

# Hypoestes aristata – Beauty with a Purpose

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Beautiful? No question. Common? Many gardeners complain this is so. Exuberant? Well, yes, new plants do tend to pop up all over the garden. But this hardy shrub more than justifies its place in local gardens as the May-Day holiday weekend showed to delightful effect.

When a few seedlings appeared close together on the lawn a few months ago, before I could decide where to move them, they had grown into full-flowering beauties, and now they are focal points that attract the daily attentions of the gardener as well as butterflies, birds, bees, and beetles. Butterflies jizz from flower to flower, a kaleidoscope of both Green-banded and Citrus Swallowtails, Common and Broad-boarded Grass Yellow, Zebra White, Common African White and African Vagrant, taking their fill while on the wing. *Nomia amabilis* (no common name; some refer to it as a flower bee, but we call it the Blue-bum bee), honey bees, and carpenter bees, providing an ever-present hum as they collected pollen.

Its wildlife attracting ability aside, the Ribbon Bush is a hard worker providing late autumn and winter colour year in and year out. Although adapted to grow in shady to partially shady areas, it seems to cope just as well in full sun, though the flowers may not last as long here. Plants thrive in both moist and dry soils, and ask for nothing more than the seasonal rainfall - and will survive a short drought. Plant the Ribbon Bush along the boundary, or in neglected areas to add colour. Be sure to prune your shrubs heavily after flowering to prevent them from becoming too woody at the base. Shrubs often split open in the centre if you miss a year's pruning.

## Where to use it in the garden.

Use as a low to mid-height foliage in a shrubbery where it will cover the woody stems of *Leonotis leonurus*, *Syncolostemon* species, and *Pycnostachys urticifolia*, for example. These beautiful companions put on a late autumn to winter show.

The Ribbon Bush is a perfect low shrub for neglected spots in the garden needing little work other than the necessary end-of-winter prune. Plant groups of *Hypoestes* on banks where they help to bind the soils and require access only once a year to prune. Use as a boundary screen filler, or allow it to propagate with verve along a sunny or lightly shaded verge.

## Companion shrubs for sun:

*Thorncroftia longiflora*

*Pycnostachys urticifolia*

*Buddleja glomerata*

*Tinnea barbata*

*Gnidia* and *Lasiosiphon* species

*Barleria obtusa* looks stunning if allowed to scramble among the stems.

## Low-growing species to front the Ribbon Bush:

*Kleinia fulgens* – despite being a drought-hardy species, *Kleinia* does enjoy some afternoon shade

*Gazania rigens*

*Crassula sarmentosa*

Grasses: place among the taller species like *Cymbopogon validus* in a grassland setting.

## A mouth-watering grouping for shade:

*Plectranthus hereroensis*

*Setaria megaphylla*

*Barleria albostellata*

*Albuca nelsonii*

*Oplismenus hirtellus* can hug the ground beneath all shrubs and bulbs.