

Cultural Details: **Lobelia**

An important part of all bedding plant programmes, compact lobelias are sold as bedding and edging plants, while the trailing types are an essential component of most mixed hanging baskets.

**Variety Selection**

Traditional compact lobelias such as Cambridge Blue and Crystal Palace have been joined more recently by varieties such as Palace and Riviera, with some interesting new colours and shades. Amongst the wide selection of trailing types, Monsoon deserves wider recognition with its vigorous habit and long flowering performance. Note that all white lobelias contain a proportion of blue-flowered plants.

**Programming the Crop**

Sow from January to March for sale from the end of April to June.

**Propagation and Growing-on**

Sow the very small seeds (25,000 per gram) onto the surface of a free-draining, open-structured, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Sow either into trays, or at around 10 seeds per cell into plug trays, to avoid root disturbance when pricking out. Cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Pelleted seed is available for sowing into plug trays; this allows easier sowing and placement of the seed – full details in the catalogue. Germination takes around 10-14 days at 20-23°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times, and grow on at 18-20°C.

After around 5 weeks, the seedlings should be ready for transfer into the final container; 6- 9- or 12-packs, or large-celled plug trays if the plants are being raised for hanging baskets. If grown from seed trays, prick out the seedlings in clumps of five or more seedlings. Once again a fungicidal solution can be used on the compost prior to planting. Grow on at 15-18°C until ready for sale, temperature can be reduced prior to sale to harden off the plants – they are tolerant of quite low temperatures.

**Pest and Disease**

Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases. Lobelia is especially sensitive to Alternaria, which kills of seedlings and developing plants. Growing in plug trays helps prevent the spread of this disease. Monitor for insect pests such as aphids and treat accordingly.

*Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.*