



SSGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 02.....19th February 2025





The snow cover that featured last month stayed for around two weeks then it all disappeared overnight when a relatively warm front moved in.

The sudden change of conditions triggered an explosion of growth from some of the early bulbs - mostly the Galanthus along with Leucojum.

As I rushed with rearranging the fallen leaves for the imminent mass growth, I revealed some Eranthis shoots pushing through in their inevitable bent-over fashion (below).

Through the period more and more Snowdrops have appeared, their white

flowers spreading out across the garden linking and unifying all the different habitats that blend together to make up our garden.



Eranthis hyemalis shoots emerging.

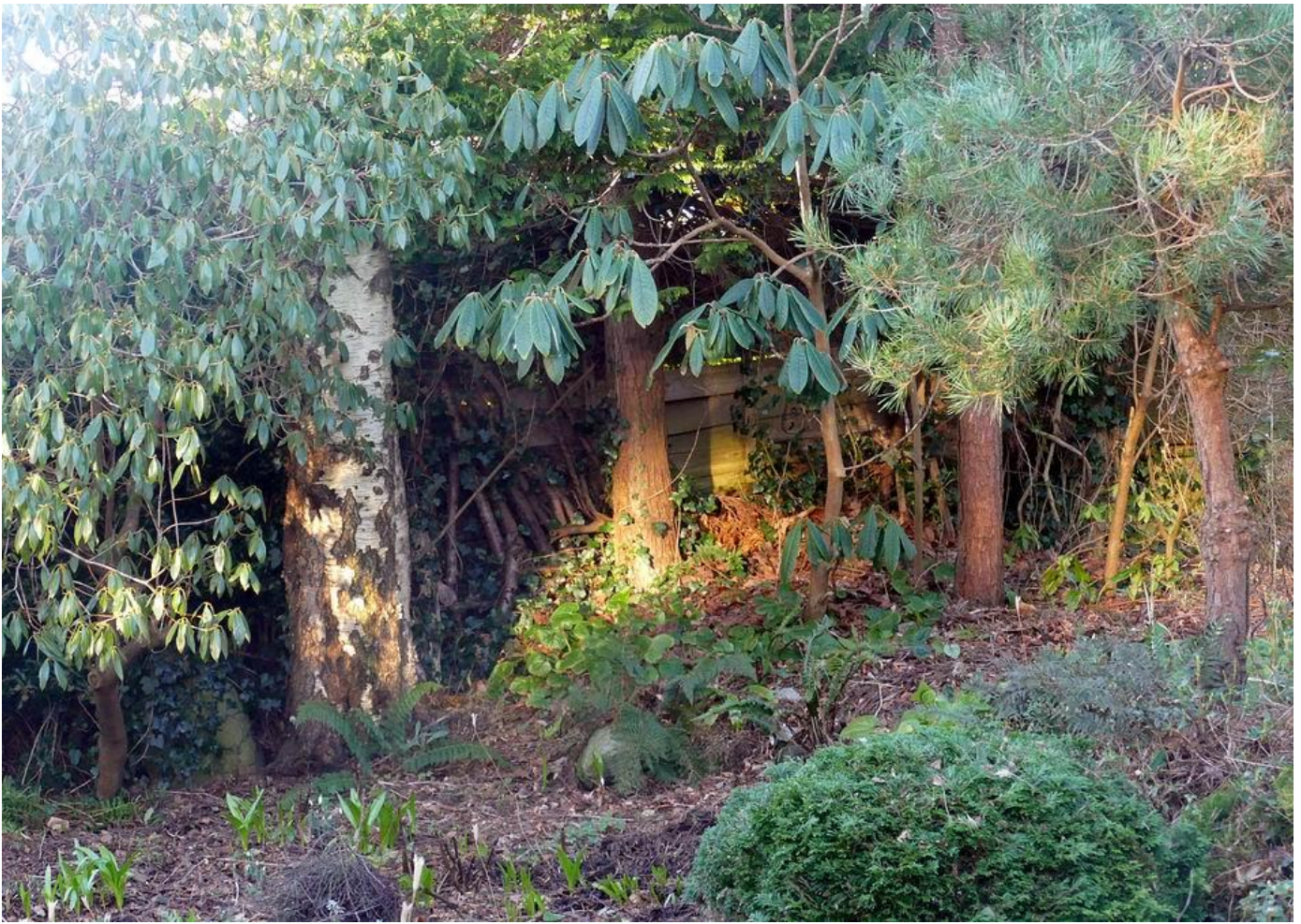


The Eranthis quickly grow from those bent-over shoots turning upright, displaying as golden balls sitting on a ruff of foliage but so far our temperatures have not warmed enough for their flowers to open fully.



