

Lobelia

Latin Name: *Lobelia inflata*

Also known as: Indian Tobacco, Wild Tobacco, Asthma Weed, Pukeweed, Vomitwort, Bladderpod, Eyebright

Scientific Classification

Lobelia is a genus containing 350 species, many of them indigenous to America.

Family: Campanulaceae – bellflower family
Genus: Lobelia – lobelia
Species: *L. inflata* – Indian-tobacco

Other lobelia species with medicinal qualities:

Great Blue Lobelia (*L. siphilitica*)
Pale-Spike Lobelia (*L. spicata*)
Kalm's Lobelia (*L. kalmii*)
Cardinal Flower (*L. cardinalis*)

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPLE ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Addictions</i>	smoking • drugs • alcohol
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	circulation • blood poisoning • BLOOD VESSELS • heart • heart palpitations • angina (chest pains)
<i>Blood Sugar</i>	hypoglycemia
<i>Body System</i>	CATARRH • GENERAL CONGESTION • cleansing • mucous membranes • astringent (tightens, constricts and tones tissues) • HYPERACTIVITY • PAIN • analgesic (relieves pain) • PROMOTES SLEEP • INSOMNIA • sedative (calming, soothing or tranquilizing) • relaxant (in larger doses) • stimulant (in small doses)
<i>Bones and Teeth</i>	TEETHING • TOOTHACHE • periostitis (inflammation or infection of the tissue covering bones)
<i>Cancer</i>	tumors
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	digestive disorders • emetic (causes vomiting) • FOOD POISONING (as an emetic) • nervous dyspepsia (indigestion) • constipation • colic • small intestines • dysentery (large bowel inflammation and pain) • peritonitis (infection of the abdominal lining 'peritoneum') • cathartic • EXPELS WORMS

<i>Ears</i>	EARACHE • EAR INFECTIONS
<i>Eyes</i>	ophthalmia (eye inflammation)
<i>First Aid</i>	bruises • open wounds • cell rejuvenation • sprains • bites and stings • poison ivy • anti-venomous • shock
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	ALLERGIES • hayfever • COLDS • COUGHS • FEVERS • cold sweats • CHILDHOOD DISEASES • CONTAGIOUS DISEASES • CHICKEN POX • MUMPS • measles • ringworm • LOCK JAW (tetanus) • rheumatic fever • scarlet fever • diphtheria • WHOOPING COUGH • spinal meningitis • meningitis
<i>Inflammation</i>	ARTHRITIS • rheumatism • bursitis
<i>Liver</i>	liver • jaundice • HEPATITIS
<i>Lungs and Respiratory System</i>	respiratory stimulant • esophagus • larynx • BRONCHITIS • bronchial spasms • bronchial asthma • ACUTE ASTHMA ATTACK • CROUP • EMPHYSEMA • LUNG PROBLEMS • PLEURISY • PNEUMONIA • EXPECTORANT (loosens and removes phlegm in the respiratory tract)
<i>Mouth, Nose & Throat</i>	CANKER SORES • hoarseness • laryngitis • tonsillitis
<i>Muscles</i>	MUSCLE SPASMS • cramps
<i>Nervous System</i>	CONVULSIONS • SPASMS • SEIZURES • EPILEPSY • palsy • St. Vitus' Dance • chorea (a nervous disease characterized by involuntary movements) • NERVE RELAXANT • neuralgia (sharp, stabbing pains due to deposits or congestion putting pressure on nerves) • HEADACHES • MIGRAINE HEADACHES • delirium • hysteria
<i>Reproductive System</i>	<i>Female:</i> • MISCARRIAGE • emmenagogue (promotes menstrual flow)
<i>Skin, Tissues & Hair</i>	boils • felons (type of abscess) • eczema • skin infections • diaphoretic (promotes perspiration, increasing elimination through the skin) • scar tissue
<i>Urinary Tract</i>	urinary problems • diuretic (increases urine flow) • nephritis (kidney inflammation)

Key Properties:

