

2006 Impatiens Trial Results



Impatiens are colorful summer-flowering annuals that provide season-long color in landscape and home gardens. Because of their dependable performance over a long time and their ability to flourish in the shade, impatiens has become one of the top three bedding plants in the United States. The majority of impatiens being used in the landscape is *I. wallerana*. This species is usually propagated by seed. Superior selections include ‘Super Elfin’, ‘Accent’, ‘Cajun’, ‘Dazzler’, and ‘Swirl’. Intensive breeding programs selecting for unique flower color, greater flower number, and sun tolerance have led to many new and exciting cultivars to choose from for use in the landscape. Information on their performances under our climate and soil conditions can help us decide which ones to plant in the landscape.

During April through November 2006, we evaluated 30 impatiens varieties at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station in the landscape, including mini impatiens, trailing impatiens, double impatiens, and New Guinea impatiens. Photos of trial entries are presented in the accompanying PDF file. The trial site is located at the research station under a pine tree planting. Nature’s Best’ organic bed mixture was added to local soil to build a 4” thick raised landscape bed. Plants were transplanted into the bed and watered by overhead sprinklers. Beds were fertilized with a broadcasting of 14-14-14 and mulched with pine straw. No major pest or disease problems were noted throughout the trial. Plants were given a visual rating during the first week of June, July, and August. Ratings were based on plant size, flower number, attractiveness of foliage and flowers, and in double impatiens whether flowers are held upright and easily visible. The rating scale ranged from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). Monthly ratings were averaged to provide an overall seasonal rating.

Mini impatiens: The Firefly series from Goldfish has 10 colors that share nice branching and compact growth habit that is great in pots, boxes, or as border plants. All colors of this series evaluated in our trial were rated as outstanding judged on full season performance. Plants are loaded with petite flowers at very young growth stage and continued the show throughout the

summer. Mini impatiens have a different sun/shade requirement from other impatiens (for which at least some shade is need) in that, mini impatiens can tolerant full sun through the heat of summer. By the same token, they are not very shade tolerant and will have fewer flowers under heavy shade. Firefly Salmon, Firefly White, and Firefly Watermelon exhibited impressive ‘flower power’. Firefly Pink performed well but had fewer flowers than others.

Trailing impatiens: ‘Butterfly’ trailing impatiens from Goldfisch has a vigorous growth habit for a trailing effect in hanging baskets or a free-style landscape. We evaluated Butterfly Salmon with Eye, Butterfly Deep Pink, Butterfly Lavender, and Butterfly Lilac. Overall, the trailing impatiens performed fairly well but do not have as many flowers as the mini impatiens at peak bloom and few flowers can be found between peak bloom. Trailing impatiens are more sun tolerant than common impatiens and will need at least filtered sun to be able to flower.

Double impatiens: Entries included new colors of the Silhouette and Fiesta series. All cultivars had large and fully doubled flowers with ‘Silhouette Orange Star’ and ‘Silhouette Pink’ rated as very good performers with high flower ratings. Silhouette Appleblossom had less number of flowers then the other two in the series. Fiesta Purple performed very well with flowers held upward on the stems but Fiesta Salmon had more downward facing flowers that are not very attractive even at peak bloom. Double impatiens are often used in hanging baskets and is also a suitable flowering plant for shady areas.

Another new addition to the double impatiens is the fancy-flowered series such as Fanfare. We have been testing this series for two years and they are good choices for filtered-sun areas. Flowers on these plants are larger than *I. wallerana* and are semi-double with an extra row of petals therefore giving more color impact when in full bloom.

New Guinea impatiens (I. hawheri) are well known for their bold tropical flavor colors and large flower size. They are usually sold as potted plants but are gaining popularity in the garden. All new varieties in the trial were well branched and performed well. Top performers include Sonic Magic Pink, Sonic Amethyst ‘06, Divine Scarlet Red, Divine Violet, and Divine White. We also had New Guinea impatiens bred for special foliage colors in the trial. Sonic Hot Rose on Gold

and Sonic Salmon on Gold had interesting variegated foliage, and Sonic Sweet Purple presented nice contrasting color display with dark purple foliage. New Guinea impatiens have similar sun tolerance as *I. wallerana* and will do best under filtered sun.

Landscapers and gardeners can choose impatiens for shade or filtered-sun locations according to the trial results presented here. All of the above impatiens will be a little more expensive than *I. wallerana* but are well worth it. A successful impatiens planting needs appropriate site selection, a soil with good drainage or a raised bed. Irrigation is needed for the dry period during spring and early summer. Mulching the bed can help keep moisture and control weeds. Most impatiens can reach to 12 to 15 inches tall and 15 to 20 inches wide, so space them at least 1 foot apart. Pinching or late season pruning is usually not required for *I. wallerana* and many new hybrids, but we found it beneficial for the mini impatiens. With appropriate care i.e. fertilizing and watering, impatiens can flower from April to the first frost which usually arrives in November in Louisiana. If you have a shady area and you love color, try impatiens!