

Wildflower in Focus

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Great Blue Lobelia

Lobelia siphilitica L.

Bluebell or Bellflower Family (*Campanulaceae*)
Some taxonomists place this plant in the separate
Lobelia Family (*Lobeliaceae*)



Great blue lobelia blooms along Maryland streams, rivers and ponds from late summer through autumn. Like the related cardinal flower (*L. cardinalis*), great blue lobelia is a wildflower of uncommon beauty. Native Americans used the root of this plant to treat syphilis – giving rise to the Latin name: *Lobelia siphilitica*.

Flowers: Deep sapphire or violet, irregular, two-lipped, the upper lip two-lobed, the lower lip three-lobed. Lips are joined to form a tube, which

is striped white on its lower side. Flowers 3/4" - 1" long, in a dense upright raceme.

Leaves: Alternate, simple, lanceolate - elliptic, oblong or oblanceolate, shallowly and irregularly toothed, sessile, 2 - 5" long.

Height: 1 - 3'.

Habitat and Range: Swamps, springs, streambanks, riverbanks, pondsides and wet ground; Maine to Manitoba and Colorado, south to North Carolina and Texas.

Herbal Lore: As well as employing the root as a syphilis treatment, Native Americans used the leaves of this plant to treat a number of internal ailments, including coughs, croup, worms and nosebleeds. The leaves were also used as poultices for persistent sores.

Similar Species: There are several other members of the Lobelia genus indigenous to Maryland. See Brown & Brown's **Herbaceous Plants of Maryland**.

Blooming Time: August - November.

Locations: Wet areas along Mount Ephraim Road, Sugarloaf Mountain; C&O Canal; Rock Creek Regional Park; Soldiers Delight. See **Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area** (Fleming, Lobstein & Tufty) for more locations.

"Wildflower in Focus" is adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press).