



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 50.....14th December 2022



This week we woke up to the first snow of the winter; there was not a lot and once daylight came precipitation switched between rain and snow before the ground turned to ice as the temperatures dropped again. The rain took most of the snow away but then the skies cleared and without the blanket of cloud the temperatures dropped well below freezing.



One of the great things about Zoom meetings is we get to chat with friends across the world and while attending a zoom talk from Toronto on Sunday night we talked of the weather with some people in northern Canada already having minus 30C making our low temperature of -11C this Tuesday morning seem pathetic but it is all relative.



Returning briefly to one of my recent topics of hardiness, I have read and heard various comments about how to grow a lovely dwarf shrub from the Olympic Mountain of western North America - **Petrophytum hendersonii**. Some suggest it should be grown in a pot under glass but we have grown it unprotected outside in a number of habitats for over thirty years and our largest plant, shown in these pictures, is almost 80cms across. Trying out plants in your garden is the best way to discover if they are 'hardy' or not.



Petrophytum hendersonii

As the snow melts away you can see the plant better especially where the foliage parts revealing the shrubby nature of the growth.

Through the years we have often cut it hard back where it encroaches on other plants following our usual thrifty routine of rooting the cuttings to make new plants. New growth buds emerge from all the way down the small twiggy stems so you can cut it back hard.



As I walked round the garden to see what was of interest to share it was some of the Gesneriaceae that drew my attention, such as rosettes of **Haberlea rhodopensis**, growing in a number of habitats, all looking really healthy. During our relatively hot dry spring and summer these plants can look terrible as the leaves shrivel but rather than dying this is a protective measure the plants have evolved to withstand hot dry periods then, when it cools down and when the moisture returns, the leaves plump up as they rehydrate.

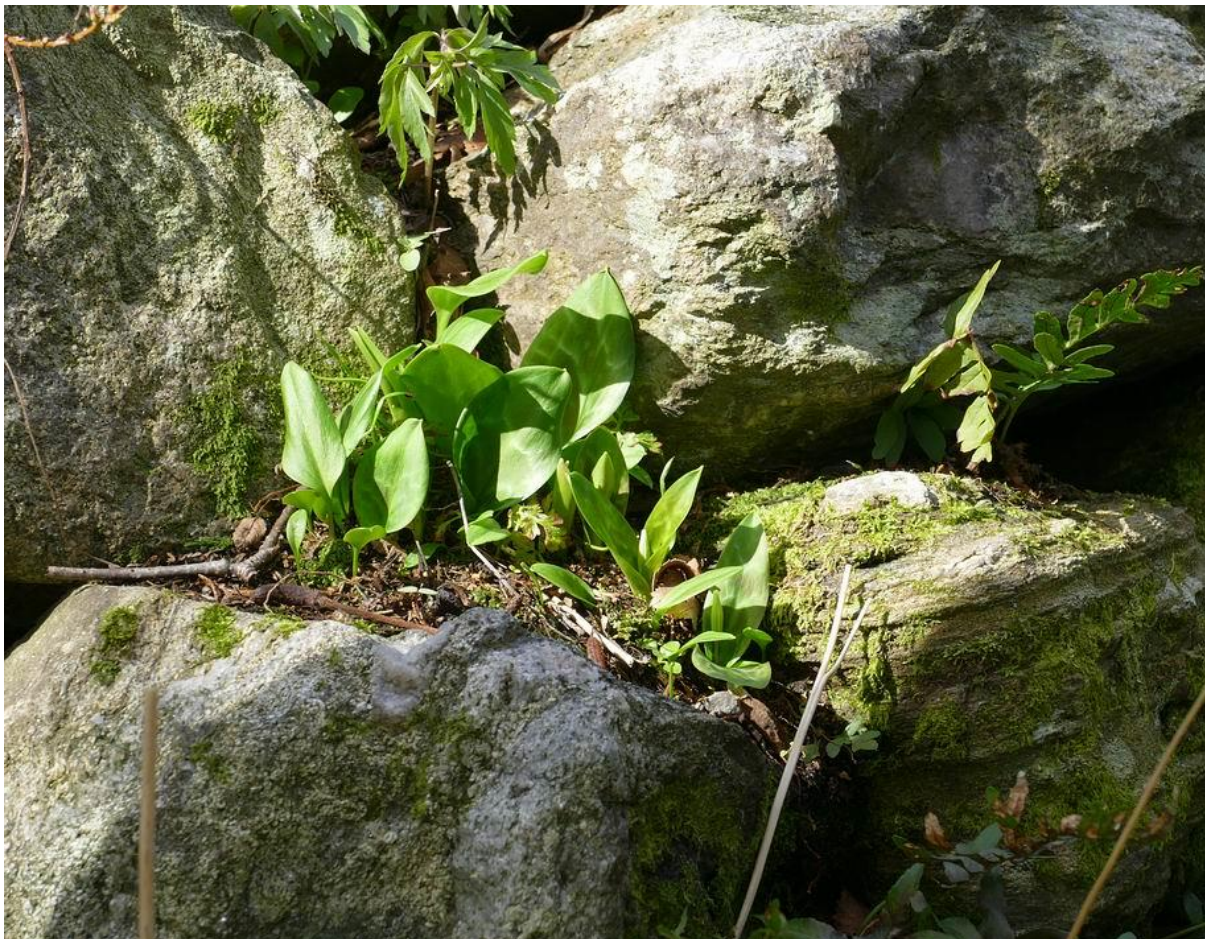
This adaptation makes such plants ideal subjects for planting in walls where they grow amazingly well. A few years ago I split an old sprawling plant replanting some of the rosettes back in the refreshed ground, forming the healthy plant in the previous picture, then I planted the other divisions in the shady north side of this wall. Like many plants in cultivation they survive and grow best when lifted, divided and replanted every so often so now rather than the one original large, sorry-



