



BULB LOG 1016th October 2024



Crocus speciosus



A skein of geese flying over the garden is a clear sign that the season is turning, actually I first heard the honking and saw geese flying overhead back in August, which seemed very early, too early – but Autumn is here.



We cannot deny the changes we are seeing to the weather and the seasons, and it is these conditions that the plants respond to.

I am as attracted by the appearance of the mushrooms that I see on my walk as I was when I was a boy.

The world of fungi is fascinating. When the plant kingdom became a separate branch on the great tree of life fungi stayed on the main stem with the animal kingdom, it was some millions of years before they also branched out.



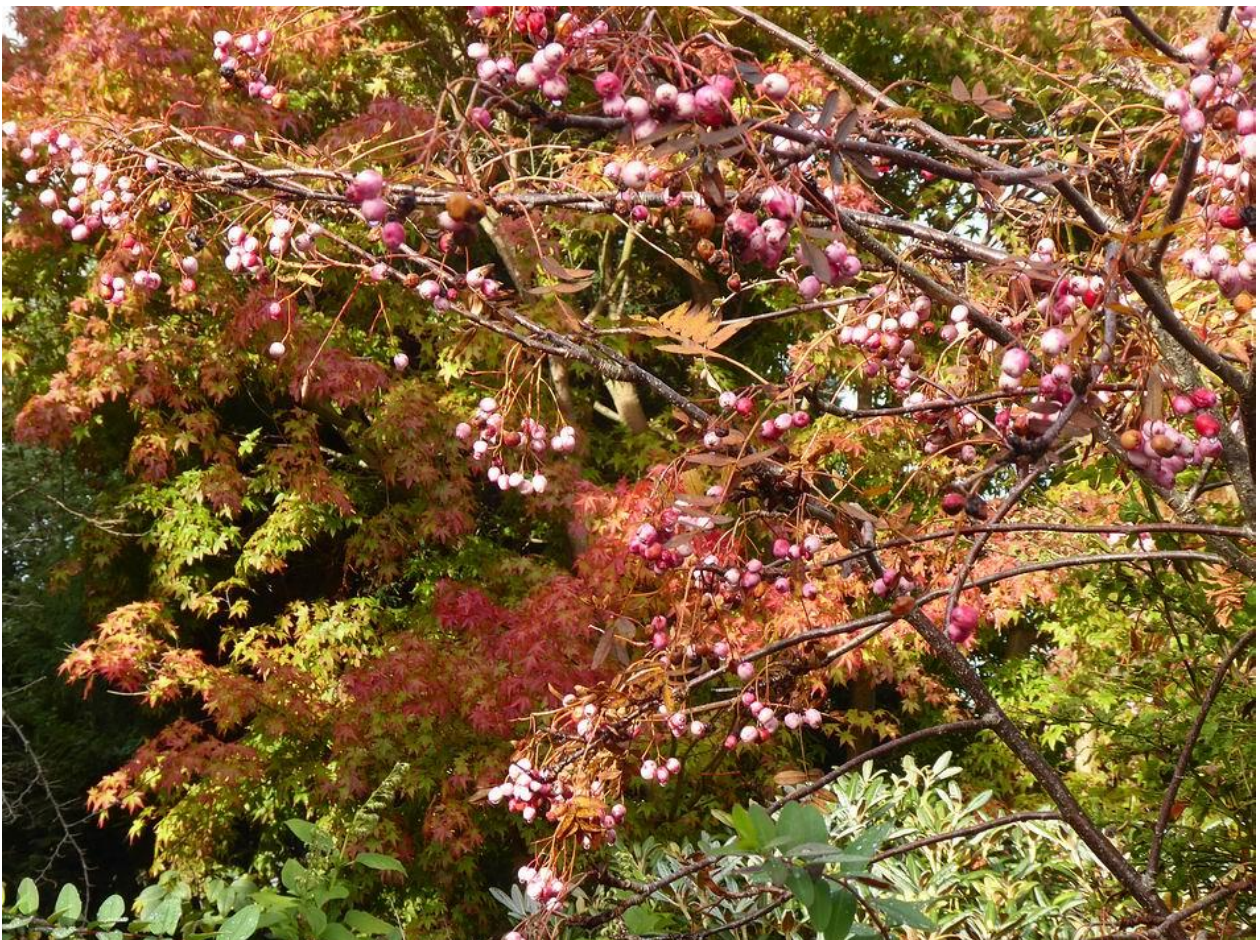
Putting it simply it is the fungi that make the world work - breaking all the fallen organic matter down into a lovely nutritious soil with humus and releasing the nutrients.

