

Great Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia Siphilitica*)

Great Blue Lobelia is a tall showy perennial found in wet woodlands, meadows, and along streams and ponds in Michigan. It features brilliant lavender-blue tubular flowers, crowded together toward the top of a tall leafy stem (1-4 ft). Each flower is about 1" long and split into two lobes. The upper lobe has two segments, and the lower lobe has three and is striped with white. Occasionally, the entire flower is white. The blooming period is from early July to late September

The central stem of this plant is rather stout and usually unbranched. The leaves are alternate, up to 5" long and 2" wide, lanceolate or ovate, with serrated margins, and no petioles. The root system consists of a central taproot, from which occasional basal offshoots are produced. The seeds are quite small and come in a two-celled, many seeded capsules.

This plant occurs in both disturbed areas and high quality habitats and thrives in full to partial sun. When in bloom, Great Blue Lobelia is aflutter with butterflies and bees, and also attracts hummingbirds. Deer occasionally eat this plant. The seeds are too small to be of value to birds.

Great Blue Lobelia has many qualities that make it a wonderful garden accent. It has an extremely long blooming period, bright flowers in tight formation, a tall sturdy stem that requires no staking, and is quite pest free. All it asks from the gardener is more water than average. It also benefits from heavy composting.

This plant is a short lived perennial (each plant living only a few years), so allow the plants to self-sow. Seeds capsules can be collected in autumn, and the seeds easily re-sown in a new location that same season or the following spring. Also, well-established clumps can be divided in the fall or spring by separating the basal offshoots from the mother plant, replanting these shoots, and watering immediately.

Warning: All parts of the Great Blue Lobelia are toxic, although only if eaten in large quantities. That said, Native Americans were known to use this plant as a poultice or infusion in attempts to treat a range of ailments: headaches, colds, rheumatism, worms, stomach trouble, croup, syphilis (hence its Latin name "*siphilitica*"), bewitchment, and to end quarrels, avert divorce or renew love. Because Great Blue Lobelia will cause vomiting if ingested, it played a part in ritual purification for some tribes.

More information and photos available at:

http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_losi.pdf

<http://www.easywildflowers.com/quality/lob.silph.htm>

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