looking sprawling plant, we have a rejuvenated plant with several more established outliers growing along this wall.



Of course it is well known that *Haberlea* and its relatives grow well in crevices like this but there is a much more unlikely subject to be found growing round the east of the same circular wall. Obviously not this time of year -I took the next sequence of pictures earlier in 2022.



I would never have thought to plant *Erythronium* in such an unlikely habitat but nature has a much better imagination and I saw the light when a few seeds of *Erythronium revolutum* dropped from the top of the bed into the crevice where they germinated and grew.

Nature's bigger lesson for gardeners is to be more adventurous in where we grow plants using all the garden habitats.



South side of the wall

I have discussed bulbs growing in crevices before but going back through the year's photo files I thought it worth revisiting the subject using pictures I may not have shown previously. Most of this wall, shown in the previous three images, is close to vertical but the south side, with a bit more of a slope, is now well populated by an ever increasing number of Erythroniums as they seed around.





This section, just out of the previous picture to the left, used to be covered by a large old plant of *Salix fruticulosa* (hylematica). In recent years this sprawling willow has died back to just a few small healthy areas - one can be seen complete with catkins in the top left of the picture. It used to grow so well that I had to trim it back hard every year until the recent effects of global warming has seen it decline in our relatively warmer drier summers. The loss of the *Salix* has opened up the opportunity for us to continue the seeding colony of erythronium all along the south face.



Growing plants in walls like this is not new; gardeners have been planting walls for well over a hundred years - plants like *Primula marginata* are especially suited but I am not aware of seeing bulbous plants growing in this way until I was enlightened by nature in the garden. Since I was shown the way I have been encouraging the plants by scattering the seeds and even planting the occasional bulb seedlings directly into the crevices. Young seedlings and seed establish much better than trying to plant mature bulbs and in addition to the *Erythronium* we also have *Allium*, *Crocus*, *Galanthus* and

Trillium all growing crevice style on the walls.



Erythronium revolutum and (Pseudo)Trillium *rivale* are all growing together in the crevices with populations of plants all the way from first year seedlings to mature flowering sized; one of the aims in our garden. I am fascinated to watch how they evolve long term as they compete with each other for space: hopefully nature will find a balance.





The stones of the walls are gradually disappearing behind the growth of shrubs, primula, bulbs, ferns, etc.

