

What does Impatiens Disease mean to my garden?

## **The Bad News**

Impatiens Downy Mildew is a fungal disease. It started in Europe crossed to Florida and has recently become a major problem in Ontario and is now found throughout Canada and North America. It is part of a group called water molds.

It causes yellowing leaves, almost complete leaf loss, and death of *impatiens*. If you turn the leaves over and look at the underneath they will be dusted with what looks like white flour. Despite a similar name and certain similarities in symptoms, downy mildew is not related to the powdery mildews.

The disease is spread by spores produced on the underside of infected leaves. These spores are splashed by rain, and are also carried for long distances on the wind. Extended periods of leaf wetness are required for spore production and infection, so severe outbreaks of downy mildew are only likely to occur during wet summers. This year conditions were ideal for spread of this fungus in Ontario.

The airborne spores remain viable for just a short time, but the fungus can also produce a second spore type (a resting spore) within the affected plant tissues. These resting spores are much more resilient, and are released into the soil as the diseased material rots down. If *impatiens* plants are placed in a flowerbed that was infected with downy mildew the year before, the new crop will not have a chance because downy mildew spores overwinter in our Canadian conditions for more than one season. Even if you didn't plant *Impatiens* last year chances are someone in your neighbourhood did and the spores will infect your plants. There is no cure available for growers or home gardeners. It is likely that many growers will either dramatically reduce the quantities of *Impatiens* they grow or not grow them at all.

## **The Good News**

This fungus only affects *Impatiens walleriana* which is the basic shade loving annual, in single and double forms however it does not affect New Guinea or sun impatiens.

## **What to do Now**

Mark Cullen suggests that "this year and perhaps in the following few years, avoid buying any walleriana type *Impatiens*. This is going to save you time, money, and the visual disaster that the mildew will bring to your *Impatiens*".

There are many other annuals that will thrive in shade, tuberous begonias and angel wing begonias, wax begonias, browallia, coleus and pansies.

## **Prevention and Control**

If you have or had infected plants, the plants should be removed and put in the garbage, not your compost. Thoroughly clean containers used for *Impatiens* and then soak the pots in a 10% bleach solution. Decontaminate any tools that you used to work with the *Impatiens*.

If you are going to buy *Impatiens* any way; use pots do not plant in the ground, use new soil in a very clean pot, keep the plant dry, only water from the bottom, give them lots of space with good air circulation, dispose of any of any infected leaves in the garbage or burn them.

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