

Prayer Plant (*Maranta leuconeura*)



Prayer Plant, *Maranta leuconeura* kerchoveana. Photo by Kurt Stueber ***Maranta leuconeura* kerchoveana (rabbit-track plant) and *Maranta leuconeura* massangeana (fishbone plant)** are both from tropical America. Rabbit-track has red spots which resemble rabbit paw marks, and fishbone has a definite pattern of fish bones.

As if these were not enough to make the plant unusual, it folds its leaves at night, resembling hands in prayer.

It grows under other plants in its natural habitat in moist rich soil and is therefore best kept in warm moist air (18 - 24 degrees Celsius [around 72 degrees Fahrenheit]), in moist soil and in partial shade. Bright light will produce very nice growth, but full sun will burn its leaves.

This is an excellent plant for a terrarium, because it remains small and likes a close atmosphere. Outside a terrarium it is prone to dry brown leaf tips. I use Prayer plants in arrangements and on low tables where their colourful foliage is most visible. They grow very slowly and never become tall. After some time, a Prayer plant will spread and hang. New plants spring up from the roots, making the pot fuller.

Repotting into PHILODENDRON SOIL in a larger pot will give it room to continue producing more plants. It can be divided and stem cuttings can be rooted. A Prayer plant can be cut back to soil level if it has become leggy or unattractive. It will produce new growth from its roots. I once discarded a Prayer plant that had died. I emptied the pot into a plastic bag to add to a compost pile the following spring. I found it months later, growing. The growth was white, resembling an onion shot. I had forgotten what it was, but potted it to see what it would do. A

few weeks later I was surprised by a nice little Prayer plant.

Frequent misting is very good for Prayer plants which are not in terrariums. Before the soil is dry it should be watered. Experts recommend that in winter (November to February) a Prayer plant should be allowed to dry a little more. They are susceptible to mites, mealybugs and scale.