



Lobelia

The Intelligent Herb

Discover The Amazing Healing Powers of Lobelia

The term *panacea* refers to a single remedy that fixes a host of problems or cures all diseases. The word's roots lie in the Greek word *panakēs* (*pan* meaning "all" and *akos* meaning "remedy"). So, if there was such a thing as a panacea in the plant kingdom, it would be an herb that would cure every disease.

While no such herb exists, there are herbs that help so many different diseases that herbalists have dubbed them a panacea. One example is Asian ginseng, which is used in Chinese medicine for so many diseases that it was dubbed a panacea with its Latin name, *Panax ginseng*. The genus *Panax* being derived from panacea. In traditional American herbalism, the herb that has come the closest to being regarded as a panacea is ***Lobelia inflata***.

The *Lobelia* genus was named for the French botanist, Matthias de Lobel and has over 400 species. Many species of lobelia are grown in gardens because of the beauty of their flowers, but the species *Lobelia inflata* is best known for its amazing healing powers and is the plant we'll be talking about in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*. Throughout this newsletter, when we use the term lobelia, it will be in reference to *Lobelia inflata*.

Introducing Lobelia: The Intelligent Herbal Trickster

Lobelia is native to eastern Canada and the United States. It is a one to two foot tall, annual plant with beautiful blue flowers and one of the most controversial plants in the modern materia medica. It has been derided and condemned by orthodox Western medicine and even some herbalists are afraid to use it. At the same time, it is one of the most widely acclaimed remedies by others.

If, as many herbalists suggest, each plant has its own personality, then lobelia is surely one of the greatest tricksters of the herbal world. Herbalist Matthew Wood goes so far as to call it "the wildest and craziest article in the herbal materia medica" in *The Book of Herbal Wisdom*. However, lobelia is not a mean trickster. It's only a trickster in that it acts in some wild and crazy ways, but always in moving the body towards health.

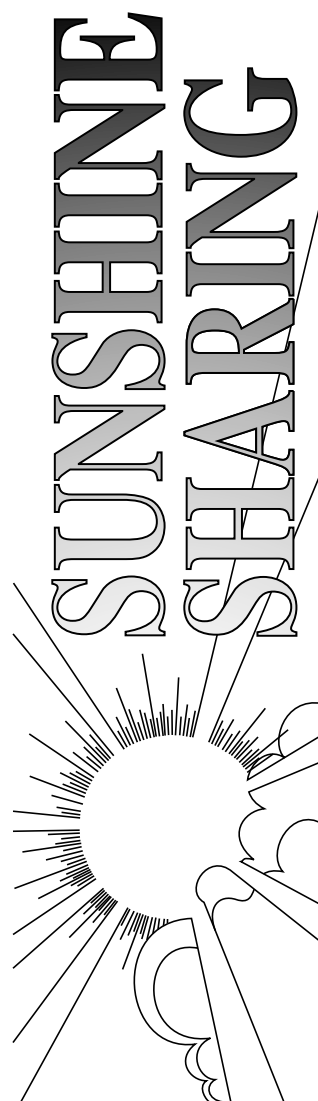
The controversy about lobelia began when it was introduced into popular use by Samuel Thomson, an herbalist in the early 1800s who is considered by some to be the father of American herbalism.

Discovering the Healing Power of Lobelia

Thomson discovered lobelia when he chewed on the plant and it made him throw up. This is because in higher doses, lobelia acts as an emetic, which means it induces vomiting. Thomson used this property of lobelia to play pranks on his friends, telling them to chew on some and getting a laugh out of seeing them throw up.

However, in playing his little prank with the herbal trickster, Thomson discovered the healing powers of the herb. He gave the herb to a fellow worker, who started to feel deathly ill. Worried, Thomson tried leading him back to the house, but the man threw up on the way home. Shortly thereafter, the man reported that he had never felt better in his life.

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Thomson, who was already dabbling in being an “herb and root” doctor, started using lobelia to help people who were sick get better. Lobelia herb worked so well in overcoming sickness that it became his number one healing agent. Together with his number two herb, capsicum or cayenne pepper, he used it for everyone, young and old, and for every illness, acute or chronic.

