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# Polka Dot Plants: How To Care for This Colorful Houseplant



Photo Credit: Sri Widowati

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# It's easy to grow the cute and vibrant Polka dot plant!

By [Lauren Landers](#)

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With their colorful red, pink, or white speckled leaves, it's easy to spot the charm of aptly named polka dot plants! These foliage plants only grow perennially in USDA zones 10 and

and can be kept as annuals in an outdoor flower bed or container garden.

If you're ready to add more color to your garden or houseplant collection, here's everything you need to know about growing these plants!



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The cute and vibrant polka dot plant!  
Credit: tathianacorrea

## About Polka Dot Plants

Belonging to the Acanthaceae plant family, these plants are pint-sized tropicals that maintain a relatively upright growth habit grow up to 1 foot tall in pots and a bit taller in the garden.

They are native to Madagascar and naturally grow as understory plants in high humidity

and dappled light. As a result, they can be

plants will reward you with a colorful display  
of white, red, or pink-speckled leaves.

#### ADVERTISEMENT

In warm areas, polka dot plants can be grown  
as short-lived perennials, but most green  
thumbs keep them as warm-weather annuals  
or grow them as houseplants.

- Outdoors, these plants draw the eye when they're planted in garden bed borders or containers, and they pair beautifully with other moisture-loving ornamentals, like caladiums and impatiens.
- Indoors, they are at their best in filtered light and high humidity, and they should be kept in terrariums if you don't have a humidifier or pebble tray handy.

early fall. But these blooms should be removed to extend the life and growth of your plants. If you have pets or kids in your home, don't fret—they are also nontoxic!

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- [How to Grow Caladium Plants: The Complete Guide](#)
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- [Staghorn Fern Care: Growing Platycerium bifurcatum](#)

## PLANTING



Freckleplace is another common name for Polka dot plants. Can you see why? Credit: Alessandra Maeda

Polka dot plants can be grown indoors or out. But if you want your plants to thrive, here are a few planting tips to keep in mind.

#### Planting Outdoors:

tures are consistently above 60°F.

- Grow plants in a partially shaded spot with moist, rich, and well-draining soil. Direct sun can scorch their leaves.
- To plant in the garden, dig a hole that's slightly larger than your plant's root ball and amend the excavated soil with compost. Locate the plant in the hole so the top of the plant's roots are level with the soil line, firm the soil around the plant's roots, and water well.
- Although polka dot plants are generally not aggressive growers, they can grow invasively in Hawaii and other tropical areas.

### **Planting Indoors:**

- For proper growth, position plants in bright, indirect light and provide a source of humidity. These plants thrive in well-lit bathrooms but should be kept away from drafty windows.
- Plants grow well in 4- to 6-inch plastic or glazed ceramic pots. Terracotta pots dry out too quickly for these moisture lovers.
- In terrariums, space individual plants about 1 foot apart to give them room to grow!
- Anv rich, well-draining, all-purpose pot-

- Self-watering planters can be a wise choice for these plants!
- Polka dot plants rarely need repotting. But if their roots are visible, repot your plant in spring and choose a container that's just one or two sizes bigger than your existing pot.

## GROWING



*Growing Hypoestes (Polka dot plants) by seed indoors. Credit: IhorStore*

Due to their higher-than-average humidity needs, polka dot plants can be a little challenging to keep. But you can simplify plant care and prevent them developing brown or wilted leaves by providing your plants with the care they need!

## Light

Bright sun can scorch plant leaves, while low

in partial shade and keep indoor plants in bright, indirect light. East- or south-facing windows are particularly good spots for these plants!

## Water

Polka dot plants don't tolerate dry soil and should be watered regularly when the top  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch of soil feels dry. Adding mulch around the base of outdoor plants will insulate the soil and conserve moisture levels. If you're growing them as houseplants or in a container garden, choosing self-watering planters can take some guesswork out of watering these thirsty plants!

## Fertilizer

Like most other houseplants, they aren't heavy feeders, but they will benefit from a light dose of fertilizer from time to time. From spring through summer, fertilize these plants monthly with a diluted, organic liquid fertilizer, but withhold the fertilizer in winter. If you're adding new plants to your garden, amending the soil with compost before planting will help your plants settle in a little faster.

