

January 2009

## Plants of the Month

### Dwarf Schefflera/ Dwarf Umbrella Plant

*Schefflera arbicola*

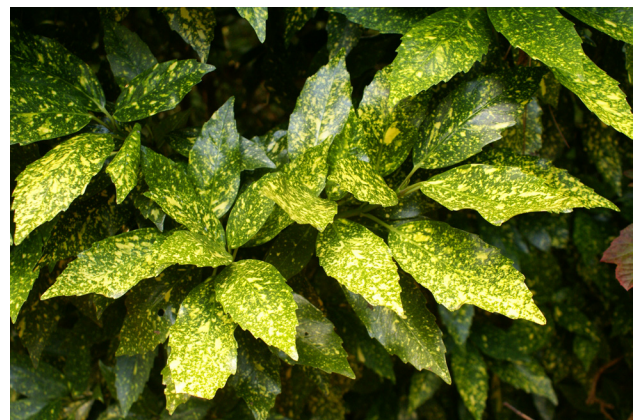
Schefflera is one houseplant that never loses its popularity. Softly glossy leaves and dependability make it practically a family pet. But with unusual leaves 3 inches long and a height up to 10 feet, it also suggests tropical locales. The dark green leaves come in variegated varieties, too. Schefflera plants like some light but not direct sunlight. From spring to fall, fertilize every other week, and let the soil dry at least 1 inch deep between watering. Never let it stand in water. Keep leaves shiny with an occasional sponge bath, and prune to keep it to your preferred size.



### Aucuba

*Aucuba japonica*

Many a dark corner in the landscape is brightened by the yellow and gold markings of Aucuba. Leathery leaves up to 8" long come in a wide choice of variegated forms—dusted, speckled, and blotched. Heavily serrated and even plain green leaves round out the pool of possibilities. Hardy to Zone 7, Aucuba suffers in unusually cold winters, but its ability to grow lushly in difficult heavy shade or on the north side of homes makes it a lifesaver in the landscape. Where happy it will bloom and produce vivid red berries. Popular in holiday greenery, Aucuba propagates easily from cuttings.



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## **Mondo Grass**

*Ophiopogon japonicus*

Can't get grass to grow in your shade? This grass may be the solution, because it isn't grass at all. A lily family member, Mondo grass spreads by underground stolons to form a sod of compact evergreen blades. Lavender flowers appear among the 8 to 12 inch grass in spring. Small blue berries follow. A popular groundcover or bed edging in zones 7 to 9, mondo grass is not fussy about soil but likes some moisture and shade. Use a barrier to keep it from spreading into the lawn. You can cut back old foliage in late winter, preserving the crowns.

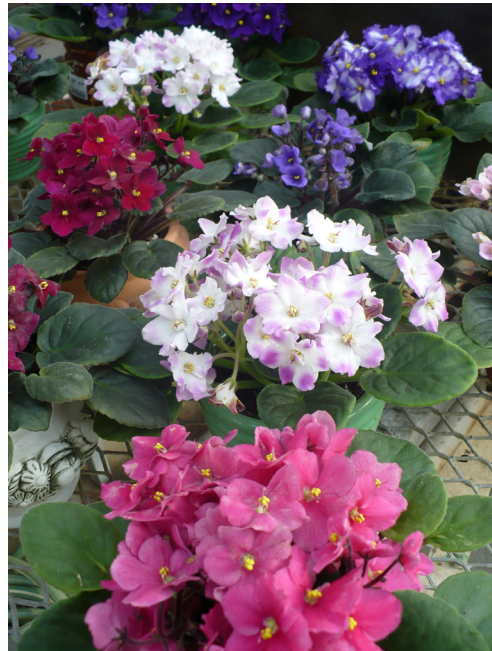


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## **African Violets**

*Saintpaulia* species

Whoop up the winter blahs with African violets, choosing from among a wide array of colors. Perhaps the all-time most popular houseplant, African violets are prized for flowering year round. Blooms, sometimes ruffled or two-tone, unfurl from its rosette of fleshy leaves. Give it bright but not direct sunlight, normal room temperatures, and well-drained soil. Raise humidity by setting the pot atop pebbles in water. (Sitting in water rots roots.) Keep pot width no more than 1/3rd that of the plant. Year-round blooming requires fertilizer year-round, but dilute to 1/4th strength. Water when the top 1/2 " of soil is dry.



**Have a pest or gardening question?**

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