SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary -----

BULB LOG 25 …….24th June 2009

Lilium mackliniae

To me Lilium mackliniae is one of the real aristocrats of the lily family; its simple elegant beauty never fails to attract my gaze. There appear to be a number of forms in cultivation and the one we grow is the taller variation with flower stems up to 110cms tall in shaded beds. The other form, which we used to have, is altogether shorter flowering on stems of no more than 50cms. It is often said that Lilium mackliniae is not long lived but we have one planting that is at least 20 years old and it has never increased vegetatively in all that time. However I do find it is very susceptible to getting virus and once it is infected the plants will succumb and die in a few years. My policy now is to remove any suspect plants as soon as I see the tell-tale symptoms of streaking in the leaves and distortion of the leaves and flowers. As it is easy to raise from seed and can flower in as short a time as three years from sowing I always have seedlings coming along to replace virused plants.

Erythronium klamathense seed

One of the tasks occupying my time and mind just now is collecting seeds as they ripen. These seeds are from Erythronium klamathense and the plump green ones are obviously fertile however the brown ones are rather shrivelled up and I think are infertile. While I can report that we have a better seed set on the bulbs than last year it is still somewhat disappointing in the number of plants that have failed to set seed. I am also noticing in a number of bulbs of all genera that the seeds have started to form then, for some reason, most likely climate related, have aborted the seeds.

Erythronium montanum seed

Not affected in that way are these nice plump seeds of Erythronium montanum. It is not necessary to wait until the seeds go brown before you collect them. These green seeds are fully formed and the only difference is that they have not started to dry out and go brown yet and in fact the capsules that contained these seeds had already started to open and I was in danger of losing the seeds to the garden. While I am quite happy to allow many of the Erythroniums to naturalise themselves around the beds I still like to collect the seeds from some of the special species to make sure that I get the maximum germination rate.

Tropaeolum azureum seeds

It is the same with these Tropaeolum azureum seeds some are green some have started to dry out but all should be fertile. - the problem with this species is how to get a good germination. I have never been able to get a consistently good germination with T. azureum some years I get none to germinate at all – I do not know the answer but will continue trying to solve this mystery.

Tristagma leichtlinii seeds

Fortunately most seeds germinate well for me and I have no problems with Tristagma leichtlinii which germinates freely. I will store the seeds in dry sand as I have described previously before sowing them in August/September.

Cleaning seeds

I crumble the dry seed pods between the palms of my hands to release the seeds, place them in a tray and blow gently over the pods while I shake the tray. The chaff being lighter blows away from the seeds which can then be scooped up and placed in the packet.

Crocus mathewii corms

I have to admit that I have also started repotting selected bulbs as I am desperate to see how they have grown this past season. Ideally I would like to repot all my bulbs on the last day in August and water them the next day but I have way too many to do that. The important thing when repotting them this early is to be sure that the new compost is **not** wet as any excess moisture through the summer dormancy can cause wet rot on the bulbs – this is especially the case in some species of Crocus like C.mathewii which prefer a very dry rest period. The corms above are the results of a few generations from seed; the larger five were from an original sowing and all the smaller ones are from seeds from those original five sown back into the same pot as the parent. I got no seeds on my C. mathewii this year.

Another consideration when repotting Crocus is whether to remove the corm tunics or not. In the wild they just bulid up year on year forming a protective layer around the corm and probably serve to prevent excessive drying out or dessication in prolonged hot dry seasons. In our cool damp conditions this is a disadvantage and I often remove the exra layers providing they come away easily, leaving the most recent tunic to protect the corm as seen on the right.

Crocus michelsonii corms

Another Crocus that I could not resist getting into was Crocus michelsonii and my excuse is that it is another species that resents any moisture in the summer dormancy so I had to be sure that my compost had dried out completely. This pot is also a mix of at least two generations of parent and seedling corms. This year I got the best crop of Crocus michelsonii seeds that I have ever had.

Corydalis elata

I am constantly looking closely at out our plants; studying their form and trying to make sure that they are correctly named and to my surprise I discovered this week that we do grow the true Corydalis elata and have for a few years. It is very distinct from C. omeiana which we knew for years as C. elata.

Corydalis omeiana

True C. elata has a less divided leaf and the flowers tend to be all around
the stem while the inflorescence on C. omeiana is more one sided, see photo at left.
The true C. elata also has a long stalked large basal leaf, see below.

Corydalis elata long stalked basal leaf

Corydalis mairei

While looking trough the bed of Corydalis species and referring to the latest book on the genus I have managed to name another species we have been growing as Corydalis mairei. This species has many branches arising from the leaf axels each of which produce flower spikes which means it flowers for a longer period than some. The flowers are not big or showy but the effect of the multi branched, often red stemmed plants, with purple/blue flowers and nicely marked divided leaves is very welcome in our garden. I am also finding seedlings in this bed which may be hybrids between C. mairei and the true C. elata.

I will leave you this week with another of the aristocrats of the world of lilies, **Nomocharis.**

I tend not to put specific names on our **Nomocharis** any more as they are mostly raised from our own garden seeds and as they are so promiscuous they have hybridised over the years however this one is close to the plant that we used to call Nomocharis mairei and like the corydalis above celebrates the French missionary and plant collector of the early 1900's Ernest Maire,.