

IMPATIENS BRIGHTEN SHADE !

Step outdoors to the shimmering colours of impatiens in those shady spots this year. Impatiens is the formal name for the popular and pretty old-fashioned flower often called Busy Lizzie and Sultana. Few other bedding plants bloom with so little sunlight and no other bedding plant offers the glowing, luminescent colours of impatiens.

Their radiant colours range from cool white to lavender-rose, intense pink to brilliant orange reds. Harlequin bicolour flowers add spice to the sunshine-in-shade of impatiens. The New Guinea hybrid impatiens add attractively variegated leaves, too; plant these hybrids in sun to semi-shade since they need more sunlight than their shade-loving cousins.

Impatiens plants grow into colourful mounds that bloom all summer. They come in several heights, from eight inches up to fifteen or twenty inches tall. The shorter ones make fine edging, foreground, hanging basket, and small container plants; use taller impatiens for larger bedding displays.

It's best to wait until the weather is settled on the warm side of spring before planting impatiens. They are tender plants that grow fast in warm and hot weather. Ready-to-plant impatiens are available in spring and summer at Plant World. The young plants are offered in flats, trays, peat or plastic pots.

Before transplanting to your garden and outdoor planters, condition all bedding plants by placing the flats or pots outdoors in a shady spot during the day; bring them in at night, if it's going to be cool. Be sure to water them every day; plants in small containers dry out rapidly.

Impatiens are adaptable plants, not caring unduly about the type of soil you plant them in, provided it's well drained. To give them the best start in your garden, dig the ground to a depth of six to eight inches. Work in plenty of organic matter such as peat moss, compost, or vermiculite to improve drainage where soil is heavy and compacted.

Under established trees you may need to replace the exhausted and root-laden soil with a fresh supply from elsewhere in the garden, or with a container soil mix such as ProMix. For hanging baskets, window boxes and planters, use equal volumes of potting soil, peat moss, and coarse sand or perlite; or buy a ready-prepared mixture like ProMix for your containers.

As you dig or mix the soil, add 7-14-7 fertilizer at the recommended rate -- about two pounds per one hundred square feet -- to boost fertility levels for your bedding plants, or use a transplant solution, Plant World Plant Starter, after planting. Feed New Guinea hybrid impatiens every month to maintain their vibrant colours. As growth slows in late summer, all impatiens will benefit from an extra shot of fertilizer such as 15-30-15 Plant Prod.

Transplant impatiens in the late afternoon or evening, or on a cloudy day so the new plants are not immediately subjected to full noonday heat. The stems are brittle so handle them gently. Space impatiens ten inches apart or closer where there is some sun. Water well to settle the transplanted roots into their new home. Check every few days and water again when soil starts to dry out.

Your colourful impatiens will blossom and flourish all summer long in shade, and even in moderate sunshine when you provide enough water. At the end of summer, dig up your favourite ones and replant in pots -- or take cuttings -- for indoor decoration.