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Lobelia siphilitica

[Synonyms : *Lobelia glandulosa*, *Lobelia reflexa*, *Lobelia syphilitica*]

BLUE LOBELIA is a perennial. Native to the central and eastern North America it has small, clear blue (rarely white) flowers with their lower part white-striped.

It is also known as *Blåaxlobelia* (Swedish), *Blaue Kardinalsblume* (German), Blue cardinal, Blue cardinal flower, Cardinal, *Gemeine Lobelie* (German), Great blue lobelia, Great lobelia, *Grosse Lobelie* (German), Highbelia, Swamp lobelia, *Tähkälöbelia* (Finnish), Virginia bellflower, *Virginische Lobelie* (German), and Vomit root.

Warning – blue lobelia should be treated as poisonous (especially the root). If taken internally it can cause vomiting.

Siphilitica was chosen by the Swedish naturalist and physician, Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), in recognition of the work of Pehr Kalm (1715-1779) one of his pupils. When Kalm was travelling in America he learnt that the plant was used by North American Indians in the treatment of venereal diseases.

Records show that the North American Indians viewed the plant as a source of medicine suitable for other purposes as well. The Iroquois Indians prescribed it for easing coughs, and apart from croup the Cherokee tribe also used it for treating headaches and pain generally, rheumatism, stomach upsets, nosebleeds, fever, colds and worms.

For the Meskwaki Indians the roots offered an aphrodisiac.

It was introduced to Europe from North America in 1665.

Medicinally, it has also been prescribed by herbalists for the treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery. Today it is used in homoeopathic treatments.