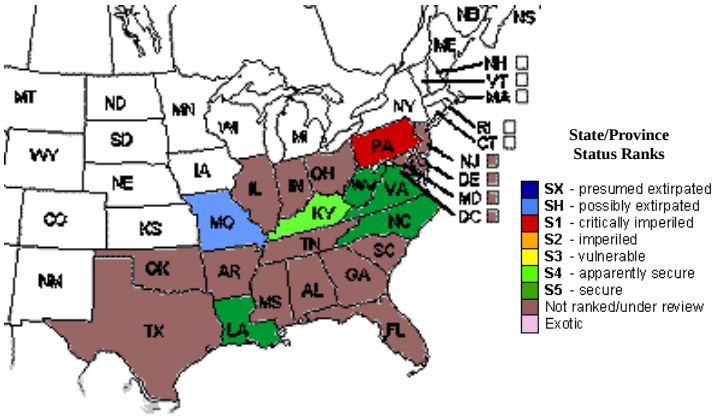
Downy Lobelia
Lobelia puberula

Description
Downy Lobelia is an herbaceous perennial with a hairy stem that may grow to 3 feet (1 m) in height. The leaves are alternately arranged, short-stalked or stalkless, egg-shaped to oblong, usually toothed on the margin, rounded at the base and pointed at the tip, and to 4 inches (10 cm) in length and to 2 inches (5 cm) in width. The blue flowers, appearing in August and September, are about ¾ inch (1.5-2 cm) in length, hairy on the outside, and scattered in an alternating sequence, and often 1-sided, along the middle and upper part of the stem. The individual flowers have a two-lipped appearance, with 3 lower lobes and 2 upper lobes, with the basal part of the flower fused in one tube-like unit. The greenish sepals that subtend the petals have long slender tips and are hairy on the margins. The fruit is pod-like and contains many seeds.

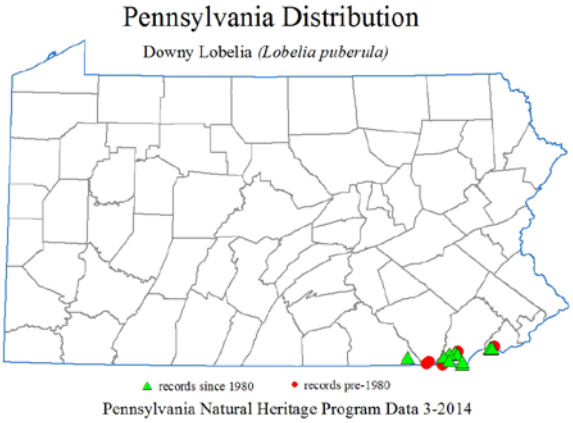
Photo source: Rocky Gleason (PNHP)

Distribution & Habitat
Downy Lobelia ranges from New Jersey to Illinois and south into Florida and Texas. In Pennsylvania, it is considered a southerly species and has been documented historically in the southeastern counties. It grows in moist clearings and openings, grasslands, woods borders, and rights-of-way.

North American State/Province Conservation Status
Map by NatureServe 2014



Current State Status
The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Downy Lobelia to be a species of special concern based on the limited number of locations that have been recently confirmed and the generally small population sizes. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.



Conservation Considerations
The viability of populations of Downy Lobelia often requires maintaining early successional conditions and controlling invasive species. Active management, such as periodic mowing, may be needed to create the proper successional stage and ecological conditions for this species to thrive.

NatureServe conservation status ranks
G5 – Globally secure; **S1** – Critically imperiled in Pennsylvania

References

- NatureServe. 2014. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at http://www.natureserve.org/explorer
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2014.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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