

## **BRIGHTEN UP YOUR LANDSCAPE WITH IMPATIENS**

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By Ralph E. Mitchell

I once heard a complaint from someone that all they ever saw in Florida were green landscapes - no flowers. While we do have very verdant landscapes, besides not being very observant, this person was also not familiar with how well flowering bedding plants do in our area. At this time of year, a flowering annual worth planting is the impatiens. The impatiens not only appreciates the cooler fall and winter, but also takes shaded areas as well.

The impatiens comes in a rainbow of colors and is readily available at local garden centers at this time of year. This East African native has been cultivated to produce colors including red, orange, apricot, pink, bluish, white, and many other similar shades. Plant breeding has also produced double-flowers and even a variegated variety. While impatiens will only survive summer temperatures in total shade, now is the ideal time to plant them as they flourish in the relatively cooler weather. Plant individual plants twelve to eighteen inches apart as impatiens grow anywhere from six to twenty-four inches high and will soon develop into a solid flowering mass. Shade to part shade is the preferred environment for most impatiens in a site with moist, but well-drained soils. Direct sunlight will often cause impatiens to wilt. Fertilize impatiens regularly to maintain plant health and flower production. Pinching

impatiens will also help develop robust plants that might otherwise become leggy.

One additional type of impatient is the New Guinea hybrid, a different option that can take much more sun than its shade-loving relative. The New Guinea impatiens does best in light shade to part sun, but will tolerate almost full winter sun once it has been established for several weeks. Regular watering and nutrients are needed in warm weather. New Guineas really excel in cooler winter weather. They also have larger leaves and grow into either upright, rounded, or spreading forms. Large lavender, purple, pink, red, white or orange flowers are produced by these plants. Some New Guinea hybrids also have another great feature - colorfully marked leaves variegated in shades of red or yellow. New Guinea hybrids can be propagated by seed. Some recommended varieties include New Guinea Spectra Hybrids, Sweet Sue and Tango.

The impatiens also does very well in containers. In fact, one New Guinea hybrid will fill a small container in about eight weeks. An added feature of containerized impatiens is their ability to be moved as needed especially if frosty weather is threatening. Impatiens like cool weather, but not frost, so be prepared to cover or move your plants if a freeze is imminent.

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Impatiens will help color-up your landscape with fall and winter brightness that will please you! For more information on all types of bedding plants, please contact our Master

Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 10:00am-1:00pm every Thursday.
- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) every Thursday 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email ([Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com)). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email ([Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com)).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

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*Resource:*

*Gilman, E.F. & Howe, T. (1999) Impatiens wallerana. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.*

*Gilman, E.F. & Howe, T. (1999) Impatiens x New Guinea Hybrids. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.*

*Scheper, J. (2003) Impatiens wallerana. Floridata.com*