



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Hypoestes phyllostachya*<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Polka-dot Plant (also known as *Hypoestes sanquinolenta*) is grown for its pink, red or white mottled and speckled foliage (Fig. 1). This loosely branched perennial may reach a height of 12 to 18 inches. The variegated, dark green leaves are ovate in shape and are generally 2 ½ inches long. The lavender or blue flowers occur in terminal and axillary cymes during the summer season. However, the flowers are negligible in comparison to the brightly spotted foliage. Foliage coloration is often more pronounced in a shaded location.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Hypoestes phyllostachya*

**Pronunciation:** hye-PESS-teez fil-loe-STACK-ee-uh

**Common name(s):** Polka-Dot Plant

**Family:** *Acanthaceae*

**Plant type:** ground cover

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** mass planting; ground cover; border; edging; cascading down a wall

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

### Description

**Height:** 1 to 2 feet

**Spread:** depends upon supporting structure

**Plant habit:** spreading



Figure 1. Polka-Dot Plant.

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

#### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-262, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the FAIRS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** ovate  
**Leaf venation:** brachidodrome; pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches  
**Leaf color:** variegated  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** lavender; blue  
**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** no fruit  
**Fruit length:** no fruit  
**Fruit cover:** no fruit  
**Fruit color:** not applicable  
**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not applicable  
**Current year stem/twig color:** green  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade  
**Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay  
**Drought tolerance:**  
**Soil salt tolerances:** poor  
**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** not applicable  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

The Polka-dot Plant is very useful for a mass display but will also create a nice edging along a shaded walk or patio. Many people place it into a container for display on the deck or patio. Shade tolerance also makes it well suited for placing a container full of Polka-dot Plant inside the home. In northern and central Florida, plants grown in the spring and summer garden may be dug in the fall and taken indoors.

This perennial is generally grown in partial to full shade on moist, well-drained, acid soils. Bright, filtered light brings out more color, but strong, direct sun is hard on the species; the leaves curl in full sun and they lose color.

New cultivars, such as those in the 'Splash Select' series and 'Confetti' series have brighter colors on more compact plants. 'Rose Splash Select' maintains very dark coloration in full sun, whereas other Polka-dot plants fade.

The Polka-dot Plant is easily grown from seed or cuttings. Plants grown in the garden will often reseed naturally, but seedlings may produce foliage that is not as attractive.

### Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.