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fittonia



Photos courtesy of Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses Inc.

Fittonia argyoneura—Nerve Plant, Mosaic Plant

BOTANICAL NAME

Fittonia spp.
(fi-TOE-nee-a)

COMMON NAMES

Nerve plant, Mosaic plant, Silver net plant, Lace leaf, Painted net leaf, Snakeskin plant

DESCRIPTION

Fittonias are evergreen, creeping perennials that are grown primarily as houseplants. An average size is 6 inches tall and 12 inches wide. They are notable for their intricately veined, egg-shaped leaves, which

grow opposite one another. The olive green leaves feature veins colored white to pink to bright red. Both larger varieties, with leaves approximately 2 to 4 inches long, and smaller varieties, with leaves approximately 1 inch long, are available.

DECORATIVE LIFE

With proper care, individual plants can live several years. Stem cuttings allow plants to last perpetually (see "Repotting").

AVAILABILITY

Fittonia plants are available year-round.

in-store and consumer care

LIGHT Low light levels are fine for *Fittonias*, and the shadowless light of a north window is optimal.

WATER The soil should be kept moist at all times, and watering should be done with lukewarm, soft water.

TEMPERATURE Warm temperatures are needed for *Fittonias* to flourish. Night temperatures between 65 F and 70 F and day temperatures between 75 F and 85 F are ideal.

HUMIDITY *Fittonias* must be kept in a humid environment, such as in a terrarium or on a tray filled with pebbles and water. *Fittonias* also can be grouped with other humidity-loving plants such as small ferns and prayer plants (*Maranta leuconeura*). *Fittonias* also can be misted occasionally.

FERTILIZER Feed plants with a balanced houseplant fertilizer, diluted by half, every two weeks. Wait three or four months before feeding newly purchased or potted plants.

PROPAGATION *Fittonias* can be propagated from stem cuttings.

PRUNING Pinch back *Fittonias'* stems to keep the plants compact. Small flower spikes may appear occasionally but should be pinched off.

REPOTTING Take stem cuttings and start new plants, in any season, to replace aging or straggly *Fittonia* plants. Creeping stems also will root in surrounding compost and can be removed and potted.

challenges

PESTS *Fittonias* are generally pest-free. The moist soil may encourage fungus gnats, small white gnats that hover over the soil. Repotting in fresh soil is one remedy.



F. argyoneura 'White Anne'—Nerve Plant, Mosaic Plant



F. argyoneura 'Frankie'—Nerve Plant, Mosaic Plant

LEAF CONCERNS Yellowed, wilting leaves are a sign of overwatering. Shrivelled leaves are a sign that the air is too dry or the plant is getting too much light. A collapsed plant signals it isn't getting enough water and generally will perk back up with watering if it hasn't been dry for more than a few hours.

fun facts

WHAT'S IN A NAME The *Fittonia* plant is named for Irish sisters Elizabeth and Sarah Fitton, who wrote *Conversations on Botany* in 1817. Its common names, including the most-often-used nerve plant, refer to the leaves' intricate veined appearance.

FAMILY *Fittonia* plants are members of the *Acanthaceae* (*Acanthus*) family. Common relatives include *Aphelandras* (zebra plants), *Crossandras* (firecracker flowers), black-eyed Susans (*Thunbergias*) and shrimp plants (*Justicias*).

HOME SWEET HOME The plants are native to Peru and its rainforests. **sfr**

Some information provided by:
Botanica, by R.G. Turner Jr. and Ernie Wasson
The Chain of Life Network®, www.chainoflifenetw.org
The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual,
by Barbara Pleasant
Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses Inc.,
www.exoticangel.com
The House Plant Encyclopedia,
by Ingrid Jantra and Ursula Krüger
The House Plant Expert, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon

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