- ANTISPASMODIC
- NERVINE – sedates and relaxes the body, relieves discomfort, improves nerve function
- EMETIC – causes vomiting in large doses, expelling poisons and toxins out of the body
- RESPIRATORY STIMULANT and expectorant – Relaxes and opens bronchioles, facilitates easier breathing, loosens and expels phlegm from the respiratory pathway

Primarily affecting: NERVES • LUNGS • STOMACH • MUSCLES • CIRCULATION

History

Native Americans smoked lobelia leaves to stop asthma and bronchitis spasms and to ease breathing. Chewing the leaves soothed sore throats and coughs. Poultices were made from fresh leaves and roots to relieve body aches, soothe skin irritations, and heal sores. Lobelia was used to induce vomiting and treat infant colic.

At least four other lobelia species were used medicinally by early American Indians. Red Lobelia was used for syphilis and expelling worms. The Shoshones made a tea of lobelia for use as an emetic and physic. Indians introduced lobelia to European settlers.

The herbalist, Samuel Thomson (ca. 1769-1843), founded the alternative system of medicine that became known as 'Thomsonian Medicine'. It enjoyed wide popularity in the United States during the 19th century. Dr. Thomson championed lobelia use as a muscle relaxant during childbirth, a poultice for healing abscesses, and for emesis therapy (induced vomiting to purge toxins out of the stomach). He believed that lobelia was the most powerful herb that existed for removing disease and congestion, cleansing the body and promoting health.

Dr. Thomson wrote of making a tincture using the ground up fresh herb and vinegar:

“This preparation is for the most violent attacks of disease, such as lockjaw, bite of mad dog, drowned persons, fits, spasms, and all cases of suspended animation, where the vital spark is nearly extinct. It will not work in two cases: when the patient is dying and when there is no disease. It clears all obstructions to the extremities and will be felt in the fingers and toes producing a prickling feeling. But it soon exhausts itself

and if not followed by some other medicine to hold the vital heat till nature is able to support itself by digesting food it will not be sufficient to remove disease that has become seated...”

Dr. Thomson further recommended using cayenne tincture in conjunction with lobelia tincture “to retain the internal vital heat of the system and cause a free perspiration.”

Lobelia was added to the pharmacopoeia of American herbalist physicians in the late 1700s. It was used for healing ulcers and treating dysentery, epilepsy and respiratory diseases.

Our family's experience with this wonderful herb has been nothing short of amazing. I originally made this oil for my sore, pregnant belly. My husband would rub it on my tummy and it eased my discomfort. Remarkably enough, all of my old stretch marks seemed to disappear. We use what we call 'Lobelia oil' for just about everything. My fondest memories are when my children would ask me to rub 'Yobellia Oil' on there upset tummies, or when my husband would rub this oil on our nursing babies feet to soothe them while I was away.

I remember when a friend carried his ailing wife into our home to see if I could help her get relief from severe discomfort in her swollen ankles. She couldn't even walk. I rubbed her feet and ankles with lobelia oil and she was able to walk by the time she left our home. We have seen old and new scars dramatically lighten or disappear completely, tight muscles loosen up, and discomfort go away. We have also had lots of experience in helping lung issues to heal. Lobelia will always be in our family's cupboard.

Attributes

Key Components: (including, but not limited to)

Calcium • Cobalt • Copper • Iron • Potassium • Selenium
• Sodium • Sulfur • other Trace Minerals

Lobeline (an alkaloid which is the main active ingredient in lobelia)

General

Many authorities consider lobelia to be the most important of all herbs. The proper use of lobelia can help alleviate an acute asthma attack and ease difficult breathing. It is useful in emergency cases of electrical shock, sunstroke and heatstroke. It can force vomiting when the body is poisoned with narcotics, bad food, medicine, carbon monoxide, and infections. It has also been noted that lobelia enhances

pituitary function.

In small doses, lobelia acts as a tonic and stimulant. In larger doses, it acts as a sedative relaxant. Large doses will also induce vomiting. It is a catalytic herb, energizing the body's ability to heal itself as needed. It resets the nervous system, opens up passages, and clears long-standing blockages.

