

IMPATIENS

The familiar pink, purple, and white blooms of impatiens have been a standard inclusion in shady beds and borders for years, but recent introductions in the impatiens family are anything but standard. Gardeners can now choose among varieties whose blooms are huge or tiny, double or single, solid or variegated; plants with green foliage, silvery foliage, or leaves splashed with bright tropical colors; series that bloom in the shade and those designed for sunnier areas. Also, the traditional family of cool pink, purple, and white blooms has been joined by brighter, warmer pinks like watermelon, salmon, and coral as well as hot new orange, peach, and yellow (yes, yellow!) shades.

Impatiens are quite easy to grow; the main obstacles to healthy plants are too much sun and too little water. For most gardeners, these are easy to overcome. Who doesn't have a shady spot where no sun-loving flowers thrive? And a good cover of mulch (in addition to the shade) will keep beds from drying out too quickly. With those considerations aside, impatiens are a versatile element of the garden. The mounding, heavy-blooming plants usually grow about a foot tall by a foot wide, creating a billowy carpet of color when planted in masses or a soft pretty edging for a bed or border. They also make excellent container plants, falling lushly over the sides of hanging baskets or window boxes.

Here's a quick look at some of the different varieties we grow (for a [full list](#), see our website).



'Silhouette Orange Star' - large, fully double fiery red-orange blooms blaze from bushy green plants.

'Pink Ice' - The 'Ice' series features cool gray-green foliage, each leaf edged in white, with fluffy double blooms in a variety of colors, including this soft light pink.

'Firefly' Mini Impatiens - Petite single blooms in 'Blush Pink,' 'Light Salmon,' 'Pink,' 'Red,' 'Salmon,' and 'Watermelon' appear early on bushy little plants that are more sun-tolerant than most impatiens.



New Guinea 'Painted Paradise' - The deep green leaves are "painted" with bold streaks of tropical yellow, orange, red, and white, with blooms in 'Lavender,' 'Lilac,' 'Orange,' 'Pink,' 'Red,' 'White,' 'Wine.' Long-blooming plants keep going until the first frost and can take quite a bit of sun, if given moist soil and protection from afternoon sun.

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Brugmansias - If impatiens are ideal for tucking into shady corners or providing a low groundcover, these big South American natives fill the opposite niche in the garden. Also called Angel's Trumpets, brugmansias grow very large, very quickly, with huge pendant blooms in white, yellow, pinks, and peaches, for an impressive specimen or large container plant. In their native, frost-free habitat, brugmansias may grow up to 20 feet tall, each tree covered in foot-long trumpet flowers with a sweet lemony scent. Our northwest climate isn't quite warm enough to keep brugmansias outside year round, so you can either grow them as an extremely large, showy annual or as container plants so they can be overwintered indoors. Here, they are likely to reach 6 feet in a season, or up to 12 feet if overwintered indoors.

Use a container that is at least two feet in diameter, and preferably plastic (much lighter and easier to move than clay). Plant them in a well-draining soil mix so you can provide plenty of water without leaving their roots too soggy. Brugmansias can stay outside until nighttime temperatures drop below 50F in the fall (and can be moved back out in the spring as soon as temperatures stay above 50F). Place them in a spot that is mostly sunny, with some afternoon shade in hotter climates, and they'll create a little piece of tropical forest in your patio corner.

Coffea Arabica - Yes, you can grow your own coffee! While it's unlikely that the Northwest is destined to become the coffee plantation for the world, you can raise a few plants and they'll produce real coffee beans to be roasted, ground, and brewed at home! With a little (well, a lot of) patience, you could enjoy a cup or two of home grown coffee.



Like brugmansias, Coffea arabica grows fairly well in large pots with well-draining potting soil and can be placed outside for the summer and brought in when temperatures cool off in the fall. Coffea plants prefer filtered sunlight, humid air, and nighttime temperatures of 60F or higher, with moist but not soggy soil. They may grow up to 10 feet tall over several years, or can be pruned back to keep them small.



While you wait for that steaming mug of home-roasted coffee, enjoy the ornamental value of these plants, with their glossy dark green leaves and the most delightfully fragrant white flowers, which appear in the second year. After 3 years, the blooms should be followed by shiny red berries, each of which contains two coffee beans. Once your plant has matured enough to start producing a good crop, harvest the berries as they fully ripen (this won't happen all at once), let the berries dry until the shells fall off the inner beans, and start roasting!

Detailed information on growing and roasting beans, as well as home bean roasters and other equipment, can be found online (just Google "roast your own coffee"), if you find yourself swept up in a new hobby. Grow-your-own coffee - how can this not be a hit in the Pacific Northwest? (Now if only we could find a Microbrew Plant.)



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