



Wm. Wheat & Son

FLORIST & GARDEN CENTRE

520 Chester Road, Little Aston. WS9 0PU
0121 353 7123 / 4090 www.wmwheat.co.uk



Gardeners Guide to: Impatiens downy mildew

Impatiens downy mildew is a fungal disease that causes yellowing leaves, leaf loss, and death of bedding *Impatiens*, commonly called 'Busy Lizzies', during favourable wet weather conditions.

Impatiens downy mildew is a disease caused by the fungus-like organism *Plasmopara obducens*. It was found for the first time in the UK in **2003** and is likely to have arrived on imported commercial propagation material (seed or cuttings). For a short time statutory action was taken by FERA against confirmed outbreaks of the disease, but this approach was soon dropped. The wet summer of **2008** triggered the most widespread outbreak of the disease so far, with most gardens, nurseries and local authority displays affected. Attacks are most likely in summer, or spring in greenhouses. Outbreaks of downy mildew have been confined to *Impatiens walleriana*, the common bedding busy Lizzie. No cases have been found on New Guinea Impatiens, *Impatiens x hawkeri*, or on the few species of *Impatiens* found growing in the wild in the UK.



You may see the following symptoms: **On leaves:** Affected leaves turn yellow and are rapidly shed from the plant. A fine white fungal growth may be visible on the lower leaf surface, but affected leaves decay rapidly. **On flowers:** Flowers are also commonly shed, and the plant is often reduced to bare branches with a small tuft of yellow leaves and flower buds at the tip. Severely affected plants will eventually die.

Affected plants should be disposed of as soon as possible. **Do not compost them.** Ideally burn them or bury them deeper than 20in. Because of the risk of soil contamination, rest affected areas from *Impatiens* for at least a year (some species of *Plasmopara* affecting other plants produce resting spores that can survive for several years). Where infected plants have been grown in containers, replace the compost and wash and disinfect the container if you intend to grow *Impatiens* in it again the following year. **The disease is specific to *Impatiens*, so any other bedding plant can be grown without risk.** Unfortunately, growing *Impatiens* in another part of the garden will not guarantee freedom from infection, as the disease may well arrive again as airborne spores from infected plants growing elsewhere. There is also a risk of purchasing infected plants, as this type of disease often has a lengthy 'latent period', when plants are already infected but not yet showing obvious symptoms.

There are no fungicides available to amateur gardeners for the control of this disease. Spores produced on the underside of infected leaves spread the disease. These spores are splashed by rain, and are also carried for long distances on the wind. Extended periods of leaf wetness are required for spore production and infection, so severe outbreaks of downy mildew are only likely to occur after wet conditions.

The airborne spores remain viable for just a short time, but it is thought that the fungus can also produce a second spore type (a resting spore) within the affected plant tissues. These resting spores are much more resilient, and are released into the soil as the diseased material rots down. They are likely to survive within the soil for an extended period.

Feeling it unfair to supply plants that are unlikely to perform well, we have decided not to offer impatiens 'Busy Lizzies' this year. May we suggest you try Begonias, Petunias, Marigolds or Impatiens – 'Sunpatiens' (to name but a few). Please ask a member of staff if you need more guidance or information