



Florist, Greenhouse & Perennial Farm

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Downey Mildew Fungus on Impatiens spread across the country, Published 9-13-12

'Downey Mildew' Fungus on Impatiens is a new problem. Gardeners and landscapers across the country have recently experienced problems within their yard or landscapes with Impatiens, such as complete "melt down" of their bedding plant Impatiens. This is caused by the fungus "Downey Mildew", which has now been identified as a death sentence for impatiens throughout the entire country. Our experience is that if you have a bed of impatiens and one plant gets it, they all will get it. Chances are that the fungus was in your yard somewhere throughout the growing season hiding so gracefully, but without the right conditions for it to spread, your plants were fine up to now. Cooler, damp, humid conditions such as the weather that we have experienced during this past few weeks has accentuated the problem thus causing complete deterioration of your impatiens bed. The leaves will start falling off and you'll see little white spores underneath the leaves before the plant collapses. It will be like it just melts away! The fungus is called "Downey Mildew". This year with high temperatures, high humidity and then the introduction of cool nights has caused the perfect environment for this disease.

As we do with many different crops, we take preventative steps as precautions to prevent these opportunities in spreading. Unfortunately, these precautions generally do not last very long in the gardens once they have left the greenhouses. Many customers do not choose to use chemicals or take steps to continue to protect these plants. Up until now, the Impatiens in your yard has been virtually fool proof, so you have not done anything wrong! This is a very large problem within our industry.

If the problem exists within your garden, immediately pull all effected plants and bag, burn or bury your dead and dying plants. Do not compost them... this will allow the fungus to potentially live over the winter. Make sure to clean the entire area so that no residual leaves have been left behind. Most important of all, don't plant impatiens anywhere near those areas for the next few years.

There are new opportunities of vegetative cutting (done from cultivars that are bred from disease resistant stock, not from a seed source) varieties of impatiens such as New Guinea and Sunspation impatiens available for next season that are disease resistant varieties. "Downey Mildew" is a wind borne fungus, so if you don't have the problem on your impatiens and your neighbor does, the chances that your plants will be affected are very high and you eventually will see signs of deterioration.

For the upcoming few seasons, our suggestion is that you not grow any regular bedding Impatiens. This is a nationwide problem that exists in virtually every landscape. There will be alternatives in the future and we are working diligently to provide opportunities for our customers. Until then we ask that instead of planting regular bedding Impatiens, you choose another bedding plant such as many of the new varieties on sun or shade loving New Guinea Impatiens, Bedding or Fibrous Begonias or colorful Coleus that are virtually foolproof in your garden.

For further information, feel free to Google "Downey Mildew on Impatiens". Thank you!