The fields and woods that I walk in most days are owned by some overseas speculators who hope that at some time planning permissions will be given – I hope not. For at least 60 years this protected area has been left to nature so there is plenty of fallen and standing dead wood around for the fungi to work on.





Eventually this trunk will fall to the ground where it can be attacked by the many tiny ground living beasts.



Back in the garden the signs of autumn are everywhere the leaves are turning colour before falling from the trees.



The many Sorbus we grow are heavy with berries as are the various Cotoneasters, from the smaller shrubs, below, up to the trees above our heads.





I love the contrast between the Roscoea foliage turning yellow as it dies back with the newly emerging flowers of **Crocus speciosus**. I often wonder why these bulbs evolved to flower at this time and it seems that they were responding to the favourable autumn weather conditions. My own observations from growing them in our garden are that there are many more pollinating insects around in the autumn than there are when the spring flowering ones are in flower. The advantage of this is we get a better seed set on the autumn species than we do on the spring ones. I can only speculate that is one of the main factors that drove the evolution of the autumn flowering species.



Crocus speciosus

We have in the past grown and studied many Crocus species that required careful cultivation under glass because they were simply not suited to our open garden conditions and weather. My focus has now changed to concentrating on and appreciating the species that will adapt to growing in our cool moist conditions and that includes many of these autumn flowering species.

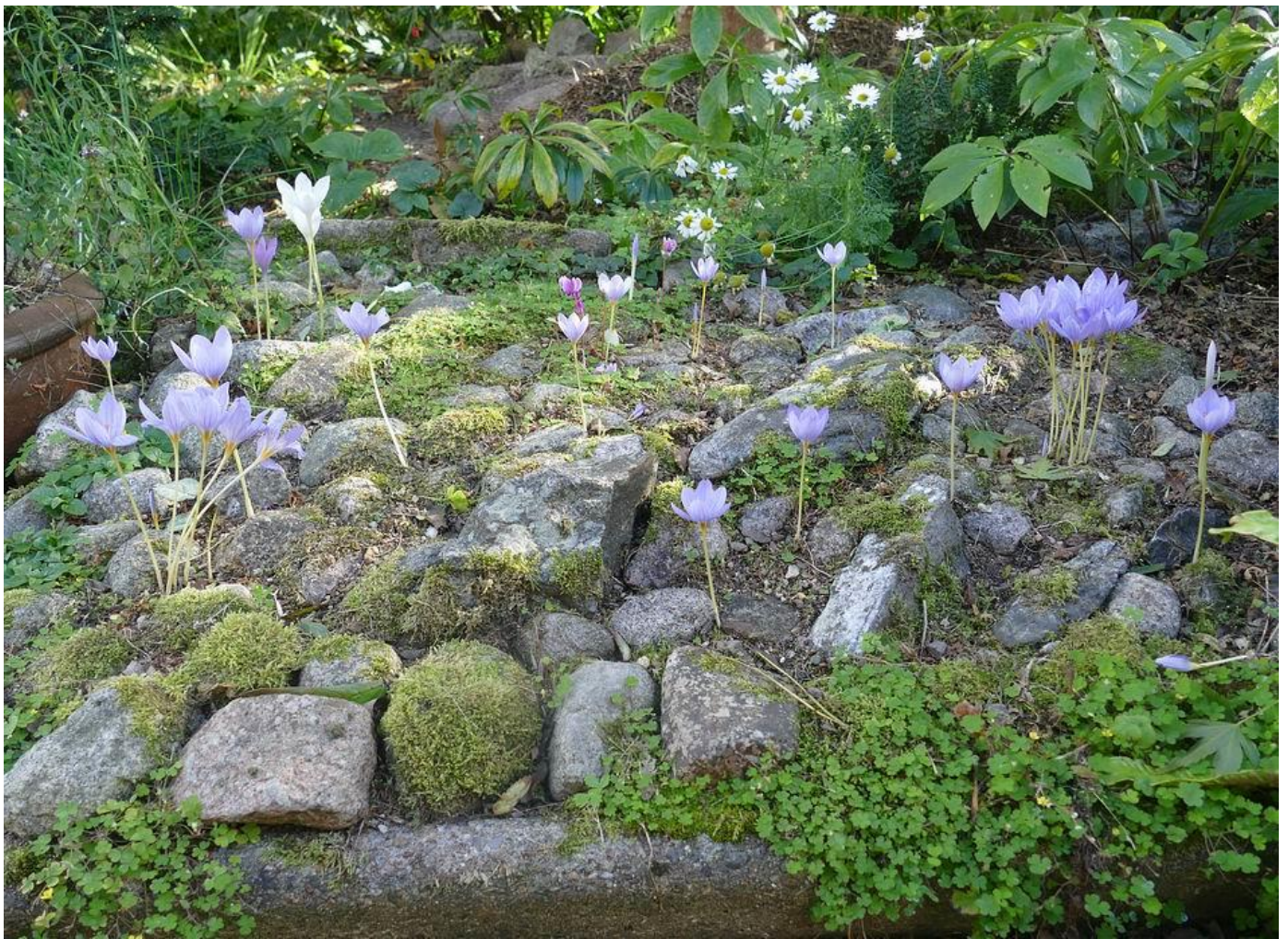
While we can do nothing about our weather, we can make adjustments to the growing habitat by improving the drainage in the soil. This is mostly done with the addition of rocks of some size, from gravel up to large stones, hence the term 'Rock Garden' can apply. Here I have used both a good layer, 30cms, of sharp sand for the growing medium, covered by closely placed small rocks for decoration and as I have explained before to stop mice eating the corms.



