.



**Corydalis 'Craigton Purple'** grows in a range of habitat in our garden here it is growing through *Dicentra* with **Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'** in the background.





Producing good garden cultivars suited to your conditions is one of the many benefits of raising plants from seed another reason is to keep a healthy population with plants of all ages. Our original ***Paeonia lutea ssp ludlowii*** shown here must be nearly thirty years old and as you can see it has suffered a lot of die back this year. This decline could be down to its age, the changing weather, the habitat conditions as the surrounding trees and shrubs have grown or a combination of these factors.

If we had just this one mature plant we could

be about to lose it but we have allowed it to behave naturally, seeding around, so we have plenty healthy plants of all ages from germinating seed to teenagers and beyond.

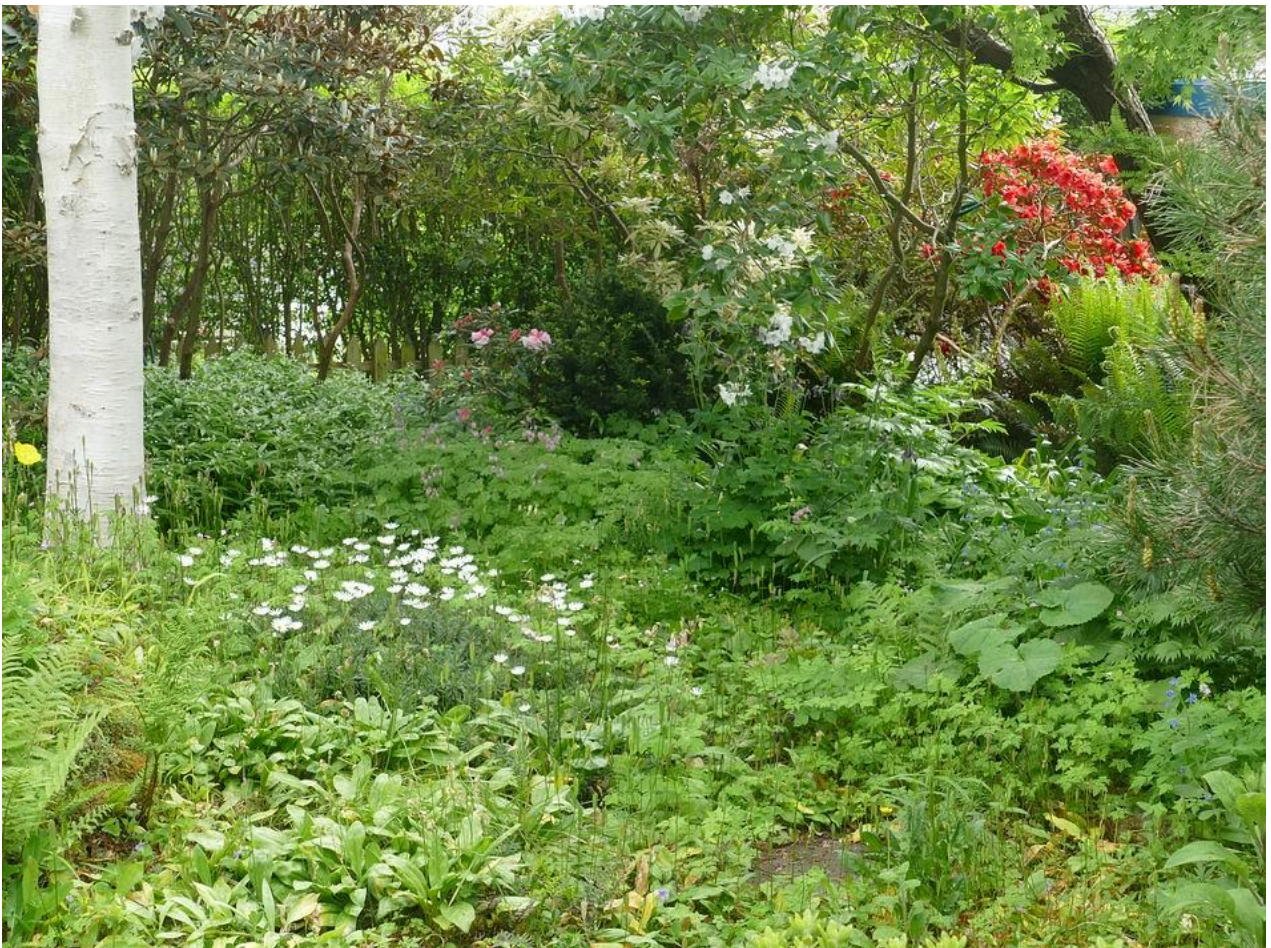


There are a number of ***Paeonia lutea ssp ludlowii*** growing where the seed fell among Acers and Rhododendrons with their beautiful new foliage.