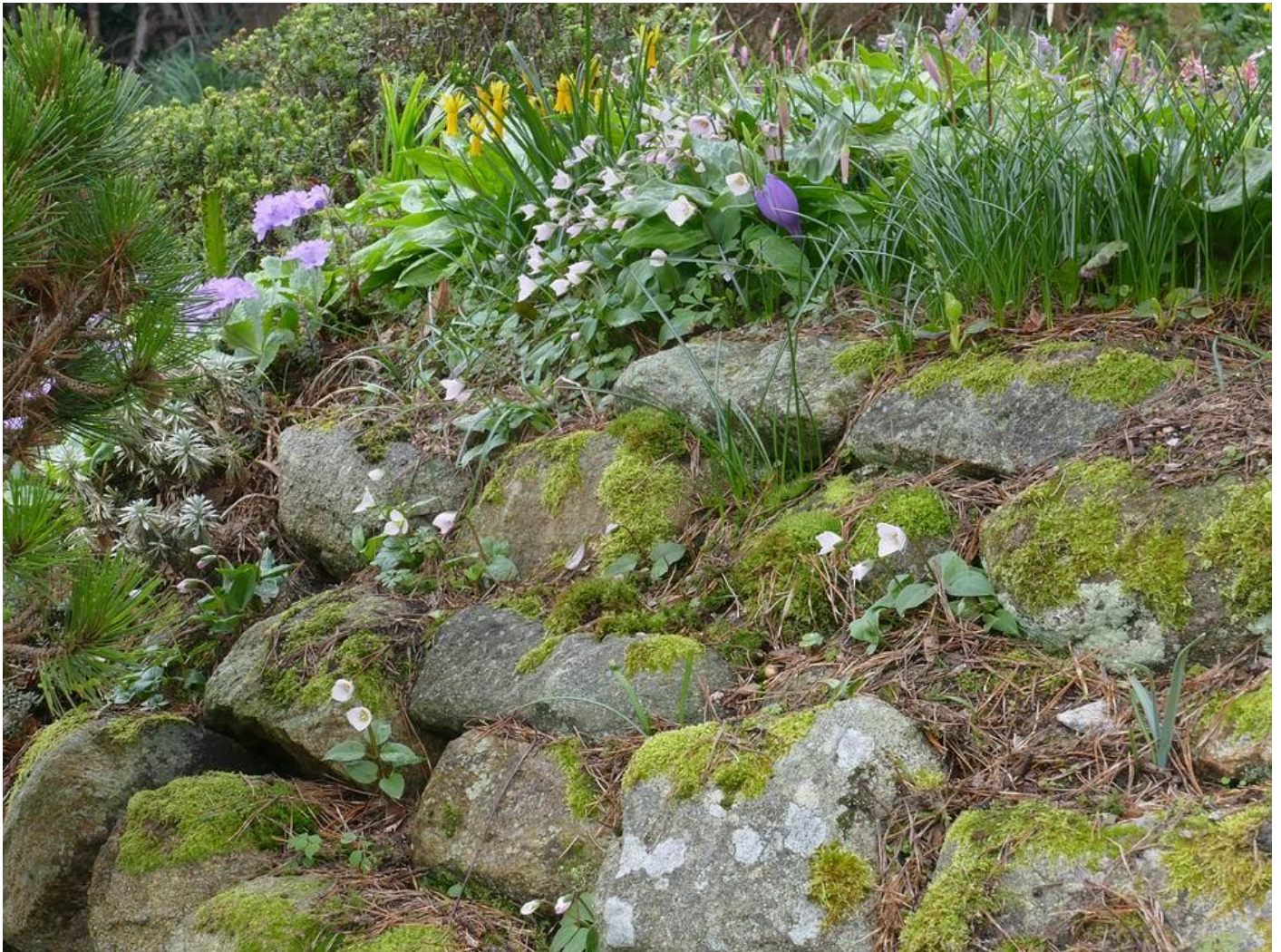


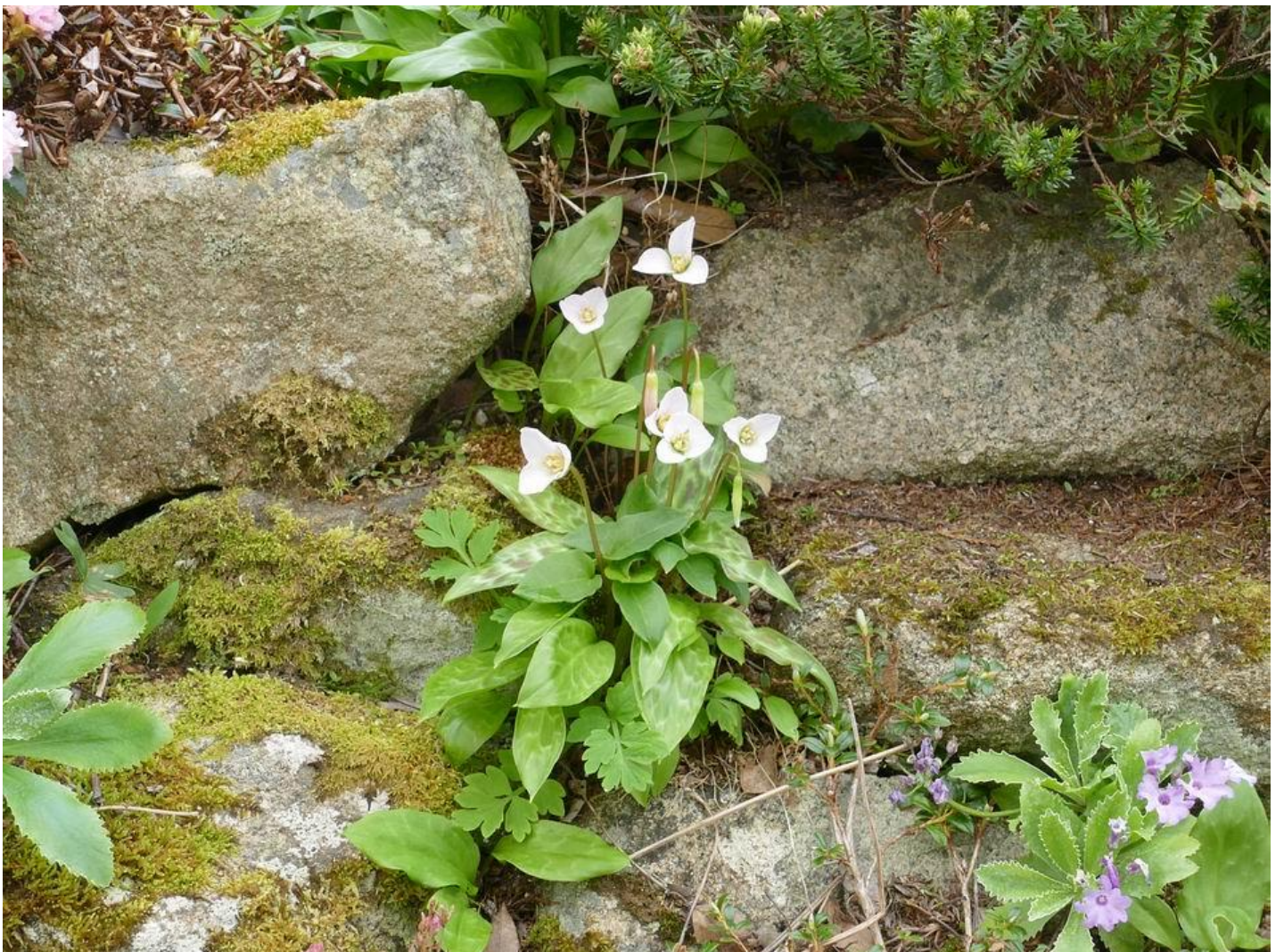
Regular readers will also remember my project, inspired by a wild habitat I visited in Southern Oregon, of establishing a seeding population of (*Pseudo*)*Trillium rivale* cascading down this section of the wall.