While the individual flowers might not last very long, we enjoy several sequences of flowers lasting over several weeks from this small bed. The violet flowers are hybrids that have evolved in the garden, along with white forms or **Crocus nudiflorus** and one of my favourites, **Crocus vallicola**.



Crocus vallicola



A few more from the same small cobble bed.



This small experimental bed has been a great trial ground where I can find out which of the crocus species and forms will grow and seed unprotected from the weather in our garden.



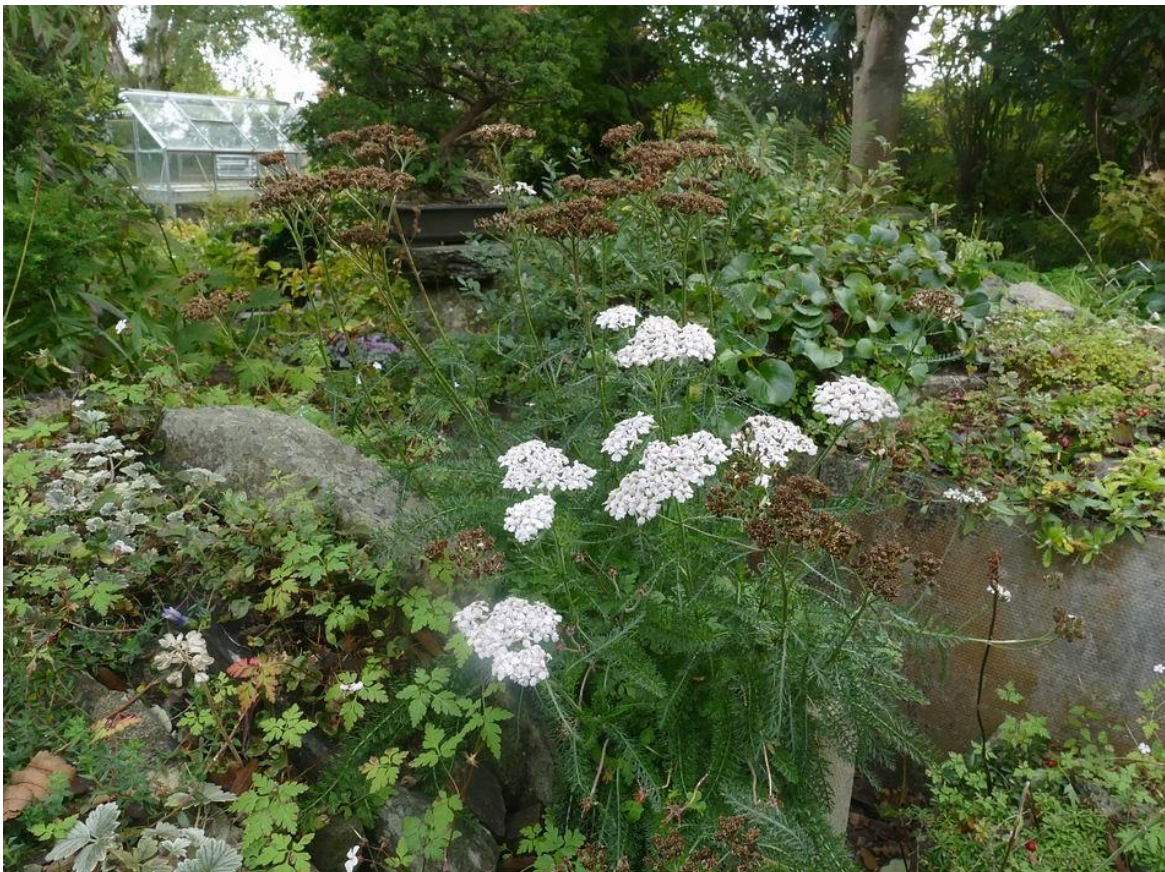
Elsewhere in a woody soil **Crocus banaticus** thrives. This beautiful and distinct species grows in many of the different habitats across the garden where it thrives in our cooler moist conditions.