Lobelia's affect on the body can last for hours but more likely will fade out after 10-20 minutes. Using stimulant herbs such as cayenne or peppermint extends lobelia's effects.

Copious amounts of water need to be taken with lobelia to aid the body in the elimination of drug-induced and metabolic toxic wastes.

*Anti-Spasmodic
and Relaxant*

Lobelia is a powerful nervine and anti-spasmodic. It can cause immediate relaxation and expansion of constricted parts of the respiratory system. This allows for the return of normal breathing and the flow of oxygen to exhausted tissues.

Lobelia is considered the strongest relaxant in the herb kingdom. It has been successfully used to help relax the muscles in lockjaw. It is excellent for spasms, cramps, epilepsy, hysteria, chorea, tetanus, and convulsions.

NOTE:

Large doses will completely relax the entire body, so that even the smallest muscles cannot be used temporarily. In rare cases, people who are sensitive to lobelia's effects or who are in a weak condition, may become over-relaxed and sleepy when using lobelia. This effect can be balanced by taking lobelia with cayenne.

Keep lobelia tincture on hand for use in convulsions. It can be rubbed on the body, or drops may be put in the mouth and the body will immediately absorb it and react to it.

Rubbing a few drops of lobelia tincture or oil on the shoulders of a restless child is an excellent way to help him calm down and go to sleep. Lobelia also helps relax the mother during delivery and speeds up the delivery of the placenta.

Heart and Circulation

Lobelia in small doses will relax the heart, lower a rapid pulse rate, and reduce palpitations of the heart. Lobelia is

effective in removing obstruction and congestion within the body, especially the blood vessels. If blood flow through the vessels is depressed, lobelia works to correct the problem by strengthening muscular action of the vessel walls which propel blood forward.

Respiratory System

Lobelia is used internally in small doses for spasmodic lung and respiratory conditions. Lobelia first stimulates the nerves that go to the internal organs, then depresses and relaxes them. As lobelia depresses the nerve centers, the bronchial muscles relax, and the bronchioles dilate. This opens the bronchial tubes, esophagus, glottis (vocal cords) and larynx, and allows for easier breathing.

Lobelia is used in this way for helping treat bronchitis, asthma, and croup. It is often added to cough medicines, as it loosens phlegm and can cause an impressive expulsion of thick, ropery mucus from sinuses and bronchi. Lobelia's stimulating effect on the respiratory system is quick, then it passes, diffusing throughout the body.

Nicotine Addiction

Lobelia has been used in lozenges, patches, chewing gums and even smoked to relieve nicotine cravings. Research has shown that lobeline has some of the same effects as nicotine, in a milder, non-addictive form. It competes with nicotine for receptor sites in the body. Smokers may require more lobelia to get the same medicinal effects as non-smokers. Lobelia decreases the addictive need for tobacco and its lobeline salts make nicotine taste bad when smoking normal cigarettes.

FDA Ruling:

In 1993, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prohibited the sale of lobeline-containing smoking products in the United States. The FDA reported that such products lacked effectiveness in helping people quit or reduce smoking. However, other countries still use lobeline in smoking reduction preparations.

Digestion

In the digestive tract, lobelia suppresses the appetite and increases peristaltic (intestinal) movement.

Emetic

In large doses, lobelia is an excellent emetic. Emesis is a therapy that induces vomiting. In many situations, it is better to cause vomiting to get the poison quickly up and out of the stomach. Digestion through the intestines could take days

for some pathogens, allowing time to release its toxins into the blood (causing fevers and other symptoms) until finally expelled.

Emesis therapy is indicated when there is a feeling of nausea caused by bad food combinations, food or drug poisoning, and with excessive mucus build-up in asthma, sinus congestion, or food allergies. Capsicum is often added to flush poisons from the stomach and bowels.

Much has been written regarding whether lobelia is poisonous, but experience suggests that it is an antidote that purges poison from the body. It not only cleanses the stomach, but exercises a beneficial influence over every part of the body.

