Impatiens Downy Mildew

By David Hooten

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A new disease has emerged that is attacking Impatiens and crippling the supply chain from commercial greenhouse growers through the local retailers. As a Master Gardener and a grower, I am writing about this new disease that is decimating a highly favorite and sought after blooming annual for shady environments especially in Lea County.

What is happening to Impatiens?

Impatiens downy mildew is a new disease that affects all varieties of *Impatiens walleriana*. This includes common bedding, double, rose form and hybrid impatiens. Infected plants drop their flowers and leaves, resulting in bare, leafless stems that eventually collapse. The telltale sign of this disease is a white velvety covering on the leaf undersides.

Are any other bedding plants affected by Impatiens downy mildew?

While other bedding plants may be susceptible to downy mildew diseases, it is important for you to know that the downy mildew affecting impatiens only infects *Impatiens walleriana* and a few species of wild plants.

Will Impatiens downy mildew survive from year to year?

There is some evidence that the pathogen that causes Impatiens downy mildew may survive in garden beds from year to year, so future plantings in the same bed with a history of downy mildew will be at risk for infection. However, impatiens may become infected by windblown spores even if planted into gardens with no history of this disease.

What should I do if I see plants infected with Impatiens downy mildew?

Promptly bag, seal and remove symptomatic plants from your beds or containers. If you spotted the white, velvety coating on the undersides, remove all bedding impatiens within three feet of the sporulating plants.

Infected plants and any fallen leaf debris should be removed promptly, preferably well before plants collapse. Discard bagged plants with regular waste. **DO NOT COMPOST.**

Now you are thinking to yourself, but we live in the desert and it's high and dry. Is it? Do your hybrid roses get mildew, how about your crepe myrtles and euonymus bushes that grows up and under the shade and eaves of your house? Just maybe, we have an episode of rain and higher than normal humidity and we see these types of downy mildew occurring. Lastly, where are you planting these impatiens? Everyone plants them in the shade, on north-side exposures which creates the ideal micro-environment for this new disease to show up and get established.
Here-in lays the problem. You currently do not have this disease. It is going to come into your yard and landscaped areas when you buy the plants at the nurseries, greenhouses and all forms of the box-stores that sell plants. You will be buying the infected plants at the retail level and bringing them home for the disease to spread. The eastern growers from the great lakes down to the southern states are hard hit regions. It is showing up out west and the Rocky Mountain States are in the squeeze with the diseases advancement.

So it is imperative that you look at the plants on the benches and displays at the retailers to see if the leaves are powdery-white, having abnormal pustules on the bottom of the leaf surface areas, and by no means buy plants that are stemmy with little leaf cover.

Is there any type of fungicides to spray the Impatiens for control?

There is NO CHEMICALS to control or avert this disease on the market currently.

Will Impatiens downy mildew affect my New Guinea Impatiens?

New Guinea impatiens is not affected and are resistant to this strain of downy mildew.

You will probably see a much decreased supply of this popular plant with an array of colors. I caution you to be very selective and watchful on buying plants from cut-rate or low-cost stores. This may not be the bargain you had hoped for in your landscapes.

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