Here **Crocus banaticus** is growing in the gravel rich very well drained conditions of a raised slab bed.



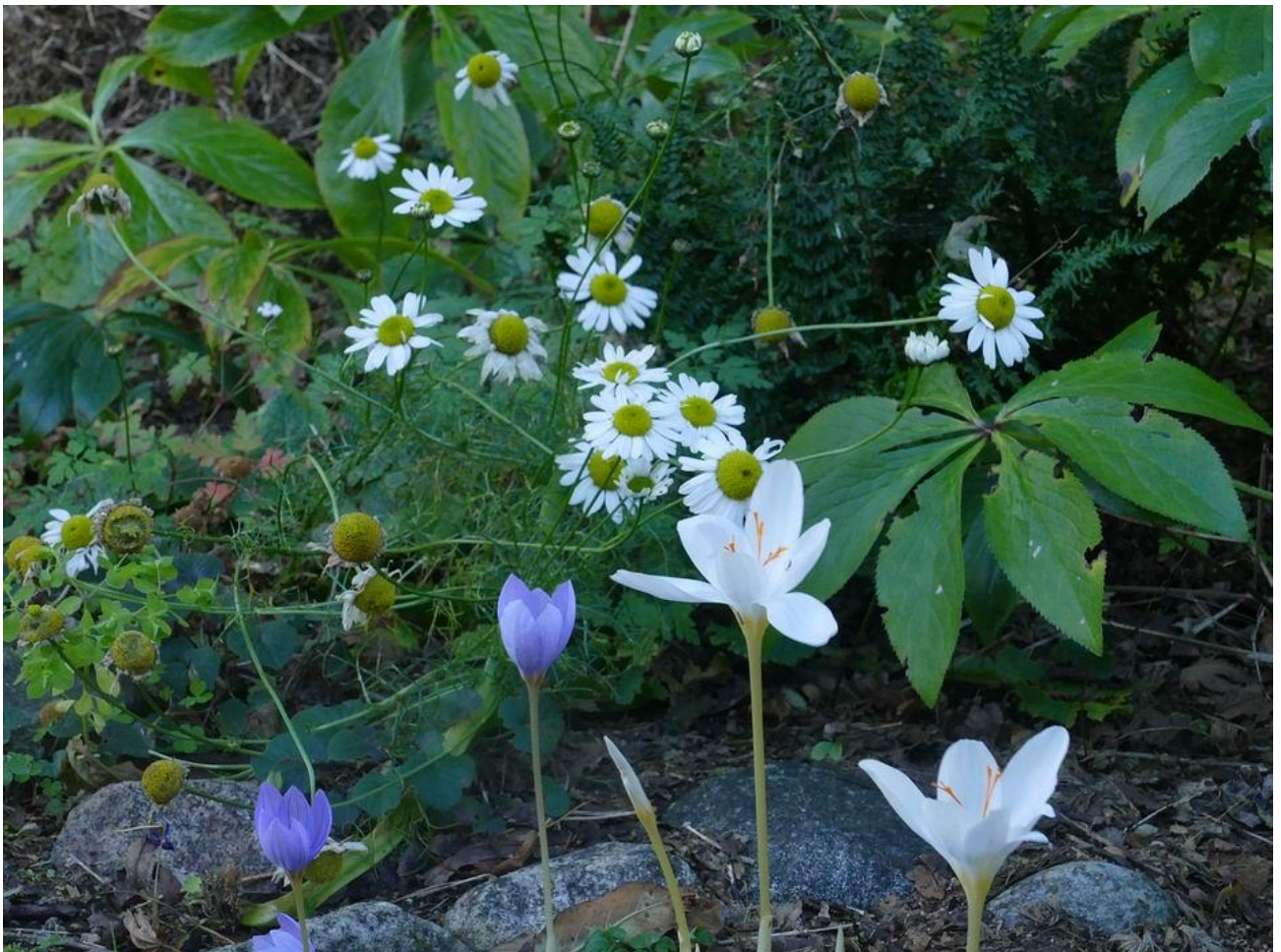
The previous *Crocus banaticus* is one of a population growing through this large mat of a ***Cyananthus lobatus*** which is still flowering months after its first flowers appeared in July - it will continue until the winter freeze sets in. I speak about the gardener modifying the habitats but here is an illustration how a plant can manipulate the conditions. This large spreading mat of stems and foliage trap moisture in the well drained gravel allowing moisture loving plants to grow.



