Lamium maculatum L.  
(Lamium variegatum)  

**Spotted Deadnettle**

**Other Common Names:** Deadnettle, Lamium, Variegated Deadnettle.

**Family:** Lamiaceae (Labiatae).

**Cold Hardiness:** Spotted Deadnettle is vigorous in USDA zones 4(3) through 7; however, proper siting and cultural conditions are critical to success in zone 8 or perhaps just the right spot in 9a.

**Foliage:** Evergreen, semi-evergreen to deciduous; opposite; simple; 1\(\text{to}\) 1½\(\text{in.}\) long broadly ovate-cordate, bordering on having a three-sided appearance; covered to varying degrees of density on both upper and lower surfaces with a clear stiff scratchy pubescence; the blade is green with a silvery or whitish, blotch of variable size in the center; the lighter blotch ranges from barely noticeable to covering all but a margin of green around the edges of the blade; tips bluntly acute; margins crenate to crenate-serrate; veins pinnate, reticulate, impressed above and strongly raised beneath creating a rugose or quilted appearance; bases cordate; petiole ¾\(\text{in.}\) to 1½\(\text{in.}\) long, concave above, convex beneath, green with clear pubescence.

**Flower:** Perfect ¼\(\text{in.}\) to 1\(\text{in.}\) long bilabiate flowers look like hooded snake heads where the upper lip of the corolla is longer and arching over the lower lip; the protruding stamens resemble the snake’s forked tongue, completing the illusion; flowers are borne in short spikes above the leaves; the colors vary from pink to purple with the occasional white flowering plant; the flowers are moderately showy during late spring to early summer.

**Fruit:** The fruit contains four tiny nutlets which are not showy.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — square in cross-section; sparsely hairy pubescent; medium green in color; procumbent; nodes fairly widely spaced; Buds — foliose; green covered in hairy pubescence; tiny, less than ¼\(\text{in.}\) long, but usually elongating to form a new stem quickly after being formed; Bark — not applicable.

**Habit:** Lamium maculatum is a spreading prostrate herbaceous groundcover 4\(\text{in.}\) to 8\(\text{in.}\) tall with a spread of 12\(\text{in.}\) to 18\(\text{in.}\); the overall texture is medium.

**Cultural Requirements:** Plants are effective in sun or shade in cooler climates, but ordinarily survive only in shade in most of our region; this species is more vigorous in the northern portions of our region, suffering in the heat of zones 8 or warmer; although adapted to a range of soil pH, including those that are mildly calcareous, this species requires a well drained rich fertile soil with uniform moisture availability or in the words of the groundcover expert David McKenzie (1997) “they suffer an agonizing death”; plants benefit from occasional renewal pruning.

**Pathological Problems:** Physiological leaf scorch and collapse in sun hot locations; intolerance to drought and high humidity; ‘Variegatum’ is even more prone to leaf spots and fungal bights than the species type; crown rot, slugs, and aphids can be occasional problems.

**Ornamental Assets:** The lighter colored central splash on the leaves provides interest in drab shady spots, while the flowers contribute color when in bloom.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** In Central Texas and the Gulf Coast areas, L. maculatum tends to succumb to our summer heat and humidity; ironically this species is weedy in more moderate environments; dry shade often results in open patches, ruining their effectiveness as a groundcover; this species is intolerant of foot traffic.

**Landscape Utilization:** Spotted Deadnettle’s primary use is as a small scale shade groundcover or shady bank stabilizer, but it can also be used in containers, pots, and shaded window boxes; it is best reserved for use in northeastern portions of our region.
**Other Comments:** The genus name means throat in Greek and refers to the basal portion of the flowers; the specific epithet maculatum means spotted in reference to the light colored splotch in the center of the leaves; the common name of Deadnettle comes from the species’ close relationship to the Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.), but since it lacks the stinging hairs of *U. dioica*, *Lamium maculatum* is known as a Deadnettle; *Lamium maculatum* is a good example of why we need to beware of recommendations from authorities in other regions concerning the use of plants in Texas landscapes; for instance among noted plantsmen, Donald Wyman (1956) claims this is a plant for “rigorous climates” and Dr. Allan Armitage (1989) refers to the cultivar ‘White Nancy’ as “one of the best ground covers I have tested”, apparently Texas landscapes are a tad beyond rigorous; the author points this out not as a criticism to these two esteemed plantsmen, but rather as an illustration of the need to consider the authority’s frame of reference when contemplating their recommendations on landscape usage for a given taxon; it would be just as unwise to extrapolate recommendations in this text to areas outside its intended sphere of use.

**Native Habitat:** Europe, but naturalized locally in the Eastern US.

**Related Taxa:** The cultivar ‘Variegatum’ is the most commonly encountered form in our regional trade and it has a large silvery white splotch that covers most of the blade; ‘White Nancy’ is very similar, but with white flowers.

**References:** Armitage, 1989; DeWolf et al., 1987; MacKenzie, 1997; Odenwald and Turner, 1996; Wyman, 1956.

Copyrighted 2005 with all rights reserved by Michael A. Arnold; intended for future inclusion in *Landscape Plants For Texas And Environs, Third Edition.*