

LOBELIA PERENNIAL VARIETIES

Cultural Details: ZZ240

Perennial Lobelias throw up spikes of flowers, and do not resemble the traditional annual bedding types at all. They are sold in flower or as green plants with a colour label, and are important components of the perennial production programme. They tend to be short-lived as perennials.

Variety Selection

Lobelia Kalmii Blue Shadow is a compact border plant which can also be grown as an annual, for bedding use.

Cardinalis Queen Victoria and Vedrariensis are two taller traditional species producing spikes of scarlet and purple flowers respectively. They do well in damper areas. Queen Victoria also has bronze foliage, and makes a good dot plant in bedding schemes. Both require overwintering before flowering.

The Fan and slightly taller Compliment Series are excellent subjects for Summer sales in flower as container plants, with their spikes of large flowers, sown early January. They can be used as feature taller bedding plants in formal bedding schemes.

Programming the Crop

Sow June-July to overwinter, or in January (not Queen Victoria or Vedrariensis) to flower as an annual.

Propagation and Growing-on

Sow the very small seeds (around 20,000 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 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, and do not exclude all light. Germination takes up to 3 weeks at around 20°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times, and grow on at 15-18°C.

When large enough to handle, the seedlings should be ready for transfer into large-celled plug trays. Grow on at around 15 °C until ready for potting up into the final container, or for the June-July sowings, the plants can be gradually cooled down and overwintered in the plug tray. The January sowings will be kept growing at 10 °C minimum, preferably 15 °C, and potted up when ready into the final container, 10cm or 1 litre pot, or three plugs to a 2 litre pot. Overwintered plants should be kept on the dry side, under protection, such as a well-ventilated polytunnel or glasshouse. Sell as green plants with a colour label, or in flower.

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by Botrytis. Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases. Monitor for insect pests such as aphids and whitefly, and treat accordingly.

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