

Yard and Garden – 05-23-09 – Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

I enjoy all colors in flowers, but when asked which my favorite is, I usually respond, "Blue." Finding the color true-blue in a flower, whether it is a perennial or an annual, is somewhat of a rarity. Most flowers claimed to be blue are actually shades of purple and/or lavender. I've often thought of planting an all blue garden, but thus far I've only planted blues with other colors.

Last week, Rita planted our window boxes, and she focused her attention on two colors. She selected flowering plants of either yellow or blue. I'm thrilled she chose blue. Yellow is considered a warm color; while blue is cool. Together they create an attention-grabbing combination. Scattered throughout, she also planted an assortment of non-flowering foliage plants that will offer some color, but mostly she planted them for their unique form and texture.

Two of her blue flowering plants caught my attention. Both are annuals, or at least considered annuals in Zones 4 and 5. One is a newer version of an older plant that has been used in container plantings for years, while the other is somewhat new in the plant world, or at least new for us.

One plant uses its genus name as its common name, lobelia. Anyone who has gardened for any length of time knows that lobelia has been widely used as a trailing plant in container gardens for years. One also knows that usually, when spring turns to summer and the heat arrives, lobelia struggles.

For the past two years, we've been planting Techno® lobelia. What makes this hybrid cultivar different from traditional lobelia is its great resistance to heat. Last year was the first time we grew Techno® and we loved it. As a matter of fact, last fall we dug up our Techno® plants and carried them indoors to survive the winter. The good news is they came through without a hitch, and now we've replanted them.



Techno® is covered with intense, cobalt blue flowers throughout the growing season. It is a trailing plant and a great addition to containers and hanging baskets. As I've stated before, unlike most trailing lobelias, this cultivar does not seem to falter in hot temperatures. It grows in sun or partial shade. Like all lobelias, Techno® responds well to pinching. It requires

evenly moist, well-drained soil and for the most part is trouble free. Techno® differs from the common lobelia because it is propagated vegetatively, rather than with seed.

One of the main advantages of vegetative lobelia versus seeded lobelia is a vegetative cultivar is sterile. When traditional seeded lobelias undergo stress, usually from lack of water or exposure to adverse levels of heat, the plants go into a reproductive state and set seed. This decreases their bloom and their overall appearance. Vegetative cultivars, like Techno®, are sterile and have the ability to recover from stressful conditions and continue to bloom.

The second featured blue plant Rita selected is of the genus *Pericallis*; the cultivar is Senetti® Blue bicolor. I'm not sure how this beauty will weather Nebraska's summers, but I'm excited to find out. Said to intermingle well with other plants and claimed to reach heights of fifteen inches, I'm curious to see how it performs. I guess for now, the jury is still out.



It, like lobelia, grows in full sun to part shade, prefers moist, well-drained soil and is used predominately in container plantings. I read where it is adaptable as a houseplant, so should this beauty survive our summer, it, too, will be taken indoors for the winter. Senetti® Blue bicolor's main features are masses of vividly- blue, daisy-like flowers with white centers floating high above its compact foliage.

The window boxes are planted, and I'm thrilled to see Rita has selected blue in her overall color scheme. Hmm, she probably chose that color just for me.