

Carl Linnaeus (1707 – 1778)

Carl Linnaeus was born at Råshult in Småland, southeastern Sweden, on 23 May 1707. His father, Nils Ingermarsson ('son of Ingermar'), needed a surname of his own when he enrolled at the University of Lund, and adopted the name Linnaeus from the huge linden tree (*Tilia cordata*), known in the Småland dialect as linn, on the ancestral farm. Carl was the eldest of Nils and Christina Linnaeus's five children. He was two years old when his father became pastor at Stenbrohult, and Carl grew up there amidst flowers, wild and cultivated. His formal education began at the cathedral town of Växjö in 1714, but with no interest in a clerical career, he did poorly, and was allowed to study medicine instead.



Lobelia linnaeoides

Lobelia was first named in 1702 by the French botanist Charles Plumier, in honour of 17th century Flemish botanist Matthias de l'Obel, and Linnaeus retained the name in 1753. The New Zealand species *Lobelia linnaeoides* ('resembling *Linnaea*') is a slender creeping and rooting herb with reddish stems and rounded leaves with a few coarse teeth. The typical lobelia-shaped flowers, white to pink or pale blue, occur singly on slender erect 2–8 cm long stalks, in summer. It may be found in thinly vegetated, damp places in montane or subalpine areas from Canterbury southwards.

Conditions were not congenial for study and his limited funds ran out, but his ability, industry and enthusiasm brought influential people to his aid. His provocative dissertation on the sexuality of plants so impressed the professors that Olaf Rudbeck appointed Linnaeus lecturer in botany and tutor to his sons. Linnaeus was to enshrine the names of his many influential friends and benefactors in the annals of botanical literature, and during this period he began the works later published as *Bibleotheca Botanica* (1736), *Critica Botanica* (1737), *Genera Plantarum* (1737) and *Classes Plantarum* (1738).

In 1732 Linnaeus made a four-month journey north to Lapland, recording his daily activities and observations. His botanical findings were published as *Flora Lapponica* in 1737, but his original journal did not appear until long after his death. On a journey through the province of Dalarna in 1734 he met his future wife, Sara Elisabeth (Sara Lisa) Moraea, daughter of the town physician of Falun. In 1735 he went to Holland to obtain his medical degree and to get his works published, and spent most of the next three years there and visiting Germany, France and England. After his return to Sweden in 1738 he practised medicine in Stockholm and became first president of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. He married Sara Lisa on 26 June 1739 and the first of their five children was born at Falun in 1741. As professor of medicine and botany at the University of Uppsala from 1741 to 1772, he was an inspirational teacher; many of his devoted students collected far afield, and two of his apostles, Daniel Solander and Anders Sparrman, were on Captain James Cook's global voyages.

His work brought him many honours, and in 1761 he took the name Carl von Linné. Weakened by a stroke in 1773, he died at Uppsala on 10 January 1778, aged 70. His son, also named Carl, survived him by only five years. The vast Linnaeus collection of books, letters, manuscripts and specimens was sold and formed the basis of the prestigious Linnean Society of London. Linnaeus is most widely known for his binomial (two-name) system of classifying plants and animals, and the abbreviation 'L' appended to about 12,000 scientific names of plants and animals described by him for his publications. The twinflower, *Linnaea borealis*, is one of the few species named after him. It was his favourite flower and he named it *Linnaea* in his early papers, but in a later manuscript called it *Rudbeckia*. The original name was finally formalised at his request by Dutch botanist Johan Frederik Gronovius, and Linnaeus added *borealis*, meaning Nordic. The flower is the emblem of his home province, Småland.