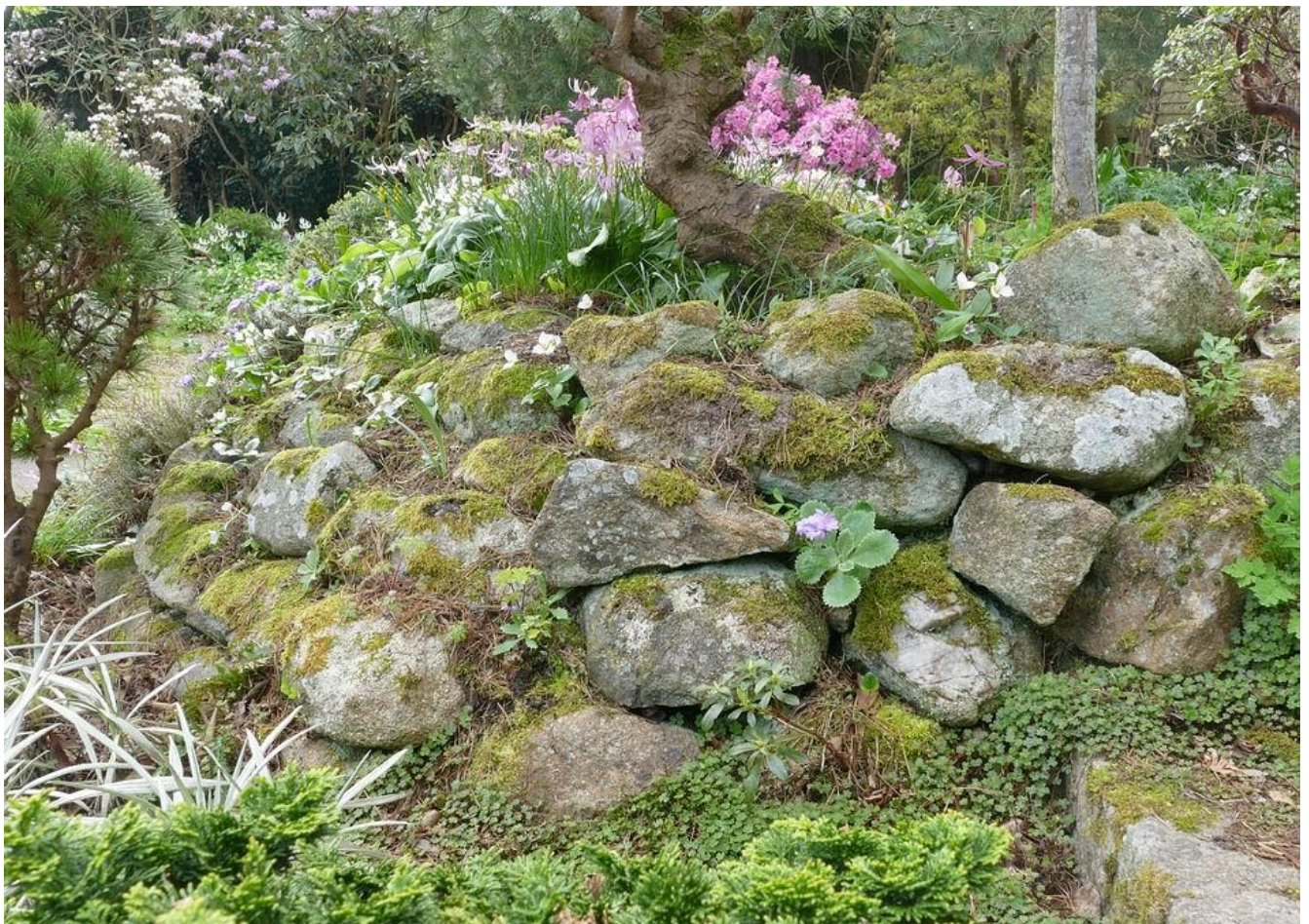


In the dark cold winters day it is worth sharing some more pictures of this wall planting.