When I spoke of rearranging the leaves what I tend to do is to remove them from the paths and rocky beds where we grow some cushion and matt forming plants, which would not appreciate being covered in leaves, but leave them lying as a natural mulch on the bulb beds and below the trees and shrubs. Like many of you I used to worry that letting the leaves stay where they fell would inhibit the growth of seedlings. I was concerned that their tiny first growth would not be able to break through the layer of leaves. I was wrong: they are more than up to it. In fact many of these plants have

evolved to grow in this kind of leaf litter which, rather than inhibiting the growth, serves to support and nourish the seedlings. This top layer of decaying leaves is a perfect habitat for the young plants to grow in with plenty of organic nutrients for the young roots to absorb. As well as feeding the plants the organic mulches support a wide range of micro-organisms, some of which also feed the garden birds which are constantly foraging among the leaves. Annoyingly the blackbirds keep scattering the leaves etc back onto the paths while the tiny Wrens disappear as they tunnel down among the leaves seeking their daily nourishment.



I observe plenty of special moments as I sit at my worktable looking out on to the garden. You may wonder what is special about this picture showing one of the darkest most shaded parts of the garden. It is the shaft of sunlight that briefly illuminated the trunk of a large conifer.

What made this especially fascinating to me was that the shaft of light, from the rising sun, was not direct but being reflected off the very windows I was looking through. This shaft of light brought this area, usually invisible in the shade, into the spotlight.

I am always trying to capture such transient moments of light with my camera.



Looking forward out of the window I observe the previous scene - turning to my right, another tree is also being illuminated, a bonsai, this one directly by the sunshine.

I normally trim and tidy the bonsai in February when I will remove any die-back and clip the growth to keep the tree compact.



I will almost certainly be showing you more pictures of the Snowdrops in the next Bulb Log. Although we have a lot out now we are not at the peak flowering. The large **Galanthus 'Glenorma'** is always among the first to flower.



***Leucojum vernum* var *carpaticum*.**

I also like, maybe even prefer, the *Leucojum* which are also planted and seeding around the garden.



***Eranthis hyemalis* and *Leucojum vernum* poking through the leaf mulch.**



Leucojum vernum



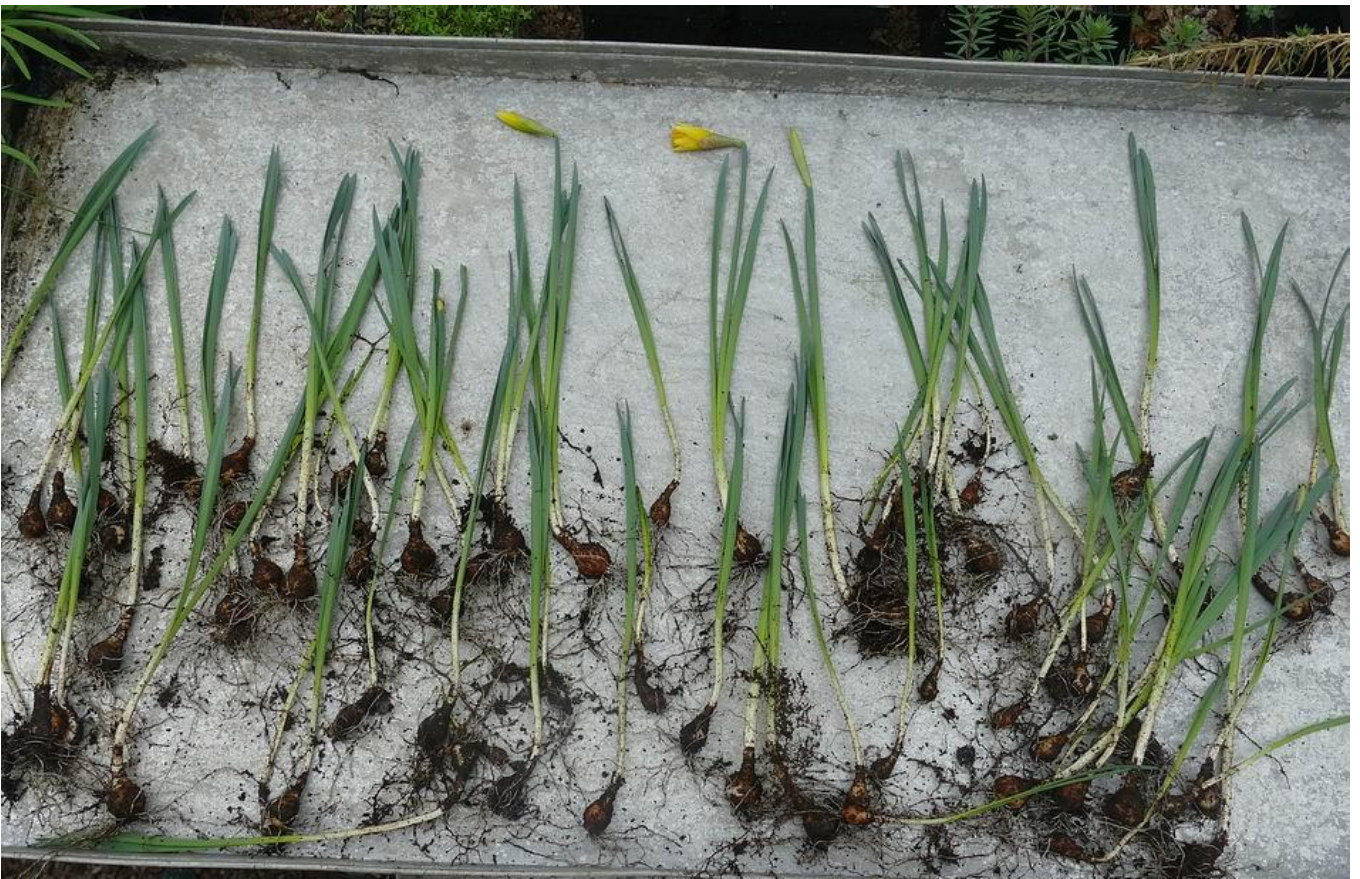
It is always nice when bulbs show a willingness to increase, forming clumps, but I see this as both a good and a bad feature. Good for the clonal increase – bad because as the clumps become more and more congested flowering diminishes and they need to be split. This clonal increase also means that there is less cross fertilisation resulting in fewer seeds being set. I much prefer the bulbs that willingly seed themselves around. These seed raised plantings are always more fertile - readily self-sowing as they cross pollinate and produce seeds just as they do in the wild. Clumps are not a familiar feature in natural populations of bulbs - not because they do not exist but because as there are no gardeners around to split the clumps in the wild these clones simply out-compete themselves and die out. Outside of cultivation clumping is not a good evolutionary tactic.



