

Impatiens Alternatives

As we get closer to the planting season you may be wondering what to plant instead of *impatiens walleriana*. Impatiens Downy Mildew is a fungal disease, it causes yellowing leaves, almost complete leaf loss, and death of impatiens plants. The disease is spread by spores produced on the underside of infected leaves. It completely decimated impatiens grown across southern Ontario last year and most of North America. If you planted *impatiens walleriana* last year or if a neighbour did, the spores will be present in your garden and any impatiens you plant will **die**. Many local nurseries are not carrying impatiens this year and will not be for the foreseeable future. More information on this problem was published in the December 2013 newsletter.

There are numerous alternatives:

1. New Guinea impatiens (*Impatiens hawkeri*) often called sun impatiens and their relatives are not susceptible to the impatiens downy mildew. This type of impatiens will thrive in partial sun locations. In full shade, they will flower sparingly. In full sun, they will flower more heavily, but they will also require frequent watering in hot, dry weather. They often have dark leaves and vibrant colours.



2. There are several varieties of *begonia* that are suitable. The smallest are wax-leaf begonias that are available everywhere and offer an inexpensive alternative for either sun or shade. They grow 8 to 12 inches tall, require no deadheading and thrive with minimal watering. They are excellent for mass planting and less expensive than some other alternatives. A new type of wax leaf begonia has recently become available. The 'Big' series has large red flowers up to 3 inches across and are much taller up to 2 feet high. The 'Whopper' series are even larger up to 3 feet tall and almost 2 feet wide.



Dragon Wing begonias have been around since the late 1990s. They are only available in red, orangey-red and pink. They have an arching, semi-drooping habit and are ideal for hanging baskets, large containers, or beds. Grow them in shade to part shade where plants will flower with minimal care. They can grow 12 to 15 inches tall and 15 to 18 inches wide. Don't let them dry out and fertilize throughout the growing season for best results. Tuberous begonias used to be grown from tubers but are now mostly grown from seed. The most popular series is the

'Nonstop' begonia. It is an upright grower with large, double flowers and green leaves. The color range includes yellow, orange, pink, rose, salmon, red, and white. They are suitable for pots and garden beds. A bronze leafed variety called 'Mocca' is also available, plus a trailing variety 'Illumination'. Both of these other varieties also offer a good colour range. Keep the soil slightly damp and fertilize regularly.



3. *Browallia* is a true shade lover; it grows in the darkest corners of the garden with its deep green foliage and dainty white, blue or purple flowers. It is probably the best alternative to impatiens for use as a ground cover. It has white, blue or purple flowers. It prefers warm weather, but must have protection from hot sun. It can grow quite large, so check the labels for the ultimate size of the particular variety.

4. *Iresine* or bloodleaf prefers partial shade and is used for its colorful foliage rather than its flowers. This plant makes a marvelous display if used for mass planting. There are several varieties available.



5. *Salvia farinacea* or mealycup sage likes partial, not full shade and tolerates poor soils and some drought. Flower colours are blue, purple, lavender, and white. I grow this plant in an area that gets only early morning sun and it is always successful.

6. *Torenia* or wishbone flowers remind me of pansies. They grow best in partial, not deep shade and come in a range of single and multi-colored flowers with shades of blue, purple, pink and yellow.

For some reason they are often labelled as suitable for full sun-they aren't. They grow well in hanging baskets and grow 8 to 10 inches tall and wide.



7. *Caladiums* make excellent accent plants in the shade. A few cultivars will also thrive in sun as well. They have beautiful, multicolored, veined leaves with colors like red, pink, white, yellow, and burgundy. They are also quite expensive so to get the best value from them dig them up and store over winter to be replanted the next year.

8. *Nicotiana* (tobacco flower) prefers full to part sun but will also tolerate some shade. They are long blooming plants with clusters of small, petunia-like flowers in colors including white, pink, purple, green, rose, and red. They are especially fragrant at night and are often considered one of the most desirable hummingbird plants. They are available in various heights, from 12 inches to 48 inches.



9. *Nierembergia* or cup flower is one of my favorite underused annuals, and is wonderful in pots or beds. It will grow in part sun to shade and creates a spreading mound of white or blue, upward-facing, "cup"-shaped flowers with tiny yellow centers. It requires no deadheading and with afternoon shade has good heat tolerance. It may require cutting back in mid-summer and should not dry out. Other more commonly used shade plants include: *Lobelia* is available in a range of white, blues and some purples, some are upright and others trailing and are very good in hanging baskets.

Coleus produce ornamental foliage whose diversity, colours, and steady performance have turned this once ignored plant into one of the most popular bedding and container ornamentals. There are very many varieties available but remember they are grown for their foliage not the insignificant flowers. Some older types will do better if deadheaded.

Fuchsias are a great shade plant. We often think of hanging baskets when we think of fuchsias; however there are some upright varieties that are ideal for use in beds or pots. When I was a child I often used fuchsias hung over my ears as earrings!

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If you have garden questions please contact us at streetsvillehort@hotmail.com check out our website at www.streetsvillehort.ca