Polka dot plants need at least 50% humidity to grow, while low humidity levels will cause their leaves to wilt and turn brown. Growing in a well-lit bathroom can boost humidity levels, but you can also increase humidity by growing these plants near a humidifier or on top of a pebble tray. Roomy terrariums filled with humidity-loving ferns and waffle plants can be a suitable home for these plants as well!

## Seasonal Care

Throughout the year, stems should be pinched back regularly to a leaf node to encourage bushier growth and prevent legginess. It's also a good idea to remove flowers as they appear since blooming causes them to stop growing.

Beyond pruning, outdoor plants should also be protected from cold weather if you want your plants to grow perennially.

Temperatures below 50°F can do serious harm to these tropical plants! Indoor plants need the same basic care throughout the year, although they should be watered more in hot weather and less in fall and winter.

## Propagation

Polka dot plants can technically be propagated from seed, but the easiest way to grow new plants is through stem propagation.

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1. To start, take 2- to 4-inch stem cuttings from healthy plants. Each cutting should have at least a few healthy leaves at

2. Gently strip off the leaves on the bottom of the stem cutting. Then, place the cutting in a clear glass filled with 1 to 2 inches of water and ensure that the cut end of the stem is fully submerged.
3. Move the cutting into bright, indirect light and refresh the water regularly to keep everything clean.
4. In a few weeks, the cutting should start to root. When the roots are about 2 inches long, transplant your plant into a potting mix and water well!

## Types



A red *Hypoestes phyllostachya*, also known as Hippo Red Polka Dot plant! Credit: Khairil Azhar Junos

The classic polka dot plant has pink and green leaves, but there are lots of other fun color variations of this plant! To get you started, here are just a few varieties you may spot at your local plant nursery.

- **'Pink Brocade'**: Pretty as a picture, 'Pink Brocade' plant leaves are ornamented with bubblegum pink speckles.
- **'Confetti Mix'**: The best of all worlds, this mix of polka dot plants is easy to find and contains plants with pink, white, and red coloration.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

Polka dot plants can sometimes develop pests and other plant problems, but these issues are usually fixable!

- **Pests**, like spider mites, aphids, mealy-bugs, and whiteflies, can sometimes target

sprays are usually the best treatment for these pests.

- **Yellow, brown, or wilted plant leaves** are typically caused by watering or humidity issues and can result from either too much or too little moisture. If your plant's soil feels dry, it's time to water. If the soil feels soggy long after watering, your plant may be suffering from root rot.
- **Faded leaf color or leggy stems** are most likely caused by lighting issues. Too much light can result in leaf burn and cause plants to lose their characteristic coloring, while too little light can lead to stretched stems. They also stretch as they age, and older plants may need to eventually be replaced.

## WIT AND WISDOM

- The Latin name Hypoestes comes from the Greek words for “under” (*hypo-*) and “a house” (*-estia*). This unique name refers to the distinct shape and position of polka dot plant flowers.
- Polka dot plants have lots of other quirky nicknames, including “flamingo plants” or “freckle face plants.”

**PLANT CARE**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Lauren Landers



Lauren is a gardener, writer, and public speaker with over a decade of experience helping others learn about gardening, homesteading, and sustainable living. [Read More from Lauren Landers](#)

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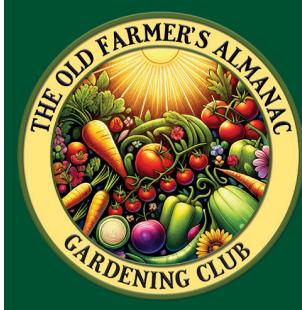
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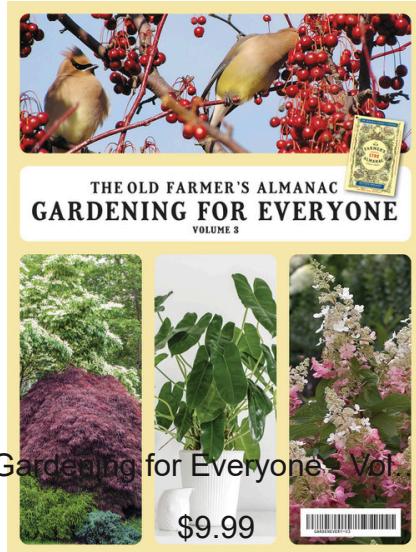
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