

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Lobelia



Lobelia (*Lobelia Inflata*), or Indian tobacco, is a flowering herb that is named after the Belgian botanist, Matthias de l'Obel. It was formerly used as a substance during smoking cessation but has since been discontinued because of mixed results.

In a broader sense, lobelia can refer to a wide variety of flowering plants, with some botanists claiming that these varieties belong to a separate family, Lobeliaceae. One of the most common and popular variety of lobelias is the *Lobelia Inflata* variety. Other varieties of lobelia plants include both *Lobelia Siphilitica* and *Lobelia Cardinalis*. These varieties can normally be distinguished from the *Lobelia Inflata* through the differences in the colour of their flowers.

Lobelia Siphilitica is the most cultivated variety of this plant and is often called the 'great blue lobelia' because of its vivid blue flowers, as opposed to the pale colour of *Lobelia Inflata*. *Lobelia Cardinalis* is also much easier to differentiate because of the distinct bright red colour of its flowers. Because of its dainty flowers, lobelia plants are usually planted in the garden or window boxes to visually improve people's surroundings. However, because of its beauty, its nutritional components are typically overlooked.

Here are some of the benefits that you'll likely receive when you start using lobelia therapeutically:

- **Respiratory stimulant and antispasmodic** - Lobelia functions as a bronchodilator, meaning it stimulates the respiratory system and may even help in alleviating the effects of asthma. It may also help relax the lungs when they're tense or overworked.
- **Expectorant** - It triggers the secretion of sputum through the air passages, which is why lobelia is commonly used to ease asthma and bronchitis.
- **Diaphoretic** - As a diaphoretic, lobelia promotes perspiration, which helps in cooling the skin during the onset of fever. It also aids in eliminating toxins from the body and promoting healthy blood circulation. Diaphoretics are often used to relieve diarrhoea, kidney and liver conditions.
- **Muscle relaxant** - Lobelia has a depressant property, which helps the autonomic nervous system and muscular system relax.

It should be noted that the above are only recommendations and an individual's tolerance for this herb may vary. Consult your physician to determine whether it's appropriate and the dosage for you.

Lobelia is commonly planted in regions with low temperatures. But while they thrive well in cold climates, they are actually very sensitive to frost. Start indoors roughly ten to twelve weeks prior to the last frost in your region. Spread the tiny seeds on top of the soil and water thoroughly. Place them in a warm, well-lit area. The seedlings should appear within a week or two, at which time you can begin thinning them out.

After the danger of frost is gone and the plants are at least two to three inches tall, replant them in your garden, spacing them four to six inches apart. During hot and dry periods, water the plants frequently, especially if they are planted in containers.