



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 09.....11<sup>th</sup> September 2024



*Gentiana asclepiadea*



Before I start rambling, here is a timely reminder to repot your bulbs. September is a good time to start them into growth with the first storm. I must admit that I am behind this year but will catch up and the bulbs under glass will be repotted and watered by the end of the month.



Chopping and shredding is another late summer task that has been occupying my time so out comes my trusty thirty-something-year-old shredder which quickly reduces a great heap of prunings into a compact heap of valuable organic matter.



I have mentioned before when the shredder bag was full I used to carry it up to the compost heaps in the bottom corner of the garden only to have to carry it back to spread it a few months later. I have now cut out that extra effort by piling the shreds in the beds where they will be spread. I have to be sure that I am not piling them over early autumn flowering bulbs or, if I am, be sure to spread out the mulch before they emerge. The material has composted enough to be spread out after around four weeks - see above. We have a light sandy acidic soil which does not retain moisture or nutrients for long so we have countered this deficiency by spreading our home produced organic mulches for most of the fifty years we have been here so we now have a deep organic woody type soil.



We are better described as habitat manipulators than gardeners because during these long years we have changed what was two relatively flat gardens into a small woodland with many different habitats. Through the years these habitats have been further modified as the plants established, changing the growing conditions and, as a result affecting what plants we could grow. When we first created this raised wall it was full of dwarf ericaceous, Primula and the Asian autumn gentians, all of which did amazingly well. These gentians and primulas do best when they can be

lifted, split and replanted into a fresh vegetable type soil every few years. However as the shrubs grew and we added more bulbs it became like the rest of our garden - a no dig garden - so the original primulas and autumn gentians dwindled.



Garden conditions will change as they mature unless you grow only annuals where you basically dig and replant your garden every year. My interest is in observing and adapting to how our habitats mature over time with the changes that brings to our growing conditions. We can still enjoy the wonderful gentian blue flowers by using **Gentiana asclepiadea** which is perfectly suited to this habitat as it is primarily native to mountain woodland habitats in central and eastern Europe.



It is perfectly adapted to cope with the competition from the trees and shrubs which along with our changeable weather often leads to dry conditions.

I have even found self-sown seedlings in the gravel path below which if allowed to mature will make it even more difficult to walk round so I will move them to a more suitable place, close to its parent to mimic a natural colony.

It is when plants start to seed around that I feel that we have properly established them.



There are two piles of shreadings ready to be spread in the bed below the **Gentiana asclepiadea**.

When I was deeper into the shade to spread some mulch I discovered more **Orobanche hederæ** flowering. It is when I am working down and close with nature like this that I discover things. I have long believed that if you create the habitats the plants will come and this has been the case. I am not sure if it is the proximity of the Ivy, the organic soil or a combination of both but this is the second group of Orobanche I have found this season when spreading mulches. These were not planted they just arrived and as they blend in so well I could easily have missed seeing others in the garden. **Orobanche hederæ**, the ivy broomrape, is a parasitic plant without chlorophyll, and thus totally dependent on its host, which is Ivy.





Among the original plants to have thrived in this bed is **Fuchsia procumbens** its small rounded leaves covering the ground as it spreads out to over two metres. The majority of its growth lies underground - the twigs, leaves, flowers and fruits are seasonal, only appearing in the spring and disappearing when the winter sets in, which is fascinating to me. There is or should be so much life in your soil if it is healthy with the micro flora and fauna feeding on and breaking down the organic and mineral matter releasing nutrients to the higher plants. I enjoyed watching a rerun of the series Earth on the BBC presented by Chris Packham (produced by BBC Studios with NOVA and GBH Boston for the BBC and PBS), in partnership with the Open University. It consists of five one-hour episodes which explain what we know about the geological history and evolution of plant life on the earth. This week we were taken back to over 400 million years ago when the first algae formed in the deep dark ocean in water warmed by the volcanic vents. At some stage some of these algae broke off and floated upwards to where sunlight penetrated the water and



there it turned green, having evolved photosynthesis, but it had a problem getting onto the land – it had no roots. Fortunately on the land a fungi was already feeding on the rich volcanic rocks that formed the land and the algae made a union where it shared sugars produced from photosynthesis in exchange for some of the minerals that the fungi harvested and so the first symbiotic relationship was made. This process goes on to this day with Lichens where a hybrid colony of algae lives symbiotically among filaments of multiple fungi species. Such relationships are formed between many plants most notably with Orchids - such as this **Epipactis helleborine**.



