

Cardinalflower

(*Lobelia cardinalis*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Cardinalflower is an erect perennial herbaceous wildflower that occurs naturally in floodplain forests, riverine swamps, spring runs and along river and stream edges. In Florida, it is a threatened species. Its stunning scarlet flowers bloom in summer through early winter. Hummingbirds are the primary pollinator, but the flowers also attract butterflies and bees.



Photo by Eleanor Dietrich

Cardinalflower's brilliant red blooms are tubular and two-lipped, with wide-spreading petals that appear lobed, but are actually fused. They are born in terminal spikes and bloom from bottom to top. The plant generally dies back to a basal rosette in winter. Leaves are deep green (sometimes with a reddish tinge) and elliptic to lanceolate. They have serrate margins and are alternately arranged. Stems are pubescent. The plant exudes a milky sap when broken. Seeds are born in small capsules.

The common name Cardinalflower has been in use since the mid-1600s and is likely derived from the flower's similarity to the robes worn by Catholic cardinals.

Family: Campanulaceae (Bellflower family)

Native range: Panhandle, north and central peninsula

To see where natural populations of Cardinalflower have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to wet, acidic/organic poorly drained soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 2–5' tall

Propagation: Seed, division

Garden tips: Cardinalflower is great for moist wildflower gardens, water gardens and along edges of ponds, streams and drainage depressions.

Cardinalflower is often available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.