

Other Common Names: Watermelon Pilea.

Family: Urticaceae.

Cold Hardiness: Plants are grown outdoors in USDA plant hardiness zones 10 (9) to 11.

Foliage: Evergreen, opposite, simple, 2" to 3" long elliptic to obovate leaves have nearly entire to slightly scalloped or crenate margins, rounded to obtuse bases, and acute to acuminate tips; the glossy blades are mottled white, silver (aluminum colored), and green above; the underside of new leaves are rusty red as they initially unfold; venation is palmate with three main veins running the length of the leaf; tiny whitish linear calcium carbonate secretions (cystoliths) form on the leaves; veins are green with mottling appearing principally between the veins; short stout petioles are yellow-green, sometimes with a reddish flush, and flattened to slightly concave above.

Flower: The small loose axillary cymes of very small individual flowers are not ornamentally important.

Fruit: The tiny achenes are not ornamental.

Stem / Bark: Stems — succulent dark green stems with brown lenticels have pairs of leaves perpendicular to the next pair above and below; Buds — foliose, red-green; Bark — not applicable.

Habit: Aluminum Plant is an erect herbaceous perennial which can quickly grow to a height of 12" to 18", however the most common selections in cultivation mature at a shorter height of half this size; it quickly forms a groundcover by rooting where branches touch the soil; the overall texture is medium to medium-coarse.

Cultural Requirements: Aluminum Plant can be easily grown in warm climates, or as a seasonal annual, in most locations in which moderate shade, moist well drained soils, and sufficient high quality irrigation water are available; better fertility increases foliage growth which is the whole point of growing this species; a location with protection from winter freeze and wind will improve chances of plants returning from the roots outdoors in marginal USDA zone 9 locations.

Pathological Problems: Mealybugs, spider mites, leaf spots and stem rots are sometimes problems.

Ornamental Assets: The highly ornamental mottled green foliage and lush growth are the primary assets along with a tolerance to shady locations.

Limitations & Liabilities: This species has almost no cold tolerance and can become weedy in some settings.

Landscape Utilization: Aluminum Plant is a popular container or interiorscape plant for medium light conditions throughout the U.S.A., but can be grown in protected locations outdoors along the immediate Gulf Coast and deep South Texas; in tropical environments it is popular as a smaller scale groundcover for shady spots in humid climates.

Other Comments: This species is a well behaved interiorscape plant, but is sometimes weedy in favorable tropical environments; the genus name means a cap in reference to the flowers; the specific epithet honors the plant collector Cadière.

Native Habitat: This Southeast Asian species has naturalized extensively in many tropical locations around the world.

Related Taxa: The genus *Pilea* Lindl. contains several popular tropical landscape and interiorscape species, including *P. cadierei*, *P. serpyllacea*, *Pilea nummulariifolia* (O.P. Swartz) H.A. Weddell (*Urtica nummulariifolia*, Creeping Charlie), and *Pilea depressa* (O.P. Swartz) C.L. Blume (*Urtica depressa*, Baby's Tears) which are all grown for their ability to form vigorous low groundcovers with attractive rich green foliage most taxa are truly tropical plants and are used only in very protected spots in warm mild winter parts of our region or are more commonly grown in interiorscape settings or as potted plants.

Pilea serpyllacea (F. von Humboldt, A. Bonpland, and C. Kunth) F.M. Liebmann
(*Urtica serpyllacea*)

Artillery Plant

- Also known as Artillery Fern, *P. serpyllacea* is not a fern relative, but a member of the family Urticaceae; fern-like in appearance this low mat-forming perennial evergreen herb spreads by vine-like stems that root as they touch the ground; *Pilea serpyllacea* is often planted for its ground hugging nature and tendency to make a fine textured bright green carpet around the base of taller plants in interiorscapes; it is also used as a spiller in containers or in hanging baskets; in tropical climates, Artillery Plant is used for edging, borders, and as a prostrate groundcover where it can eventually mound to a 10" depth, but often remains lower; the orbicular leaves are

tiny, $\frac{1}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{4}$ " long, and essentially sessile to the stem; the specific epithet means with leaves.

- Artillery Plant offers almost no cold tolerance, being truly tropical, it is hardy outdoors only in USDA cold hardiness zones 10 (9b) and 11.

References: Beckett, 1995; Rauch and Weissich, 2000.

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