

Pilea microphylla Artillery Plant¹

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Introduction

A multitude of minute, lime green leaves on short, arching stems gives artillery plant a fine-textured, fern like appearance (Fig. 1). Growing only 8 to 12 inches tall and quickly forming spreading clumps up to two feet wide, artillery plant makes an attractive tropical ground cover. The common name is derived from the forcefully ejected pollen from the rather inconspicuous flowers on this brittle and succulent plant.

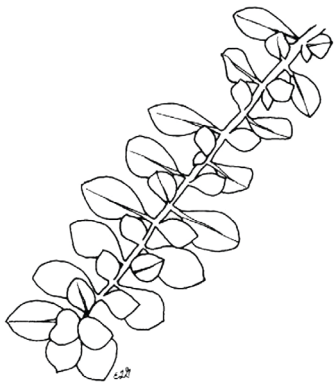


Figure 1. Artillery plant

General Information

Scientific name: *Pilea microphylla*

Pronunciation: PYE-lee-uh mike-roe-FILL-luh

Common name(s): artillery plant

Family: *Urticaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous; ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; edging; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: .5 to 1.5 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: spreading

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

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Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: obovate
Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: green
Flower characteristic: year-round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun;
plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: extended flooding; alkaline; clay; sand;
acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: potentially invasive
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Growing in full sun but preferring light shade, artillery plant needs well-drained yet moist soils and should only be watered when the soil dries. Plant on 18- to 24-inch centers to establish a quick cover. Plants may be pinched occasionally to encourage bushiness but this is seldom necessary. Light applications of fertilizer are recommended.

Artillery plant can become a weed since seeds germinate in the landscape. It is best used as a ground cover planted in a mass in a bed beneath existing trees. Do not mix with other ground covers or low shrubs since it will spread into these areas.

The cultivar 'Variegata' has leaves blotched white and pink.

Propagation is by cuttings which root easily.

Pests and Diseases

Artillery plant is occasionally bothered by chewing insects.

Plants are subject to root rot in poorly drained soils.