I first found **Epipactis helleborine** growing in the garden in 2018, see [Bulb Log 3318](#) ,then a year later found another growing in a pot with a pine tree [Bulb Log 3419](#) . We have never consciously brought this plant into the garden it has just appeared and seems to like growing in association with other plants. All of the ones we have found are growing below shrubs. This week while recording a [Video Garden Diary](#) I spotted this one growing on the wall under a Rhododendron dendrocharis. As with the

Orobanche they hide themselves away so it is possible that they grow somewhere in the garden every year and we have missed spotting them or perhaps they lie dormant as seeds in the ground waiting for the best conditions to grow and flower.



This space is also favoured by this **Philesia magellanica** which rather than growing out in the open chooses to come up and mingle with the rhododendron. There is a real community thing going on here with the Fuchsia procumbens also growing under this shrub with its seasonal growth appearing at both sides.



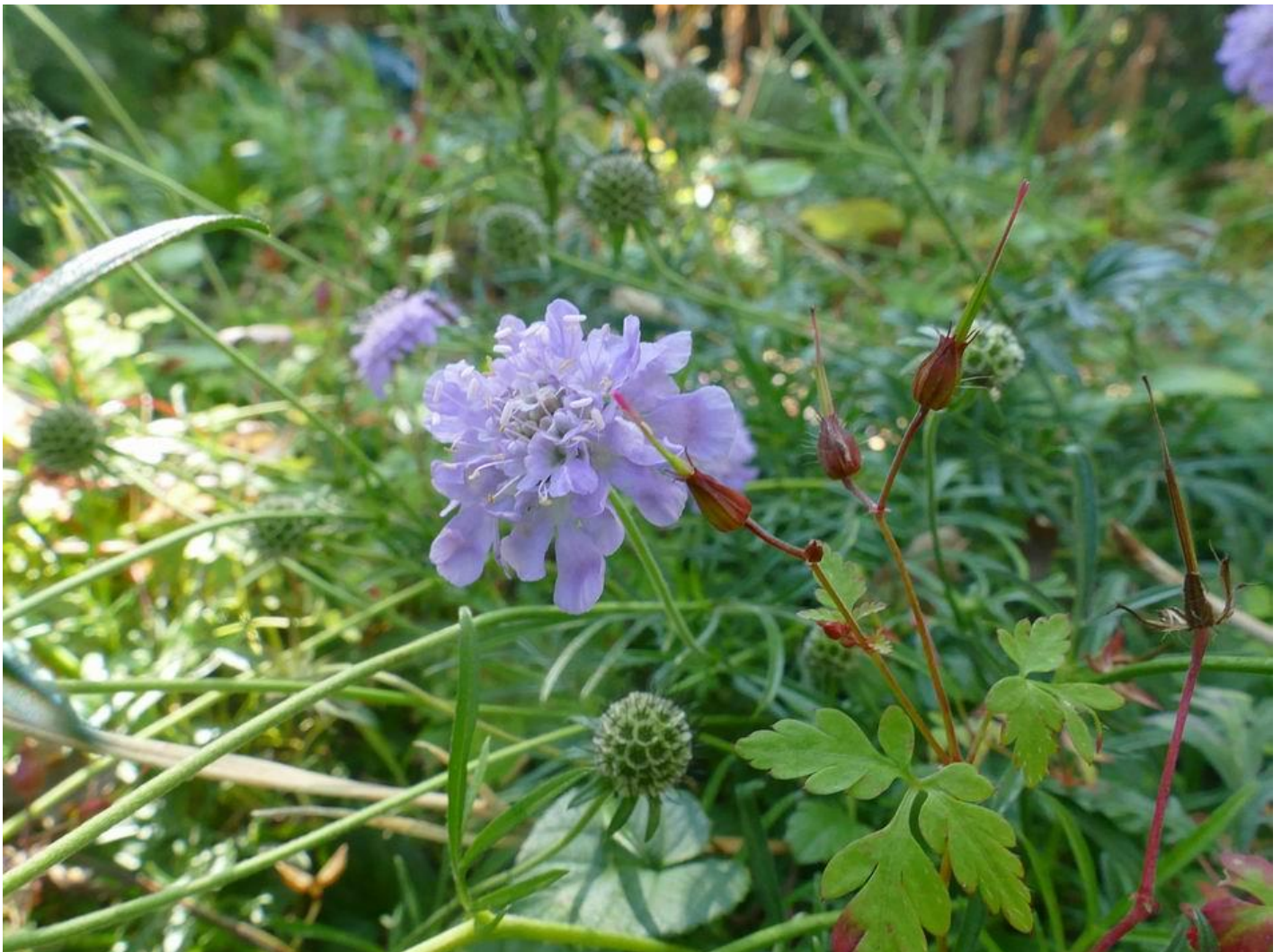
There is a distinct autumn blues colour in the garden opening with the *Gentiana asclepiadea* and picked up here with *Codonopsis grey-wilsonii* and *Cyananthus microphyllus* below.