In his book, *New Guide to Health*, he had this to say about it:

Much has been said of the power of the Emetic Herb [lobelia], and some have expressed fears of it on that account; but I can assure the public, that there is not the least danger in using it; I have given it to children from one day old to persons of eighty years. It is most powerful in removing disease, but innocent in nature. Its operation in different persons is according to their different tempers... There are two cases where this medicine will not operate, viz. when

the patient is dying and where there is no death; or in other words, when there is no disease.

The Lobelia Controversy

As the above quotation suggests, lobelia was controversial in Thomson's day and the controversy continues to this day. Like Thomson, famous herbalists like Dr. John Christopher and Jethro Kloss claim that in decades of use they never saw lobelia cause harm to anyone. You can see for yourself the high praises these herbalists have used in the quotations below.

On the other hand, orthodox sources continue to claim that lobelia can cause “sweating, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, rapid heartbeat, mental confusion, convulsions, hypothermia, coma and possibly death.” [Wikipedia]

The controversy began when an allopathic physician, who was losing patients to Thomson, filed charges claiming that Thomson had murdered a man with lobelia. Thomson was thrown in jail. In Matthew Wood's words, “After languishing in an unheated, urine-soaked cell with a child molester, the case was brought to court, the charges were shown to be fabricated and he was released without being allowed to stage a defense.”

Herbalists Sing the Praises of Lobelia

Herbalists through the years have made some pretty amazing claims about lobelia. Here are a few.

Pioneer Herbalist Priddy Meeks said in his journal:

I don't know what [high praise] I could place on Lobelia to be competent with its virtues... for Lobelia will act on the system in complete conformity with the laws of health... it will permeate the whole system till it finds where the obstruction is seated, and there it will spend its influence and powers by relaxing the parts obstructed... always accompany the Lobelia with Cayenne pepper [Capsicum], which is the purest and best stimulant that is known in the compass of medicine... [They] will act on the whole system like an increased flow of water turned [into] a muddy spring of water—it will soon run clear. And, although Lobelia is set at naught and persecuted the way it is... it is ordained of God to be used in wisdom.

R. Swinburne Clymer, MD in his book *Nature's Healing Agents*, had this to say about lobelia.

The number one agent on the Natura physician's armamentarium is Lobelia. Lobelia is one of Nature's few dual agents in the relief of human ailments. It is both a relaxant and a stimulant; depending altogether on how it is prescribed, hence, if the Natura physician had to choose one remedy from others, it would be Lobelia and his practice would be successful. So many claims have been made for this agent, and so many more could honestly be made for it, were its virtues fully understood. ...most unjustly, Lobelia has been, and continues to be—labeled a poison... In my fifty-six years (at the writing) I have prescribed it for children and people advanced in age; in three drops to new born children; fifteen drops every fifteen minutes for

hours, or maximum doses of 60 drops, to older persons with never any but the best results... If there is any such thing as a general panacea, I would say that lobelia comes closer to being such than any other agent I have used all of these many years.

In more recent times, the father of the modern American herb movement, Dr. John Christopher, wrote this in his book, *School of Natural Medicine*:

Lobelia is one of the greatest herbs ever given to the world... Lobelia is a general corrector of the whole system, as it is easily diffused and able to influence the entire body... Over years of practice, lobelia has been administered many times, and there have been numerous miraculous healings. Time after time, lobelia has helped the very young to the very old, with only positive results. As for lobelia being a poison: this is one of the most ridiculous falsehood ever foisted on the public by orthodox allopaths.

Lobelia is a selective herb. When a fetus is dead, or in an extremely weakened condition, lobelia will cause it to abort. However, if the fetus is well and healthy, and the mother is weak, it will cause the mother to heal and strengthen, enabling her to carry the child until the proper time of delivery. Lobelia accurately and intelligently selects which way it is to go. It is truly a ‘thinking’ herb.’

Jethro Kloss in his famous book, *Back to Eden* devoted 18 pages to lobelia, citing numerous other references to its safety and efficacy. Many herbalists, naturopaths and even medical doctors who have used lobelia extensively could be cited and all have claimed it was not only highly beneficial in treating disease, it was also completely safe.

