

Pilea microphylla Artillery Plant¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

A multitude of minute, lime green leaves on short, arching stems gives artillery plant a fine-textured, fern like appearance (Figure 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.

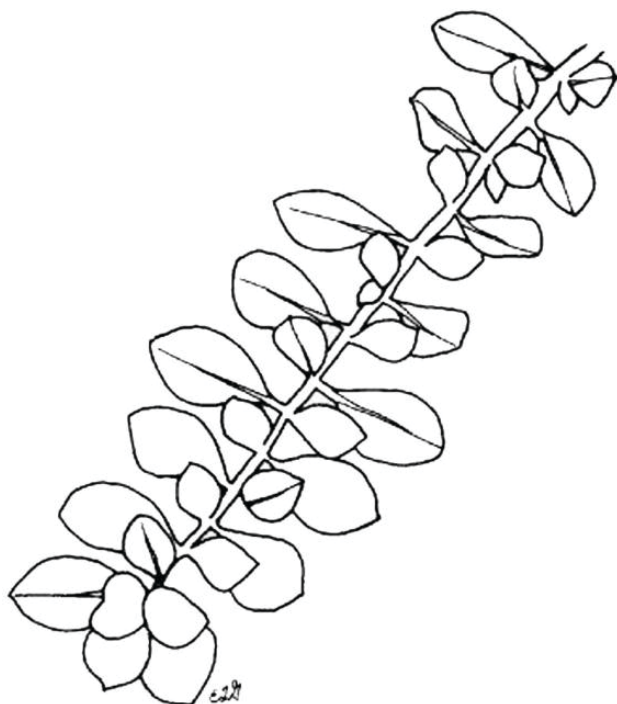


Figure 1. Artillery plant

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 (Figure 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

Description

Height: .5 to 1.5 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: spreading

Plant density: dense

1. This document is FPS479, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised April 2023. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.

2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

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.