

# **Lithodora diffusa (Lithodora)**

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 6-12”  
Foliage Width: 24-48”  
Flower Height: 6-12”  
Foliage Color: Dark Green  
Flower Color: Blue  
USDA Hardiness: 6-8  
Moisture: Average  
Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



Native to Southern Europe, *Lithodora diffusa* is sometimes referred to by gardeners as Purple Gromwell.

*Lithodora* is an excellent choice for slopes and banks because it enjoys growing in well-drained areas. It grows naturally in less fertile soils, so be careful not to fertilize it too much. If the leaves begin to lose their dark green color, use an acidic fertilizer such as one that would be used on azaleas or rhododendrons.

Sunny spots are where this fluorescent blue flowered wonder thrives, but it can tolerate some shade if necessary. Excessive shade or old age may cause *Lithodora* to have a more open growth habit. Browning of the center leaves also may occasionally occur after flowering. If either happens, trim the plant back after it finishes flowering to help restore its compactness.

The dark evergreen foliage is a great contrast to the electric blue flowers that will begin to cover the plant as the days lengthen and the temperatures rise in the spring. Few leaves are quite as green or blossoms nearly as blue as those of *Lithodora*.

The blue flowers are a good addition to any sunny butterfly garden. The fact that deer do not bother it can also be useful to many rural gardeners. *Lithodora* is generally pest and disease free in home gardens.

Purple Gromwell was officially brought into the gardening world in the 1800s by German botanist August Grisebach, when he wrote *Flora of the British West Indian Islands*. Although this plant had its origin in the genus *Lithospermum*, botanist Ivan Murray Johnston decided to reclassify it into the new genus we know today as *Lithodora*.

The name is derived from the Greek words *lithos* meaning stone and *dorea* meaning gift. This could refer to the soil type of its native region or possibly the hard nut-like seed the flowers produce. *Diffusa* means loose, open, or spreading. This is a wonderful description for this plant because its electric blue flowers are a gift for any sunny rock garden.

True blues are a rare gem in the world of gardening; combine this with this plant's dark evergreen foliage and *Lithodora* is a must-have leafy family member for any sunny garden.