The same colour theme is picked up with these early flowering autumn Crocus and the late flowers on Scabious *Columbaria nana*.





The colour pallet warms up with the **Roscoea** and **Cyclamen hederifolium** flowers which are appearing all across the garden.





**Cyclamen hederifolium**





**Cyclamen hederifolium**





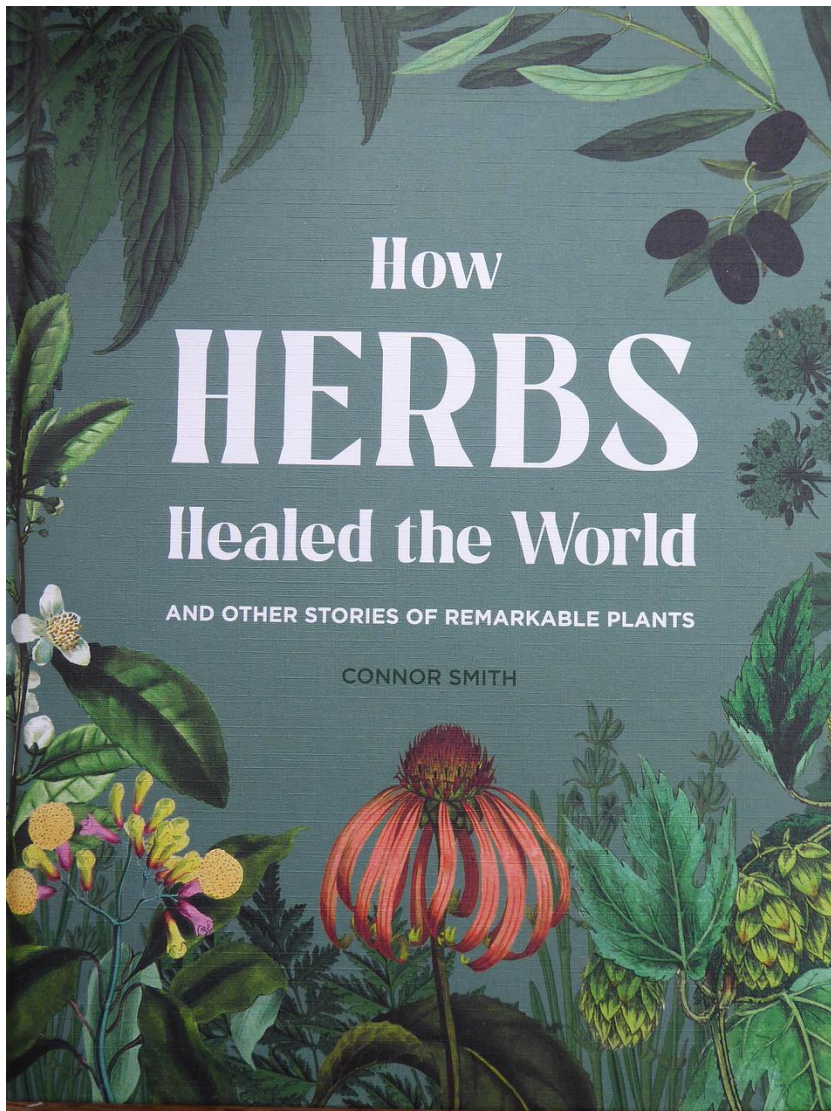
**Allium wallichii** is another subtle plant - while their flowers attract plenty of pollinators, especially hoverflies, they are not exactly eye catching, however, when they are backlit as below they light up in a quite spectacular way.





The low light at this time of year shines though many plants with spectacular results.





I have been reading a recently published book, [‘How Herbs Healed the World And Other Stories of Remarkable Plants’](#) by one of our own, Connor Smith, an active member of the SRGC family. Connor is now head of Europe's largest rock garden at the Utrecht University Botanic Gardens in The Netherlands.

