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Subject: Plant of the Month



Dallas Arboretum Trial Program

Plant of the Month

April, 2007

At a glance

Latin Name: *Impatiens x hybrida* 'SunPatiens' series

Common Name: SunPatiens

Flowers: 2-3" flowers in orange, red, magenta or white

Foliage: deep green

Mature height: 2-3 ft.

Hardiness: Annual

Soil: Well drained

Exposure: full sun

Water usage: high

Sources: Home Depot



If you have ever read any of my writing, you know I'm critical of what "northern" test sites, plant tags and catalogs tell us about plants. Very few gardeners outside Texas would ever understand just what we have to go through to keep plants alive, much less thriving. So, you can only guess at my disbelief when I first heard that there were new impatiens being bred that would grow in full sun. Matter of fact, I thought it was one of those "urban myths" of gardening.

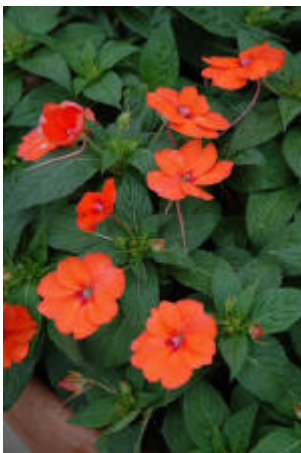
These sun-loving impatiens were to be called 'SunPatiens.' Personally, I couldn't believe they didn't immediately send them to me for trials at the Dallas Arboretum, but, alas, none showed up. Then, one day, I opened a Home Depot flyer and noticed they were selling them, and right there in black and white it stated they could stand full sun in North Texas! How dare someone introduce a new plant to Texas and not let me try to kill it! You know our motto at the Dallas Arboretum Trial Program is "Trial by Flower - If we can't kill it no one can!"



To tell you the truth, I was somewhat ruthless in my search for these plants. I prefer to call myself resourceful, but some may say I'm "pushy" when it comes to getting plants to trial. So, after a few hours on the telephone to the breeder I had plants the next day. I planted those tender little 4-inch pots in my sunniest and hottest spot in the trial garden, not a drop of light shade for these SunPatiens! Even my trial assistant Denise Robb mentioned, "Why are we even planting these? You know they'll be dead by the end of the week." My answer was "That's the point of the trial."

Well, I'm here to tell you I was wrong! SunPatiens not only survived the heat, but they looked good doing it! Last summer was brutal to many plants in our trial garden. Matter of fact, I had a hard time keeping regular impatiens alive in the shade last year, but the SunPatiens just kept on growing and blooming.

Now that I was sold on them, I had to go do a little research and see what made them special. Apparently they are a hybrid of *Impatiens walleriana* (regular impatiens) and *Impatiens hawkeri* (New Guinea impatiens). If you take a close look at the plants, you can definitely see some of each of their parents in them. The flower size is somewhere between both and the leaves and flowers are somewhat thicker than normal impatiens. It's the robust stems you notice first. These plants have thick, branching stems.



Other colors include white, magenta, orange and red. New this year is a variety and a pale lavender one - I've already got them in the garden this year. The white, orange and magenta were the most popular colors I tested, reaching almost 2 1/2 feet by the end of summer. The lavender one was shorter at around 2 feet.

I recommend using SunPatiens only in areas with full sun in the afternoon or all day. If you have shade I'd stick to standard impatiens - they're cheaper and more floriferous. Just like other impatiens, they do require quite a bit of watering, but I'll share a secret with you to make any impatiens flower more and stay shorter: Let them wilt between watering, and I mean let the tips hang down before you water. Since all impatiens are native to the equator they are used to only two seasons, hot/wet and hot/dry. If they start to dry out a little bit they kick into reproductive mode and will flower much heavier for you.

Another good thing about SunPatiens is if they do get too tall or big for you, give them a trim and they'll pop right back out.