



NEW GARDEN  
LANDSCAPING & NURSERY

newgarden.com  
email:info@newgarden.com

**New Garden Village**  
5572 Garden Village Way  
Greensboro, NC 27410  
phone: 336-665-0291

**New Garden Gazebo**  
3811 Lawndale Dr.  
Greensboro, NC 27455  
phone: 336-288-8893

# Impatiens Downy Mildew



We had plenty of reports in the summer of 2012 from homeowners and our own people in the field of entire beds of impatiens being wiped out seemingly overnight. A little research determined that the culprit was Impatiens Downy Mildew (IDM), a relatively new and virulent disease to this area. As of 2012 it had hit many regions in the US (see map), causing complete loss of impatiens where it strikes.

While often referred to as a fungus, it is actually a fungus-like water mold similar to the organisms that cause Phytophthora and Pythium, already well-known plant diseases. Symptoms before total leaf drop are quite subtle and include a slight downward curl of the leaves, leaf yellowing, and a white, powdery substance on the underside of leaves. These symptoms are easily missed and for this reason the leaf drop seems to come with no warning, leaving almost bare, twiggy stems where lush, blooming impatiens stood just days before. **If spotted, the affected plants and all fallen leaves must be removed immediately and discarded in the trash-do not compost the diseased plants.** Removing and discarding a thin layer of soil may help remove any spores that have contaminated the ground already. Since it is not a true fungus, most fungicides have little or no effect on Impatiens Downy Mildew in the landscape and chemical treatment is not advised for this reason.

IDM spores are spread by wind and water, and studies of similar downy mildews show that they can travel hundreds of miles in just days. The spores can persist in the soil once an area is affected, and can re-infect impatiens planted in the same beds for years via wind or splashing water. Information from Europe, where the disease gained a foothold several years ago, suggests that the disease intensity may wax and wane from year to year. This suggests that having it once does not make it a certainty that it will strike with the same severity in following years. However, there is not enough data on year-to-year disease rates in this country to draw any firm conclusions as the best course of action in years following an outbreak.

If you decide to try impatiens again this year, (assuming they are even available) try to keep the leaves dry as much as possible to avoid spores getting a foothold: plant them with extra space to allow good air circulation, and avoid overhead irrigation when temperatures are cool.

There is some good news: Although devastating to regular impatiens and their hybrids, it does not affect New Guinea impatiens or any other plants that can also be used in shady areas like coleus, begonias, caladiums, torenia, oxalis, or polka-dot plant. If you saw Impatiens Downy Mildew in your garden this year, consider these other options next season, or ask our sales staff for advise on substitute shade plants.



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