

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Real Series: Early Springs Lobelia

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The color blue is one of the most popular colors; varying shades of it can be found almost everywhere we look. However, when it comes to our gardens, the color blue is much less prevalent. True blue flowers are, in reality, quite obscure and limited to a handful of genera. Developing true blue forms of common garden varieties has proved to be one of the Holy Grails of plant breeding.

Lobelia is not a new plant to gardeners, but it's probably one of the most reliable true blue flowers gardeners have access to. Lobelia has seen a resurgence in popularity with the development of many new vegetative cultivars that increase the versatility of this genus, as well as improve performance in regions where lobelia may have suffered or had limited seasonality prior.

Key advancements in lobelia breeding include shortened photoperiod requirements, as well as improved heat tolerance. One series that's the result of these advancements is Early Springs Lobelia from Ball FloraPlant. Early Springs is significantly earlier flowering than many lobelia varieties and will bloom alongside most early season annuals. Early Springs Lobelia makes excellent companions with compact, mounded petunias like SunSpun and Aztec Verbenas. Group these three varieties together and you have the makings of some beautiful mixed combinations.

Along with this earlier flowering, Early Springs also has improved heat performance. No longer limited to summertime in coastal California, Early Springs will flower profusely around the country from early spring and into the warmer days of early summer. For northern areas of the country with milder summers, Early Springs Lobelia can bloom all the way in to fall.

Early Springs Lobelias are notably more compact and upright than the vigorous basket lobelias one might be used to. Ball FloraPlant bred Early Springs to be very manageable in small pots. This upright, controlled habit also makes them ideal for smaller mixed combinations where they pair well with other controlled-growth genetics. Early Springs is available in five colors: Dark Blue, Sky Blue, Lavender Pink, White and Magenta. All colors are nicely matched and make a complete series with similar habits, flower timing and cultural needs. This uniformity across the entire color range makes Early Springs Lobelia one of Ball FloraPlant's "Real Series" group of plants.

With all of these great attributes, growing Early Springs Lobelia has never been easier. Here are a few key tips to getting the most out of Ball FloraPlant's Real Series Early Springs Lobelia.

Crop Timing: Rooted Liner to Finish

Container Size	Plants Per Pot	Crop Time
4-in. to 1-qt. Pots	1	7 to 9 Weeks
6-in. to 2.5-qt. Pots	1 to 2	9 to 11 Weeks
10- to 12-in. Pots or Baskets	4 to 5	10 to 12 Weeks

Transplanting

Plant lobelia liners into a well-drained media. Peat-based and peat perlite-based medias are an excellent option for lobelia. Use a media with a pH of 5.5 to 5.8. Always start with pre-moistened soil and water in the liners after transplanting. Avoid letting the liners dry out during transplant. Lobelias are resilient plants, but try to avoid planting liners excessively deep, as this can encourage rot.

Pinching

Early Springs are very densely branched varieties that require little to no pinching. High light and cool temperatures produce the best branching and should be used if growers want to minimize pinches during the crop cycle. If growers receive or grow their own liners, pinching during the liner stage is the ideal timing and most likely growers won't have to pinch again after transplant.

Temperatures

Early Springs prefer cool growing conditions. Cool temperatures during the production cycle will produce the best overall quality, especially when producing pot-tight or in high-density situations. Ideal temperatures for Early Springs production are: Days 71 to 76F (21 to 24C); Nights 56 to 61F (13 to 16C).

Light levels & photo period

Early Springs Lobelia prefers high light between 5,000 to 8,000 f.c. Bright conditions are critical to maintain Early Springs' compact and upright habit. Low light conditions will encourage stretch and compromise the overall habit of the plant. Early Springs flower much earlier than most varieties and will bloom without supplemental lighting in most areas. Growers can expect Early Springs to be in flower and retail ready at the very beginning of their spring season.

Fertilizer & pH

Lobelias are moderate feeders and should be fed on a regular basis with a nitrate-based feed. Rates of 175 to 225 ppm N are ideal. Avoid fertilizer high in ammoniacal nitrogen as this can encourage soft and leggy growth. Early Springs will tolerate a range of pH, but ideal ranges should be between 5.8 to 6.2.

PGRs

Early Springs Lobelia is naturally compact and requires little to no growth regulators. Growth is most effectively controlled with cool temperatures and high light levels.

Pests & diseases

Proper sanitation and IPM practices are the best way to avoid insect and disease problems with lobelia. Growers should actively scout for common lobelia pests, such as spider mites and thrips, and treat accordingly. High thrips pressure can be especially problematic on lobelia, as they are a vector for INSV, which can quickly ruin a lobelia crop.

Early Springs Lobelia is an overall excellent option for growers looking for a production-friendly lobelia that works well across multiple container sizes, as well as flowers early so they are the first plants out the door at the start of every spring season. Early Springs' full color range will give growers a depth of options, but most importantly offers gardeners a great product in the highly desirable true blue color in an early and long-lasting package. **GT**

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