

## GARDENS IN BLOOM

(week of March 21, 2021)

Expanding its horticulture, environmental education and conservation mission, **GARDENS IN BLOOM**, each week spotlights a featured tropical and native plant—to enjoy on a visit this week!

### CRYSTAL PALACE LOBELIA (*Lobelia erinus*)

Lobelia, a cool-season annual, typically seen in Coastal Bend landscapes November through May, is more common in northern U.S. and Canada where it grows throughout summer. Delicate dark green leaves have a burgundy tint. Stalks of tiny brilliant blue flowers emerge above, blooming for months without removing old blossoms. Lobelia grows to 6 inches tall, spreading to 12 inches wide, making it a good short-term groundcover. As temperatures rise, this plant starts to thin, but more heat-tolerant varieties are being developed in the “Proven Winners” program.

Lobelia is in the Bellflower (Campanulaceae) Family. The leaves, stems and flowers are reportedly used medicinally, with some herbal remedies claiming benefits against asthma, bronchitis, whooping cough, and smoking cessation; but without sufficient scientific evidence to support these claims. NOTE:

Lobelia may be unsafe if ingested, so do not grow it for home remedy use.

**See Lobelia in multiple flower beds between the Visitor Center and Orchid House, and near the Tropical Garden, as well as a supplemental planting in pots with larger tropical plants.**



### MEXICAN PLUM (*Prunus Mexicana*)

Mexican Plum is a medium-sized tree native to Texas, Mexico, and up through the Missouri-Kansas Border, along forest prairie borders. Reported growing in some areas up to 35 feet, taller than most cultivated plums, its common name is *Big Tree Plum*! But in much of Texas, it matures closer to 20 feet tall, due to extended drought and windy conditions.

In early spring before many trees bud out, Mexican Plum reveals clusters of tiny white flowers about a half- inch across. Important to pollinators in early spring before other plants bloom, if flowers are pollinated, the resulting fruit begin to mature in July as round purplish ‘drupes’ (plums). Fruit are typically smaller than cultivated plums giving it another common name of *Inch Plum* in other regions. It is a single-trunked tree, growing individually instead of in groups like many native plants, its natural growth habit making it a desirable rootstock for many grafted plums.

Plums are related to other fruit trees including apples, pear, peach and almond. However, few people know they are in the Rose Family (*Rosaceae*), which not only connects them to roses, but also Indian Hawthorn, Photinia and Pyracantha.

**See a young Mexican Plum, in full bloom for the next week or so. behind the Butterfly Garden.**