Emesis therapy is for singular situations and not to be used on a regular basis. Habitual vomiting unbalances normal processes of the body and can be life-threatening.

Infections and Fevers

Lobelia is not to be used continuously. The intent of use is to clean out, clean up, and keep clean the areas of congestion and infection.

Lobelia helps reduce fevers caused by infectious diseases. It induces perspiration and urine flow. Catnip and lobelia enemas are good for mumps as well as other infectious diseases.

External Uses

Lobelia tea may be used as a wash to help clear eyes in cases of ophthalmia, or for infected or itchy skin rashes. Lobelia extract is good to rub on gums of a teething baby to relieve swelling, inflammation and discomfort.

An extract of lobelia in extra virgin olive oil is soothing and helpful when used topically. It can relax tight muscles, calm arthritic conditions, upset tummies, nausea, fussy babies, soften and heal the skin (including acne and scar tissue). A poultice of lobelia soothes inflammations, rheumatism, ringworm, bruises, and insect bites. A natural-soap poultice with slippery elm and lobelia added to it may be used to bring abscesses or boils to a head. Add lobelia to liniments for sore muscles, pains and rheumatism.

Herb Parts Used

The whole plant, fresh or dried, and seeds are used medicinally. The root and inflated seed capsules are the most powerful. The seeds contain more lobeline than the

	rest of the plant.
Preparations and Remedies	Give lobelia in small quantities, as needed, to clean out waste material and relieve locked-up conditions of the body. When administered internally, it is used for acute, singular conditions, rather than for long-term use.
<i>Powdered Formula</i>	<p><i>Kidney Formula:</i> (see JUNIPER preparations)</p> <p><i>Infection Formula:</i> (see GOLDENSEAL preparations)</p>
<i>Infusions</i>	<p><i>Lobelia Tea:</i> 1 ounce Lobelia 1 pint boiling Water</p> <p>Steep for 10 minutes. Take lobelia tea in tablespoonful doses every hour or half-hour. A weak infusion given in teaspoonful doses every 10 minutes will thoroughly relax the muscular system.</p>
<i>Tincture</i>	<p><i>Tincture of Lobelia:</i> 4 ounces Lobelia herb, stem, flowers, seeds or leaves 1 pint Raw Apple Cider Vinegar or Vodka (use alcohol for emergency first aid kits for external use).</p> <p>Macerate (soak to soften and release constituents) in a tightly capped bottle for 10-14 days. Shake every time you walk by, or at least once a day. Strain off the liquid, and bottle it for use.</p> <p><i>Neuralgia:</i> Using 10-40 drops lobelia tincture in warm water or in a good nervine tea is a specific for neuralgia.</p> <p><i>Massage:</i> Use tincture of lobelia to massage externally onto the afflicted area and take two or three drops internally at regular intervals until difficulty is resolved.</p> <p><i>Breathing Easy:</i> 2-5 drops (you may use up to 10 drops with caution) of lobelia tincture on the tongue will relax muscles in the throat and open bronchiole tubes.</p> <p><i>Baby Convulsions:</i> Place a drop or two of the tincture on the tip of the finger and put it into the baby's mouth. This can</p>

