



Growing Impatiens

There are more than 800 species of impatiens. Impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*), New Guinea impatiens (*Impatiens hawkeri*), and rose balsam (*Impatiens balsamina*) are three species that are commonly grown in home gardens.



Impatiens

Impatiens are the most popular bedding plant in the United States. They are ideal for containers, hanging baskets, and beds in partially shaded locations. Impatiens have glossy, medium green leaves. Flowers are 1 to 2 inches in diameter, may be single or double, and come in a wide variety of colors. Plants commonly grow 12 to 18 inches tall.

Suggested impatiens include varieties in the Super Elfin, Accent, and Xtreme series. Plants in these series are compact, free flowering, and available in a wide range of colors.

Plants can be purchased at garden centers and greenhouses in spring. Impatiens also are relatively easy to grow from seeds. Sow seeds indoors in early to mid-March for planting in mid-May. The crop time (the period from the sowing of seeds to planting outdoors) for impatiens is 8 to 10 weeks.

Location—Impatiens perform best in moist, well-drained soils in partial shade. Sites that receive 2 to 4 hours of filtered sun during the day or morning sun and afternoon shade are usually ideal. Impatiens also can be grown in heavy shade. However, plants will be taller and bloom less profusely in heavily shaded locations.

When to plant—Plant impatiens outdoors after the danger of frost is past. Plants purchased at a greenhouse or started indoors should be “hardened” or acclimated to outdoor conditions for several days prior to planting. Place the plants in a shady, protected location for 1 or 2 days, then, gradually expose them to longer periods of sunlight.

Watering—Impatiens growing in garden beds usually need to be watered once a week during dry weather.

Plants growing in containers or hanging baskets should be checked frequently and watered when the soil surface is dry.

Fertilization—Impatiens require moderate fertilization. Plants in containers should be fertilized approximately every 2 weeks with a water-soluble fertilizer. In flower beds, incorporating a slow-release fertilizer into the soil prior to planting should be adequate.

New Guinea impatiens

New Guinea impatiens are native to the island of New Guinea. They were introduced to the United States in 1970. While the initial introductions didn't perform well, plant breeders have introduced many new, improved cultivars during the last 30 years. These newer cultivars have transformed New Guinea impatiens into popular potted and landscape plants.

New Guinea impatiens have green, bronze, or variegated leaves and large, showy flowers. Flowers can be up to 3 inches in diameter. Flower colors vary from white and pale pink to bright pink, red, violet, and orange.

Most New Guinea impatiens are propagated by cuttings. Gardeners can purchase plants at greenhouses and garden centers in spring. A few varieties, such as those in the Divine series, can be grown from seeds. New Guinea impatiens seeds should be started indoors 10 to 12 weeks before the anticipated outdoor planting date (late February or early March for mid-May planting).

Location—Areas that receive morning sun and afternoon shade are ideal for New Guinea impatiens. Eastern exposures that receive 4 to 6 hours of sun are often best. Plants that receive too much sun have fewer and smaller flowers. Excessive amounts of sun also may damage the foliage.

New Guinea impatiens require moist, well-drained soils. They do not like wet or dry soils. Plants are prone to root rots in wet soils and wilt badly in dry soils. Although wilted plants recover quickly when watered, moisture stress results in the abortion of flower buds and fewer flowers. It also may cause browning of leaf margins and leaf drop.

When to plant—New Guinea impatiens are not fond of cool night temperatures. Plant outdoors about 2 weeks after the average last spring frost. When planting, set New Guinea impatiens at the same depth as they are currently growing.



Watering—New Guinea impatiens in containers should be checked frequently. Water plants when the soil surface becomes dry. For plants growing in landscape beds, a deep soaking once a week should be sufficient.

Fertilization—New Guinea impatiens require moderate fertilization. Plants growing in pots or other containers should be fertilized approximately every 2 weeks with a water-soluble fertilizer. Incorporation of a slow-release fertilizer into the soil prior to planting should be adequate for plants in landscape beds.

Rose balsam

Though popular in years past, rose balsam is no longer widely grown in home gardens. It is also known as touch-me-not or garden balsam. *Impatiens balsamina* is an erect plant that grows 1 to 2½ feet tall. Its flowers are double and resemble small camellias or roses. Flower colors include white, cream, pink, rose, purple, red, and bicolors. Although attractive, the flowers are partially hidden by foliage. As a result, rose balsam isn't as showy as other impatiens species.

After blooming, plants produce football-shaped pods (fruits). When mature, these pods burst when touched, hence the common name of touch-me-not. Varieties in the Tom Thumb series produce double flowers on plants that are 8 to 12 inches tall.

When to plant—While more difficult to find than other impatiens, garden balsam can be purchased at garden centers for planting after the last spring frost. Seeds may be sown indoors 6 to 8 weeks before the anticipated outdoor planting date. Seeds also can be sown directly outdoors after the danger of frost is past.

Location and care—Garden balsam is most commonly used in beds and borders and less often in containers. It performs best in partial shade and a moist, well-drained soil. Prior to planting, lightly fertilize the area with a slow-release garden fertilizer. Plants should be watered once a week in dry weather.



Disease Alert

In 2012, a serious disease (impatiens downy mildew) appeared on a number of impatiens plantings in Iowa. Downy mildew is caused by the water mold *Plasmopara obducens*. Symptoms of impatiens downy mildew initially appear as yellowing of infected leaves. The yellow-green foliage may initially be confused with a nutritional deficiency. As the infection progresses, leaves may curl downward and a white, fuzzy growth can be seen on the undersides of the leaves. Severe infections lead to defoliation and blossom drop, leaving bare stems with a few, tiny yellow leaves at the tips of the shoots.

All varieties of the common garden impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*) and interspecific hybrids with an *Impatiens walleriana* parent (such as Fusion and Butterfly impatiens) are susceptible to impatiens downy mildew. Rose balsam also is considered susceptible to impatiens downy mildew. New Guinea impatiens are highly tolerant to this disease. No other annuals are infected by this pathogen.

In landscape plantings, control of downy mildew on impatiens with fungicides is not practical. Sanitation is the best management strategy for this disease. Remove and destroy infected plants as soon as they are noticed to reduce the spread to healthy plants and minimize the amount of over-wintering spores. Avoid planting common garden impatiens in areas that experienced a downy mildew problem the previous year. Plant shade tolerant alternatives, such as wax begonias, pansies, lobelia, torenia, caladium, and coleus.

For more information

For more information on selection, planting, cultural practices, and environmental quality—Contact your Iowa State University Extension county office. Visit one of these websites.

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/>
www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu
www.reimangardens.iastate.edu

Call ISU's Hortline at (515) 294-3108 (Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-noon, 1-4:30 p.m.)

If you want to learn more about horticulture through training and volunteer work, ask your ISU Extension office for information about the Iowa Master Gardener program, or visit their website: www.mastergardener.iastate.edu/.

Revised by Richard Jauron, extension horticulturist.

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