Hypoestes phyllostachya

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Introduction

Polka-dot Plant (also known as Hypoestes sanquinoletia) 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 2½ 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

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple

Figure 1. Polka-Dot Plant.
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

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

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
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 loose 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.