



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## ***Pilea microphylla***<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

A multitude of minute, lime green leaves on short, arching stems gives Artillery Plant a fine-textured, fernlike 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 groundcover. The common name is derived from the forcefully-ejected pollen from the rather inconspicuous flowers on this brittle and succulent 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

### **Description**

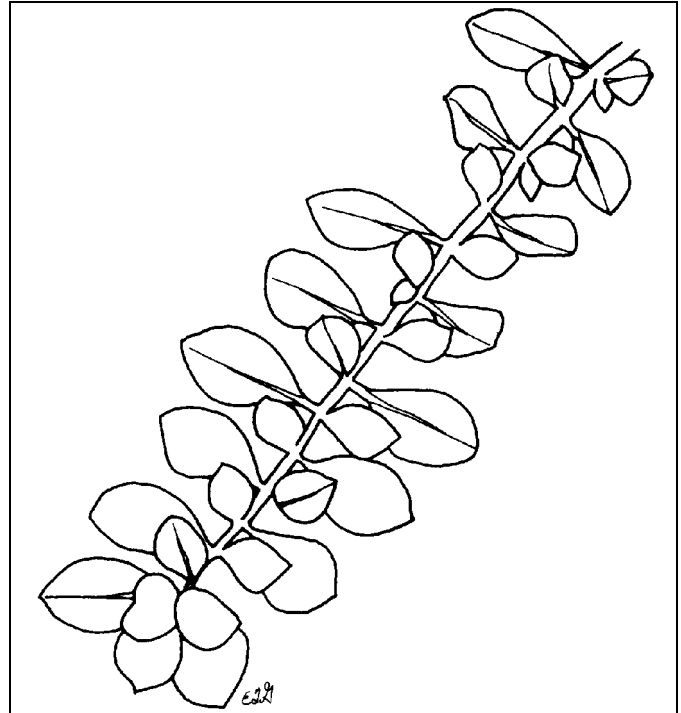
**Height:** .5 to 1.5 feet

**Spread:** 1 to 2 feet

**Plant habit:** spreading

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate



**Figure 1.** Artillery Plant.

**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** obovate

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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 groundcover planted in mass in a bed beneath existing trees. Do not mix with other groundcovers 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.

Artillery Plant is occasionally bothered by chewing insects.

## **Pests and Diseases**

Plants are subject to root rot in poorly drained soils.