In turn all the **Paeonia lutea ssp ludlowii** offspring are also seeding around. If not wanted where they germinate these seedlings are very easily lifted to move around or give away especially when they are young.



There is a similar green and lush look across the garden with plants growing in every available space.





Walking around I spot many plants flowering among the greenery such as a sprawling group of **Celmisia walkeri**.



**Ramonda nathaliae**





**Glaucidium palmatum**

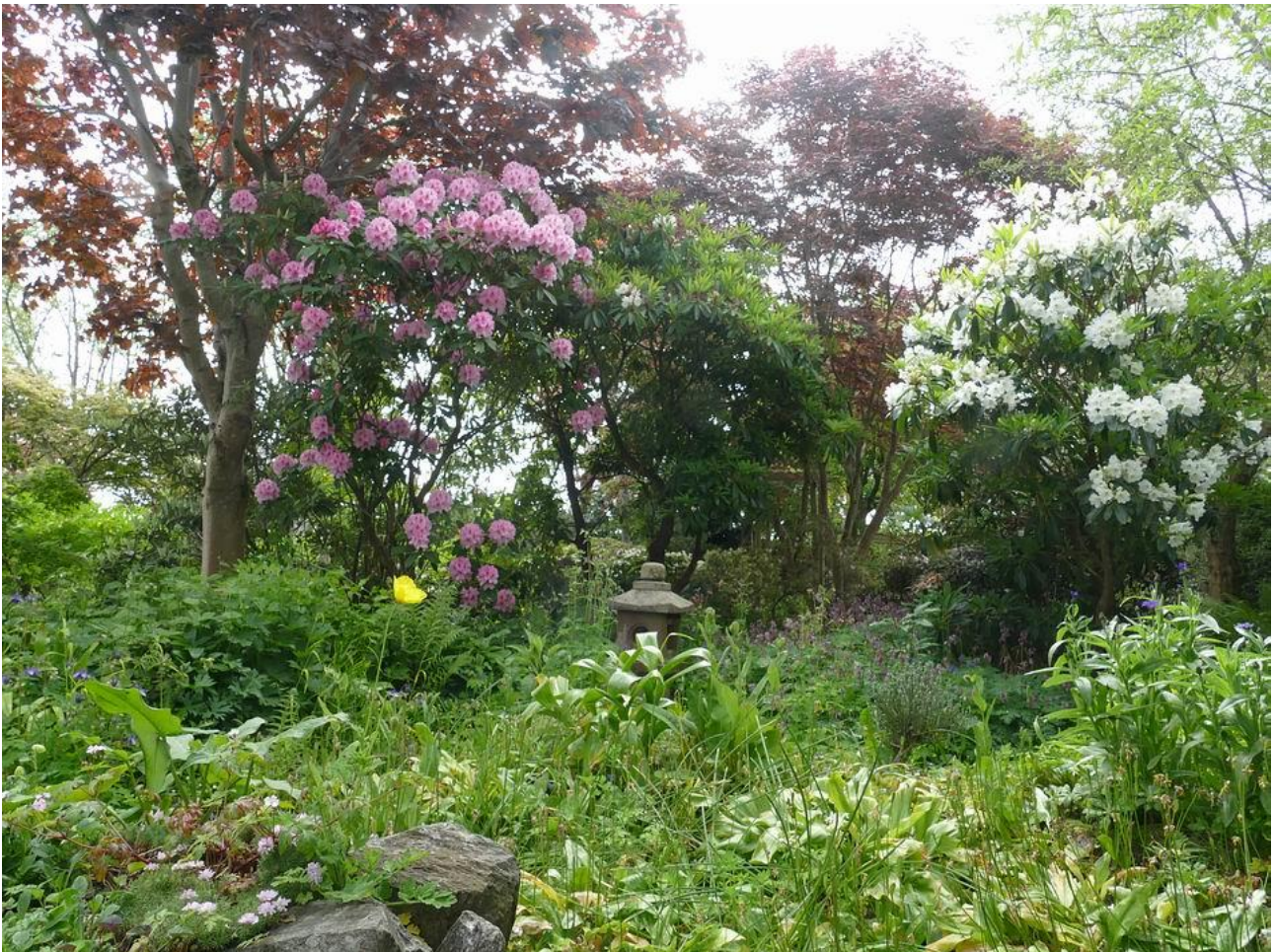


I will finish off with a few more of the trees and shrubs starting with **Rhododendron makinoi**.





**Rhododendron decorum**



It is the variety of ground level plants that have mostly been featured in the twenty two years of the Bulb Log but it is the trees and shrubs that create the landscape and ambience of the garden setting the scene as well as providing the many varied habitats in the garden. Once again I have loaded a [Bulb Log Video Diary](#).