However, for the next 100 years orthodox medicine would continue to repeat the falsehood that Thomson had killed a man with lobelia. The truth is, that lobelia does have some alarming effects on some people. As an emetic and powerful antispasmodic, lobelia can cause profuse sweating, nausea and vomiting. That part is true, but it is also true that there are no cases on record of lobelia having ever caused death.

Why Lobelia is an Intelligent Trickster

As Thomson and the other writers on the previous page suggest, lobelia seems to always act in an intelligent manner. It's trickiness is that it sometimes produces alarming symptoms when the body needs to be cleansed of toxins, but has little effect when there is no disease to remove. It also seems to have a dual action.

For example, small doses (1-2 drops) will actually help relieve nausea and vomiting, while large doses will induce it. Small doses can act as a stimulant, while larger doses act as a profound relaxant.

Some people get an emetic effect (nausea and vomiting) from taking one capsule. However, other people who have taken large doses of lobelia when they were not sick [including the author who took 12 capsules once] have reported no nausea or vomiting at all, just a deep state of relaxation where you don't want to move a muscle.

The Many Uses of Lobelia

Now that you know the background. Let's get down to the practical use of lobelia and why it has been considered such a panacea. Here are some of the many medicinal uses for this amazing plant.

Relaxing Respiratory Remedy

Lobelia is one of nature's most powerful antispasmodics. It has a profound relaxing effect on the entire system. One of its principle alkaloids, lobeline, attaches to the nicotinic acetylcholine receptors, inhibiting some and stimulating others. In the respiratory system, it dilates the bronchials, which allows the lungs to take in more air, while stimulating the movement of mucus to help clear the lungs. It also slows the breath rate, while deepening the breath.



This makes lobelia one of the best remedies for asthma in the herbal materia medica. Doses of 10-15 drops can be administered every 2-3 minutes to stop an asthma attack. Lobelia can also be taken in similar doses 3-4 times per day to help relieve asthma. It is also helpful for COPD, bronchitis, pneumonia, and emphysema.

Lobelia is also useful in relieving respiratory congestion because it helps the lungs expel mucus, while at the same time calming the cough. It is especially helpful for whooping cough or other spastic coughs. The best way to use it is to administer 5-10 drop doses of lobelia along with two to four capsules (or 1/4-1 teaspoon) of an **Expectorant/Decongestant Formula** containing herbs like horseradish, boneset, citrus peel and bamboo sap. This will help to clear mucus from the lungs in colds, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

Stop Smoking Aid

Because lobelia attaches to the same receptor sites as nicotine, lobelia can be a powerful aid in reducing the desire to smoke tobacco. Lobeline was once sold as an over-the-counter no smoking aid, but unlike the whole plant lobelia, lobeline by itself can produce toxic side effects (which is probably why modern medicine considered lobelia poisonous).



The other alkaloids in lobelia induce vomiting long before one can get a toxic dose of lobeline, making lobelia a perfectly safe remedy to help a person stop smoking. The dose is typically one capsule two or three times a day. Adding 1-2 capsules of **chamomile** and 2 tablets of a **B-complex plus C Anti-Stress Vitamin Supplement** can enhance the ability of lobelia to reduce nicotine cravings.

Circulatory and Heart Support

In the cardiovascular system, it relaxes blood vessels, lowering blood pressure, while it simultaneously lowers the heart rate, while increasing the strength of the heart beat. This makes lobelia a useful remedy for high blood pressure, tachycardia and a feeble heart beat. It can also help relieve angina and arrhythmia.

Lobelia is traditionally combined with **capsicum**, especially for circulatory problems. Combine equal parts of lobelia and capsicum extracts and take about 1/4-1/2 teaspoon 2-3 times per day or in a crisis situation every 10-15 minutes until heart rate and blood pressure normalize.

Powerful Pain Reliever

Lobelia also relaxes the skeletal muscles, relieving muscle spasms, cramps and the pain associated with them. The best way to use it for this purpose is topically. Mix extracts of lobelia and capsicum in equal parts and rub them into any area of the body where there are muscle pains, tense muscles or cramps. This can be followed with the topical application of an **Analgesic Essential Oil Blend** containing menthol, camphor, lavender and/or wintergreen.



