### Native American Materia Medica

**Lobelia inflata**

**Latin**: Lobelia inflata  
**Family**: Campanulaceae  
**Common Name**: Pukeweed, Indian Tobacco  
**Energy**: Cool, dry  
**Taste**: Acrid  
**Part Used**: Fresh herb, seed  
**Category**: Calms liver wind/antispasmodic

### Location

It grows throughout the eastern US, west to Oklahoma and Kansas.

### Gathering

Gather the plant when it is flowering, the seeds will ripen after harvest.

### Cultivation

It prefers partial sun and can grow in average soil.

### Western Classification

- Antispasmodic  
- Bronchial dilator  
- Emetic  
-Expectorant  
- Vulnerary

### Triune Classification

- Nervous System -  
- Mucous Membranes -  
- Lung -  
- Musculoskeletal System -  
- Chinese Liver -  
- Stomach -  
- Heart/Cardiovascular -

### Major Constituents

- Piperidine alkaloids:  
  - Lobeline-antispasmodic  
  - Lobelanidine  
  - Lobelanine  
- Chelidonic acid (pyran)  
- Beta-amyrin palmitate-sedative

### Specific Indications

* Spasmodic coughs with a sense of oppression and a feeling of fullness in the chest with dyspnea and mucous rales.  
* Liver wind-spasms and petit mal epilepsy.

### Primary Uses

Lobelia has a long history of use, first by Native Americans, then by Thomsonians and then the Physiomedical and Eclectic medical sects. It is indicated for spasmodic coughs with a sense of oppression and a feeling of fullness in the chest with dyspnea and mucous rales. It can be used to treat spasmodic asthma, spasmodic bronchitis, pleurisy, hiccoughs, or whooping cough (pertussis). For hot/damp asthma, use it with Khella, Sophora root/Ku Shen, Grindelia, Platycodon/Jie Geng or Loquat leaf. For hot/dry asthma, use it with Fritillaria/Chuan Bei Mu, Anemarrhena/Zhi Mu, Lycium root bark/Di Gu Pi, Mulberry bark/Sang Bai Pi or Prince Seng. For cold/damp asthma, it can be combined with Schisandra, Ephedra, Pinellia/Ban Xia, Yerba Santa, Horehound, Pippali Long Pepper or Psoralea/Bu Gu Zhi. For cold/dry asthma, I use it with Licorice, Cordyceps, Ophiopogon/Mai Men Dong or Chinese Asparagus/Tian Men Dong. If it is a spasmodic asthma, herbs such as Khella, Licorice, Black Cohosh or Wild Cherry bark can be added.

It can be used for liver wind conditions such as petit mal epilepsy (use it with Gastrodia/Tian Ma, Scullcap, Blue Vervain or Asafoetida), spasmodic headaches (use it with Passion flower, Betony and Scullcap), back or neck spasms (use it with Kudzu/Ge Gen and Siler/Fang Feng) and angina pain with oppression of the chest (use it with Hawthorn, Corydalis/Yan Hu Suo, Kudzu/Ge Gen or Arjuna). The Eclectics used it for heavy pain radiating from the heart to the left shoulder and arm, the chest feels sore and there is a full oppressed pulse. If a person is experiencing a myocardial infarction or if the cause of the symptoms are unknown, they should immediately go to the hospital. If these symptoms are found to be caused by brachial nerve pain, Lobelia can be useful along with Jamaica Dogwood, St. John’s wort and Prickly Ash.

Lobelia reduces nicotine cravings due to its lobeline content, use it with Licorice, Fresh Oat and Scullcap. Studies indicate that lobeline inhibits dopamine uptake and release, instead of mimicking nicotine, as was previously believed. Animal studies suggest that lobeline may also be useful to prevent and treat amphetamine abuse (Dwoskin & Crooks, 2002; Harrod, et al, 2001). I use Lobelia with Chaste Tree, Chinese Polygala, Scullcap and Fresh Oat for helping to relieve symptoms of drug withdrawal.
Lobelia combined with Kava, Hydrangea (or Gravel root), Yucca root, Hops and Khella can be very useful to help pass small kidney stones (5 mm or less) and relieve the associated pain.

Small amounts of Lobelia tincture (1-2 gtt) can be used orally during labor to help dilate the cervix (rigid os).

Lobelia seeds infused in a carrier oil make an effective massage oil for whiplash, body armor, torticollis and muscle spasms.

### Secondary Uses

The fresh plant can be used as a poultice for proud flesh (infections with red, raised tissue) and the diluted tincture can be used to treat poison ivy rashes.

It was used in Thomsonian medicine to “scour the stomach and bowels” (eliminate morbid materials) and clear the lungs. In large doses Lobelia is a nauseating, depressant emetic.

### Dosage

#### Tea (Infusion): 1/4 tsp. seed, 8 oz. hot water, steep for 1 hour, take 2 oz. 3x/day

#### Tincture (1:5-seed, 1:2-fresh herb), 45% ETOH, 10% apple cider vinegar Dose: .25-1 mL (5-20 gtt) TID/QID*

#### Vinegar extract (1:5): 1-1.5 mL (20-30 gtt) TID

#### Triune: 1/36 - 1/72 part

*For the most effective dosing of Lobelia, titrate the patient’s dose. Starting at 7-8 gtt. per dose, add 1 gtt. each time they take the formula. Usually between 14-18 gtt. the person will complain of low-grade nausea. Drop the dose 1-2 gtt. and that is the effective dose.

### Preparations

For acute asthma, 30 gtt. Lobelia with 10 gtt. Capsicum BID (Bastyr/Mitchell).

Lobelia syrup for croup, asthma and pertussis - 2 drams powdered Lobelia, 1 pt. cider vinegar, macerate 2 weeks, then add 4-6 oz. warm honey and shake well until dissolved.

The tincture of the fresh flowering herb or of the seed are the most effective preparations of this herb

### Contraindications & Drug Interactions

Acute nausea.

Avoid use in pregnancy (except to help dilate the cervix), lactation and in young children.

Use cautiously in people who have a weak pulse or are deficient or asthenic.

Overdose of Lobelia can cause nausea, vomiting, gastric irritation, dyspnea, headache and dizziness.

### Special Notes

Lobelia has been used by various native peoples in smoking mixtures, hence the name “Indian Tobacco” or the Cherokee name, tsola iyusdi, which means “like tobacco”.

### Additional Resources & References

- Lyle, T.J., Physiomedical Therapeutics, Materia Medica and Pharmacy, J.M. Lyle & Brother, Salem, OH, 1897, pp. 382-8, also available at www.herbaltherapeutics.net/physio-medical/therapeutics.pdf