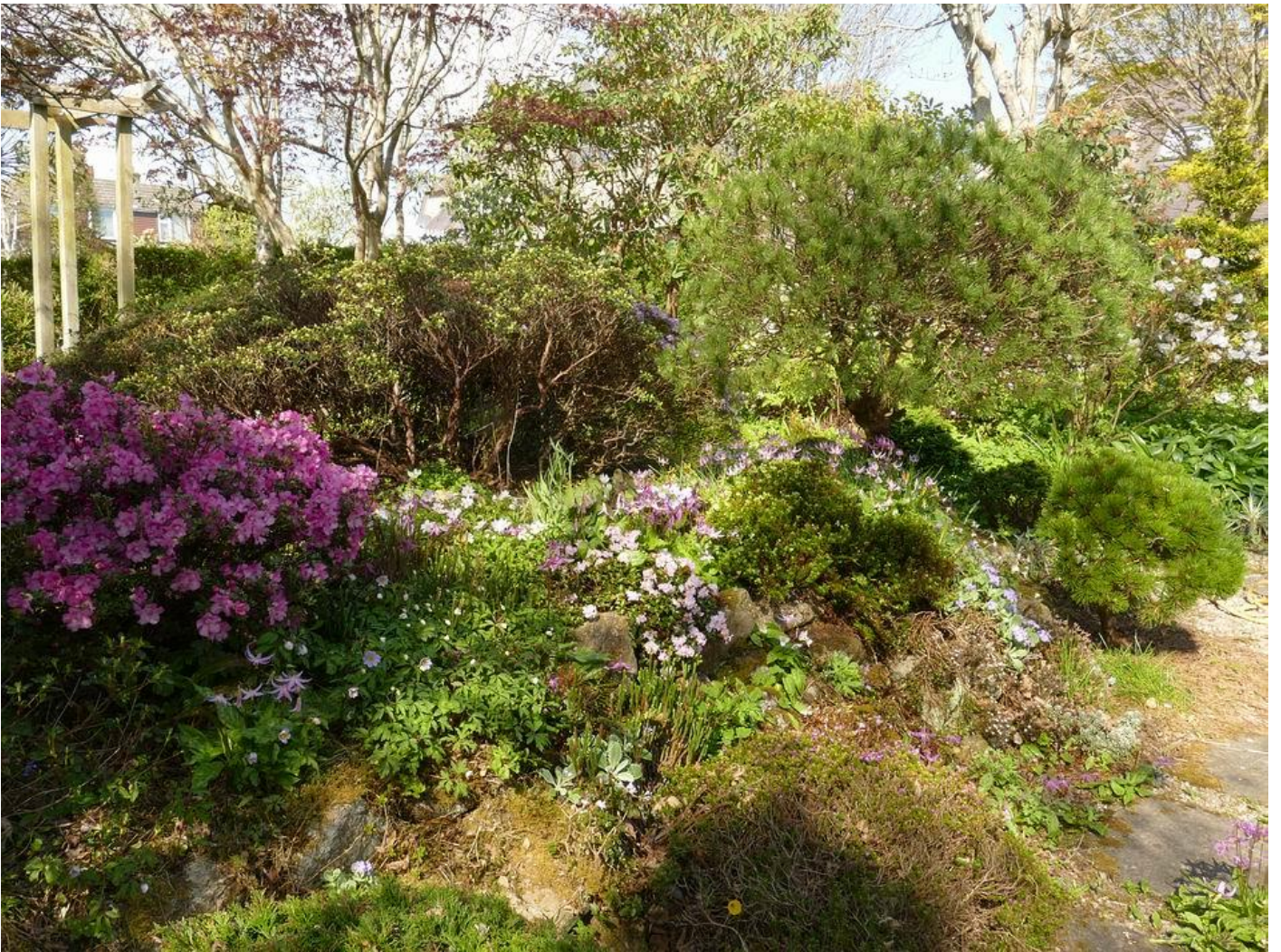






Largely due to the big soil-less gaps between the stones it has been more of a challenge establishing plants in this short north facing section of wall. Most soils I have packed in have just eroded out but I am cramming pine duff and leaf mould into the gaps which has worked very well on the longer east facing section shown below.





Most of these pictures were taken on a sunny day in April 2022.





The west side of the wall surrounding this long raised bed sits on higher ground so only has two or three courses of stones. **Erythronium americanum** grows on the top of the bed and do you spot the yellow flower in a low crevice?



I was delighted when I spotted that one of the stolons of **Erythronium americanum** had placed a plant in one of the low crevices. Nature really is the best grower and we should take her lesson being creative in the habitats we deliberately or accidentally fashion in the garden as well as the plants we grow in them.....