I planted ***Achillea millefolium*** further along the same raised slab bed and it has also been flowering for months. I like plants that flower over a long time or repeat flower like here.



Here you can see some of the spent flowers from some weeks ago standing out in the light alongside the new stems all rising from the same plant. Many of the native species such as the *Tripleurospermum inodorum* you may have noticed behind some of the previous pictures of crocus in the cobble bed will repeat flower like this.



Tripleurospermum inodorum



This group of garden hybrids has been gradually increasing for several years since a single seedling first appeared growing where the seed must have fallen between the slabs. The autumn crocus may not seem very showy when the are closed but the become very eye catching when it warms up enough for their flowers to open, below.





As you get familiar with the flowers you can start to identify the different species from the shape of the flowers which distinguishes these **Crocus kotschyanus** in the foreground from the similarly coloured hybrids behind.



Another highlight of the season is the way the low light illuminates some leaves making them stand out like stained glass windows. Here it is the large leaves of **Podophyllum pleianthum** joined by the lanceolate leaves and racemes of creamy white **Veratrum fimbriatum** flowers.



Another *Veratrum fimbriatum* flowers through dwarf shrubs in the shaded front garden.



A view across to one of the bulb houses.



Since they were watered in September the bulbs under glass are coming into growth - some like *Sternbergia sicula* flowering before the main growth of leaves.



I have lost the original lable for this small *Colchicum* species - help!



It is nice to be able to enjoy the bulbs we grow in pots and sand beds under the protection of cold glass but I much prefer seeing them growing naturally in the garden associated with other plants such as these **Crocus banaticus**



Cyclamen, Colchicum and Crocus flowering in communities.



Colchicum speciosum



Colchicum speciosum abum



Colchicum 'Pink Star'



Colchicum davisi



We have only one flowering stem on this *Eucomis bicolor* this year but there is very good strong leaf growth on the non-flowering bulbs, so I expect more flowers next year. Crocus and Colchicum flowers poke up all around the *Eucomis*.



Crocus speciosum



Crocus speciosus is one of the best most accommodating of the autumn flowering crocus to start out with its loves to grow through other plants where its large flowers put on a fabulous display when the sun is out.



I see and hear the geese flying overhead every day now and with regular morning frosts Autumn is well and truly here, winter is next....