

*Lobelia cardinalis* L.  
Cardinal Flower

This plant takes both its scientific and common names not from the fact that its flowers resemble the red of a native bird so familiar to us all, but rather from their resemblance to the color of the scarlet robes worn by Catholic cardinals. (Keep in mind that many North American plants were collected by early expeditions and set to European botanists for naming, this one by Carlos Linnaeus.)

The natural habitat of cardinal flower is near streams and rivers, often on the floodplain so it will withstand a constantly moist soil quite well. It also thrives in a soil that is moist and well drained. The soil should also contain a good amount of organic material. Full sun to light shade suits this plant well, but don't let the soil dry out in full sun.

This plant has a reputation of being short-lived, but I have found that if it is dead headed when flowering is done so that it does not set seed it will survive for many years. If left to go to seed it will also self-perpetuate from self-seeding.



There are a few cultivars of cardinal flower including 'Alba' (white flowers) and 'Rosea' (pink flowers) but for many of us only the scarlet will do.

True cardinal flower has green leaves so if you find one with bronze leaves it is very likely a hybrid.