	<p>help stop the problem immediately.</p> <p><i>Earache:</i> Place a few drops of warm lobelia tincture or oil extract in the ear and plug it with cotton.</p> <p><i>Fomentations</i> <i>Respiratory Fomenation:</i> (see MULLEIN preparation)</p> <p><i>Soothing Fomentation for Pains, Sprains, and Rheumatism:</i> 2 parts Ginger root 1 part Slippery Elm 1 part Cayenne 1 part Lobelia Soak cloth with warm infusion and apply to affected area.</p> <p><i>Poultices and Plasters</i> Lobelia tincture added to poultices and plasters sedates and relaxes the affected area and eases pain.</p> <p><i>Poultice for Boils and Abscesses:</i> (see ECHINACEA preparations)</p> <p><i>Salves</i> A salve or tincture of lobelia along with other soothing barks and roots such as slippery elm bark, comfrey and aloe, may be employed for inflammations, swellings and discomfort. (see COMFRY preparations for directions on how to make a salve formula).</p> <p><i>Emesis Therapy</i> <i>Emesis (induced vomiting):</i> Take 1 teaspoon lobelia tincture every 10 minutes until vomiting is induced. Follow this therapy with several warm cups of peppermint or spearmint tea to soothe and relax the stomach.</p> <p>After vomiting (followed by a mint tea), fevers will usually reduce and organ functions return to normal. This therapy reduces body energy and should not be used in weak, debilitated conditions, severe hypertension, or when hemorrhaging. Emesis therapy is used in response to a toxic condition of the body and is not to be used on a regular basis.</p>
Safety	<p>Lobelia is powerful and effective in low doses. Getting to know the proper use of lobelia can be tricky, but it is well worth the trouble to have the knowledge and use of this valuable herb.</p> <p>No health hazards or adverse side effects are known with proper dosages. Lobelia overdose is possible. To avoid the</p>

chance of overdose, internal preparations of lobelia are often mixed with other herbs and always taken with lots of water.

A dose of straight lobelia should usually be diluted in at least one full cup of water before ingestion. Lobelia may be used in tincture form directly under the tongue for emergencies. Large doses of lobelia may temporarily affect the heart muscle. Those suffering from a weak heart or heart disease should avoid emesis therapy.

Internal lobelia preparations should not to be taken during pregnancy unless guided by a health care provider that is familiar with this herb. Lobelia can help to-be mothers avoid miscarriage and may be used during labor as a relaxant. Do not over-use, as large doses may cause nausea and vomiting.

Early physicians in the 1800s are said to have been jealous of Dr. Thomson's success and speedy results with his patients using lobelia. Even though there had never been a study proving it to be so, lobelia was labeled as a poison in official works of the day, such as the U.S. Pharmacopoeia and the American Dispensatory.

Plant Profile

Natural Habitat:

Indigenous to North America, lobelia grows wild in most sections of the United States. It is found in meadows, pastures, woods, and grassy places in Canada and the United States, and it is cultivated in Russia and India.

Description

This type of lobelia is not to be confused with the bright blue, low growing, ground cover that is popular in landscapes across America.

The herb, lobelia, is an annual (must grow from seed every year) in warm latitudes and a biennial (must grow from seed at least every two years) in moderate and northern latitudes. Lobelia has a fibrous root. The plant grows one to three feet with erect, angular, very hairy and highly branched stems that have a milky sap. Lobelia has soft pointed leaves (one to three inches long) and loose terminal spikes of small and numerous pale-blue flowers (red, yellow, white or blue in other species) from July to November.

Lobelia flowers give way to characteristic 'inflated' seedpods; two-celled puffy capsules (hence the species name 'inflata') housing numerous small brown-black colored seeds.

Lobelia has a faint, irritating odor. When it is chewed it doesn't have much flavor at first. Then, it produces a burning acrid taste, very closely resembling that of tobacco. It causes saliva to flow and produces an overall nauseating effect. However, lobelia is not related to tobacco and does not contain nicotine or other poisonous properties.

Growing Lobelia

Planting:

Lobelia plants prefer part to full sun, rich, acid soil, and plenty of water. Seeds are sown in spring or fall. Average germination time in warm soils is one to three weeks. Water very gently. In the wild, lobelia germinates in the fall and the low-lying rosette (leaves) overwinters. The plant then flowers and goes to seed in the spring to early summer. When seed is planted and grown as a spring annual, it usually flowers early (once the soil warms) and gives very little yield.

Harvesting

The plant is best harvested in the green seedpod stage, usually from the end of July to the middle of October.

Storage

The plant should be dried in the shade and then preserved in covered containers, especially if reduced to powder.

Lobelia should never be stored in paper, as both the herb and the seeds contain a volatile oil that can be readily absorbed by the paper and lost. Potency of the herb deteriorates rapidly after drying, yet it is still very effective when dried and stored properly.