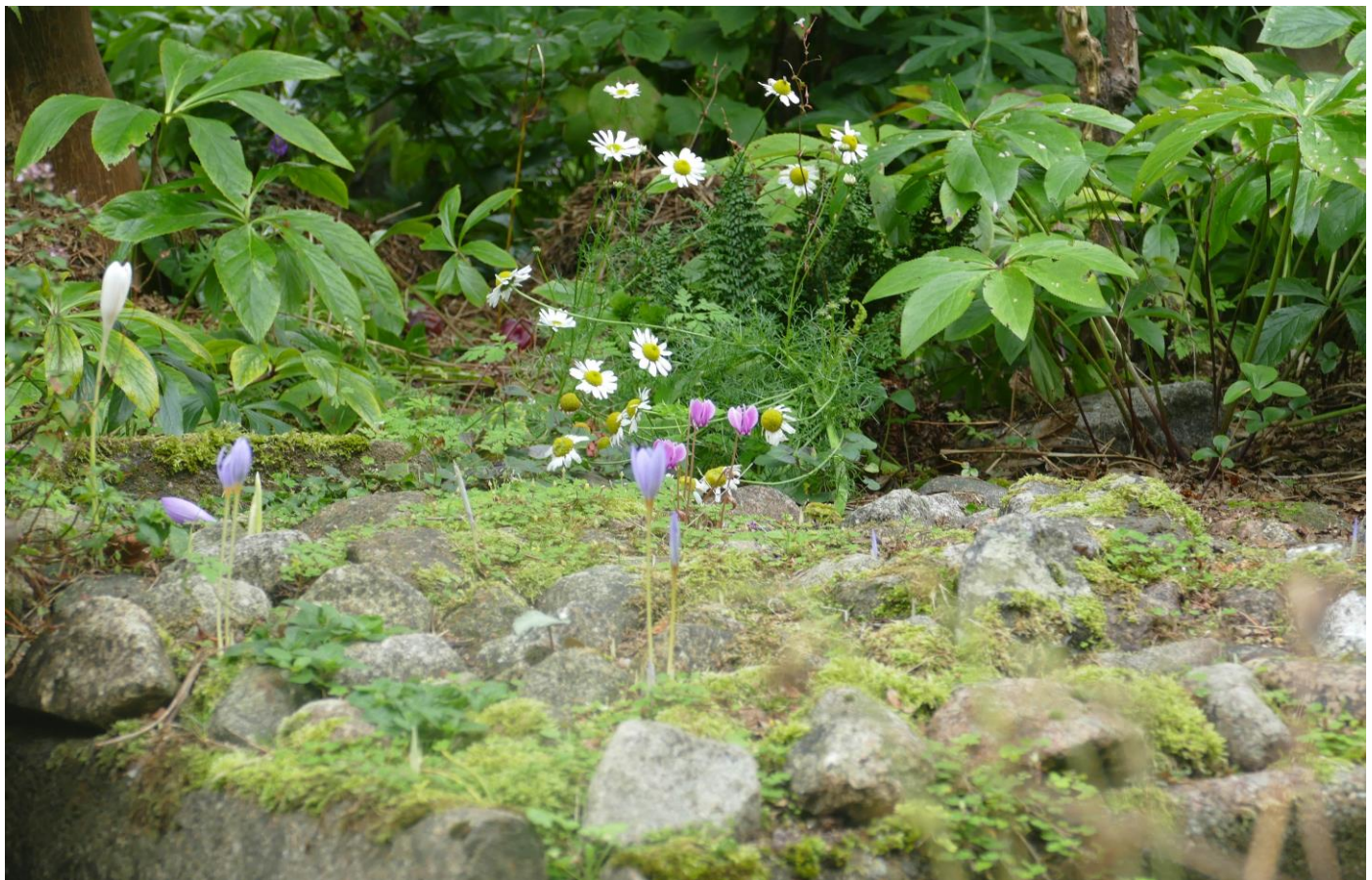
This is a very readable book worth the modest price for the attractive full page paintings of the plants it is illustrated with. I found the text equally captivating full of historical and scientific facts relating to how we, the humans, have used these plants from food, through medicine to folklore.

The history of the 75 chosen herbs and how they have been used is laid out across the 224 pages of this hard back book.

Connor brings together a lot of research and delivers it to us in a very readable package that I am dipping into and greatly enjoying.

If you are interested in how Herbs have changed our lives or just fascinated by plants in general then I can recommend this book to you.

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Evolution at every level is fascinating from the planet all the way down to the garden where my pleasure comes from watching how the habitats we have created evolve as they mature.....