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# polka-dot plant



Photo courtesy of The John Henry Company

*Hypoestes phyllostachya* 'Confetti' mix

## BOTANICAL NAMES

*Hypoestes phyllostachya*  
(hy-po-ES-teez fil-o-STAK-ee-a)  
syn. *Hypoestes sanguinolenta*

## COMMON NAMES

Polka-dot plant, Measles plant, Flamingo plant, Freckle-face

## DESCRIPTION

The *Hypoestes* species most commonly sold as an indoor foliage plant is *H. phyllostachya*, which is known for its colorful pink-spotted leaves. The plants, which grow quickly, can reach 2 feet tall in some cases but are best kept more compact.

They have hairy, densely set leaves that measure 1.5 to 2.5 inches in length. The varieties 'Splash' and 'Pink Brocade' are showy versions in which the pink coloration is even more dense, creating more of a mottled look. Some breeders also have produced varieties where the spots are white or red or where red is the leaves' base color.

## DECORATIVE LIFE

With proper care, individual plants can live up to two years indoors (see "Repotting").

## AVAILABILITY

*Hypoestes* plants are available year-round.

## in-store and consumer care

**LIGHT** Bright indoor light is appropriate though the plants should be kept out of direct sun.

**WATER** From spring through fall, water thoroughly and allow the soil to dry slightly between waterings. Water less frequently in winter.

**TEMPERATURE** Average warm indoor temperatures are appropriate; *Hypoestes* plants like a night temperature between 65 F and 70 F and a day temperature between 75 F and 85 F. Avoid temperatures below 55 F.

**HUMIDITY** Mist the leaves frequently.

**FERTILIZER** Feed established plants with a balanced houseplant fertilizer, diluted by half, every two weeks.

**PROPAGATION** *Hypoestes* can be propagated through stem cuttings or via seeds.

**PRUNING** Pinch back stems as they grow too long, such as those longer than 10

inches, to encourage a more bushy form.

**REPOTTING** It is recommended to take stem cuttings and start new plants each spring to replace aging or straggly *Hypoestes* plants. Potting mixtures formulated for African violets are suggested.

## challenges

**PESTS AND PROBLEMS** Watch for aphids, whiteflies, spider mites or scale. Pinch off infested areas, thoroughly clean the plant and isolate it from other houseplants. Daily misting to increase humidity can keep some of these pests at bay.

**LEAF DROP** Yellowed leaves dropping from the plants are a sign of overwatering. Leaves that drop off without turning yellow are a sign the plants aren't getting enough water.

**CURLED LEAVES** Too much light, particularly direct sunlight, can cause the leaves to curl. Move the plants to a shadier spot.

## fun facts

**WHAT'S IN A NAME** The genus name *Hypoestes* comes from the Greek roots "hypo," which means "below," and "estia," which means "a house." This refers to the bracts that cover the flowers.

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

**HOME SWEET HOME** The plants are native to Madagascar, South Africa and Southeast Asia.

**SEEING THE LIGHT** The amount of light that *Hypoestes* plants receive affects how colorful their leaves become. Plants receiving too little light may stay all green; in well-lit spots, the leaf coloring will be vivid.

**OCCASIONAL BLOOMERS** Some *Hypoestes* plants, after reaching a year old, will produce spikes of purple flowers in late winter. These flowers should be pinched out. After flowering, the plants may go dormant, and at that point watering should be reduced until new growth starts. **sfr**



Photo courtesy of Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.

*H. phyllostachya*—Polka-dot plant



Photo courtesy of The John Henry Company

*H. phyllostachya* 'Confetti Pink'

Some information provided by:  
Botanica, by R.G. Turner Jr. and Ernie Wasson  
The Chain of Life Network®, [www.chainoflifenet.org](http://www.chainoflifenet.org)  
The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual,  
by Barbara Pleasant  
Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.,  
[www.exoticangel.com](http://www.exoticangel.com)  
The House Plant Expert, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon

Reach "Foliage Plant of the Month" writer Amy Bauer at [abauer@superfloralretailing.com](mailto:abauer@superfloralretailing.com) or (800) 355-8086.