Here is a typical example of a clump of Narcissus that has gradually become so congested and the competition between the bulbs so great that the flowering is very poor – just three flowers from all these leaves. The next question is when is the best time to lift and split bulbs? Lifting them when the bulbs are completely dormant is the ideal time but here is the dilemma. In our garden when the bulbs are dormant the same beds are full of the next sequence of plants. It is my decision that carefully lifting and splitting this clump now will do less harm to any surrounding plants and the carefully replanted bulbs will have the space to grow better than they would all crowded together.



Using a small fork slid down close to the edge of the clump on three sides, to get below the bulbs and roots, I then prised the clump up so I could separate the individual bulbs.



I separated the bulbs out with minimal damage to the roots then replanted them spread around in groups of three, five and some singly to mimic a more natural look than the single large clump offered.



Regarding Narcissus there have been plenty of flowers in the bulb houses over recent months. These winter flowering species give us flowering interest through the dark months keeping going until long after the flowers in the garden have picked up.



Different forms and hybrids of *Narcissus romieuxii*.



A few years ago I split a small clump of *Iris* 'Sheila Ann Germaney' planting the bulbs out singly and now these have doubled up.

Using mulches is a common practice among rock gardeners where it is mostly gravel that is used.

So often gardeners 'tidy' up the leaves etc. For many years I was guilty of that until I adopted what I observed in nature into the garden. I realised that this natural leaf fall is nature's way of mulching and feeding the soil keeping it full of life and nutrients that support the plants.



As we try to create a woodland type of condition we use a lot of organic mulches. One natural mulch that forms all too readily in our climate is moss. Various mosses grow on the rocks, slabs and the gravel areas and for many years we tried to remove it until we realised that it forms a part of the natural world's cycle of soil formation. Moss is often the first step in turning inhospitable stony ground into a productive area for seeds to germinate.



The only place where **Cyclamen coum** seeds readily around is in this small moss-covered sand bed.



Cyclamen coum



All our beds are covered with either moss, leaves or garden compost mulches plus a few with gravel. Rather than seeing moss as a problem I now see it as part of the garden environment.



I have been fighting a losing battle to keep this area of gravel free of growth but now it has become a new experiment where I have added a few plants and scattered seeds and will now watch what happens and report.



Above and below are some of the earliest flowering ***Erythronium caucasicum***.



Erythronium caucasicum



Snowdrops come in many different forms and sizes. **Galanthus woronowii** in the foreground is dwarfed by the larger growing cultivars behind.



Galanthus woronowii



A clump of one of the yellow forms of *Galanthus plicatus* that will soon need splitting to keep it flowering well.



A final view for this month showing a range of the many habitats that combine to become our garden.....