You can use this technique on the back to relieve backaches, on the neck and shoulders to relieve headaches, including migraines, as well as neck and shoulder pain. This technique can also be helpful for healing sprains and similar injuries or any other part of the body where there is tension and pain.

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Additional Help and Information

For more information about the use of lobelia (and other antispasmodics) contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

The Book of Herbal Wisdom by Matthew Wood

Back to Eden by Jethro Kloss

New Guide to Health by Samuel Thomson

The School of Natural Healing by Dr. John R. Christopher

Nature's Healing Agents by R. Swinburne Clymer, MD

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You can also use lobelia internally to relax muscles and relieve cramps. It is typically used as part of an **Antispasmodic Formula** containing other antispasmodics like black cohosh, cramp bark and/or wild yam. It can also be used by itself (or along with capsicum) in doses of 10-30 drops or one capsule. For instance, midwives have administered lobelia to counteract pelvic rigidity during childbirth.

The Emetic Herb

Vomiting is one way the body has of clearing irritating substances. Traditionally, when a person has food poisoning or has ingested a non-caustic poisonous substance, vomiting has been used to help clear the toxin from the system. Medicine used to use another herb, ipecac, for this purpose, but has abandoned the practice after determining that taking **activated charcoal** works better. Charcoal adheres to the poisons, preventing them from being absorbed.

Constriction and Antispasmodics

Constriction refers to an excess of tension or tone. Muscle spasms of any kind are examples of constriction. But, tension also tends to alternate with relaxation, creating conditions that are jerky, sudden, unpredictable, irregular and alternating, like alternating diarrhea and constipation or sharp, shooting pains. In Oriental medicine, conditions with this erratic nature were called wind conditions. Constriction always blocks movement or flow and is often a cause of pain.

Herbs that reduce constriction are known as antispasmodics. By relaxing constriction they enhance movement and flow, as well as easing pain. They help facilitate the flow of blood and lymph, help us breathe freely, move without tension and sleep better.

Lobelia is one of the most powerful antispasmodics, but there are others such as kava kava, black cohosh, blue vervain and wild yam. Wherever there is obstruction due to tension, antispasmodics can help things move freely again, reducing feelings of stress and pain, while increasing a general sense of relaxation and well-being.

In situations where throwing up may be helpful, lobelia is a reliable remedy and an alternative to ipecac. Take it with warm water until the stomach eliminates the irritants. Use peppermint tea or a drop or two of peppermint oil to settle the stomach afterwards.

Other Valuable Uses for Lobelia

Lobelia extract has also been warmed and used as ear drops to relieve pain in earaches and to ease tinnitus (ringing in the ears). It can be applied topically to insect bites and stings or in combination with **capsicum** for bruises. Lobelia has also been used to ease spastic bowel and to counteract the tendency to intestinal gripping (or cramps) that the cascara sagrada, buckthorn and Turkey rhubarb in **Stimulant Laxative Formulas** will sometimes cause.



Lobelia rubbed on the spine can help a restless child calm down and go to sleep. It aids lymphatic flow and has been used to help shrink swollen lymph nodes. It is extremely helpful for relaxing a hiatal hernia. Other possible uses for lobelia include treating whiplash, easing TMJ, stopping hiccups, easing tics and muscle twitches and calming restless leg syndrome. It may even be helpful for seizures in epilepsy and the muscle spasms created by tetanus.

An Intelligent Activator of Health

The most interesting characteristic of lobelia is its ability to work as what Matthew Wood calls an activator, "to stir up the other herbs in a formula and direct them to the desired tissue or organ needing therapy." This is why Dr. John Christopher used small amounts of lobelia and capsicum in almost all his herbal formulas.

The idea of an activator herb possessing an intelligence which allows it to direct the actions of other herbs, was known and used by Native American herbalists, but certainly goes against the grain of modern-day medical thinking. But, if we listen to the wisdom of the past we may learn as Matthew Wood says, that herbs "like to do all sorts of things. They really do have a magical level of action and this goes far beyond the artificial constructs of the human mind" and lobelia is certainly one of those herbs.