
BWSR FEATURED PLANT

BLUE LOBELIA *Lobelia siphilitica*

Family: **Lobeliaceae**

Midwest Region Wetland
Indicator Status:
Facultative Wetland



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Valued by pollinators and landowners alike, Blue Lobelia exhibits showy violet-blue flowers through the end of the summer and into fall, providing additional color amongst goldenrods, sneezeweed and asters. Growing in a variety of natural settings within Minnesota and central to eastern North America, the plant is a common and easy to spot wildflower, as well as a favorite among gardeners. Easily propagated and divided, the plant has a lovely long-lasting bloom and is generally low-maintenance once established.



Identification

Standing 1-4 ft. tall with a slightly hairy, upright stem, this perennial forb prospers in swamps, floodplain forests, stream banks, and wet meadows. The plant displays alternating, oblong oval leaves which increase in size towards the base of the plant with irregular teeth. The dark blue, tubular flowers are arranged in a crowded spike-like raceme. Many tiny semi-translucent seeds are dispersed from a cup-shaped capsule. Compared to other varieties of Lobelias, Blue Lobelia has the largest flowers and the deepest shade of blue. In addition to *Lobelia siphilitica* there are five other lobelias in Minnesota including *L. cardinalis*, *L. dortmanna*, *L. inflata*, *L. kalmii*, and *L. spicata*. Cardinal flower (*L. cardinalis*) is also a widely used for gardening and restoration with its vibrant red flowers.



Blue Lobelia stem



Tubular flowers of blue lobelia

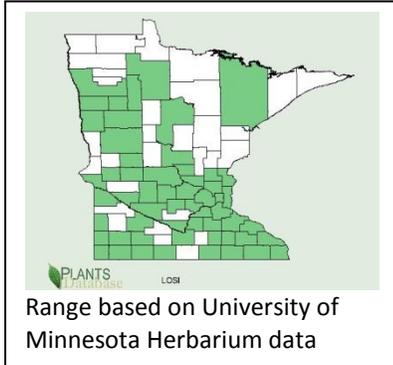


Blue Lobelia leaves



Cardinal Flower is another species (*Lobelia cardinalis*) in the *Lobelia* genus

Range



Blue Lobelia is found throughout Minnesota with a higher concentration adjacent to the Mississippi River Valley Region. It prefers moist black soil prairies, soggy meadows, floodplain forests, fens, and moist pastures. There are two varieties in Minnesota with var. *siphilitica* dominant in eastern Minnesota and var. *ludoviciana* in the west. Across North America blue lobelia is generally not found west of Colorado, covering the central and eastern portions of the United States and Canada. It is found as far south as Georgia and as far north as Manitoba.



Blue Lobelia amongst native sedges

Uses

Historically the species has been used for respiratory ailments such as asthma, bronchitis, whooping cough, as well as muscle pain, rheumatoid arthritis and insect bites.

Frequented by butterflies, bumblebees, long-tongued bees and occasionally hummingbirds, the nectar and pollen are an ideal attractant and valuable for a variety of species. Although harmless to humans unless consumed in large quantity, most herbivores don't eat this forb because the plants foliage contains several toxic substances that produce symptoms similar to that of nicotine poisoning. However, there are some reports that claim deer have eaten this plant with little to no side-effects. The species is commonly used in raingardens due to its showy flowers and is a common component of shoreline, riparian and wet meadow restorations.

Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Ecological Restorations
- Rain Gardens



Blue lobelia and other wildflowers in a restored wetland

Planting Recommendations

Fairly easy to grow, Blue Lobelia is often spread by wind or water in the wild. With around 500,000 seeds per ounce the seeds are too small to be of interest to birds or other animal species. The seeds require moist stratification (over winter or in a refrigerator) and should be broadcast on the soil surface and lightly incorporated through raking and/or rolling. Developing from a central taproot with a need for wet to moist soil, the plant does well in almost any sunny condition as long as the soil stays moist. Being fairly tolerant to sun exposure the forb prefers fertile and loamy soil which will largely determine the overall height and success of a given plant. Requiring light to germinate, Blue Lobelia has been found in both disturbed areas and high quality habitats. Not much patience is needed as the flower will generally bloom in the first year. It is a perennial that generally does not like to be crowded, so maintain some space if in a garden setting. Plants can also be propagated by division in early spring as they mature.

Planting Methods:

- Broadcast Seeding
- Containerized Plants
- Propagation by Plant Division

Additional References

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/wetland/plants/gb_lobeliax.htm

Larry Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=losi

Minnesota Wildflowers: <http://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/blue-lobelia>