

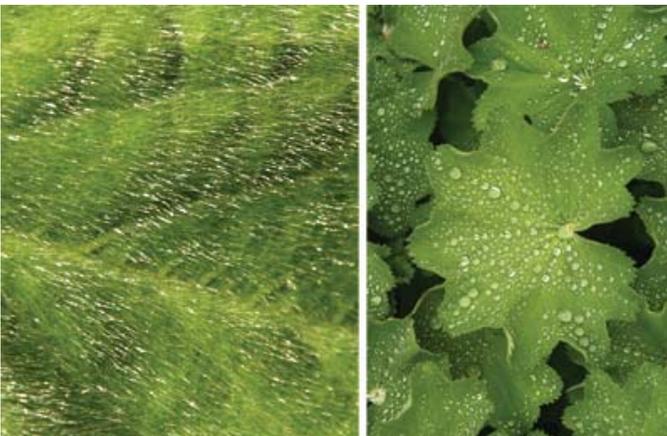
Lady's Mantle, *Alchemilla mollis*



Lady's mantle, *Alchemilla mollis*, blooming in a garden.

serrated edges. Each leaf is palmately veined with 7-11 partially folded lobes, making it appear pleated. The foliage is light green to olive green in color. Plants spread very slowly by rhizomes, forming mounds 12-15" tall that spread to two feet or more.

The dense hairs on the leaves catch and hold water droplets, so are very attractive after a rain or in the morning when drops of dew



Numerous, long hairs on the leaves catch and hold water droplets.

turn base metal into gold – hence the name "Alchemilla".

Airy sprays of yellow to chartreuse flowers cover the plants in early to midsummer. The individually inconspicuous, ¼" wide, star-shaped flowers have no petals. The effect is fairly subtle,

Lady's mantle, *Alchemilla mollis*, is an old-fashioned, tough and adaptable European garden perennial grown for both its interesting foliage and frothy sprays of flowers. It is the most commonly planted of nearly 300 species in the genus in the rose family (Rosaceae) native to the mountains of Europe, Asia, and North America. Its common name supposedly comes from the resemblance of its scalloped leaves to the Virgin Mary's cloak, although other explanations exist. Native to Turkey and the Carpathian Mountains, *A. mollis* has been used medicinally for stomach ailments and to dye wool green. Lady's mantle should be planted with care as it can be invasive because of its abundant seed production. It is hardy in zones 3-8.

The soft, velvety leaves are up to 6" across with



The large leaves are lobed, with serrated edges.



The plants produce airy sprays of yellow to green flowers.

compared to many perennials with bold, brightly colored flowers, and some gardeners prefer to cut off the flowers. Cut stems make good fillers in cut flower arrangements, but fresh and dried. To dry, just hang cut stems in bundles upside down in a cool, ventilated spot until dry. They resist shattering and last longer than many dried flowers.



The tiny flowers, closeup, have no petals.



The flower stems tend to flop after a while.

The flower stems tend

to flop over after a while, making the plants look somewhat messy. There are no seedpods; the tiny brown seeds are held in the calyx, which becomes brown and papery when the seeds are ripe, with one seed per flower. Shear after blooming to improve the plant's appearance and prevent self-seeding. New, lush basal growth will begin growing soon after trimming, and this foliage should remain good looking through the remainder of the season.

An easy-care perennial, it does well in sun or partial shade. In hot climates it may scorch in full sun, but this is rarely a problem in the upper Midwest. It tolerates most soils, except overly moist conditions, and does well in clay. It is not drought tolerant and should be watered when soil moisture is lacking. The foliage will turn



The foliage in late winter and early spring.

completely brown over the winter, and new leaves appear in spring. It is best to shear the old leaves from the crowns in early spring before new growth starts.

Use lady's mantle at the front of the border, in cottage gardens or as a ground cover. It looks really good spilling over the edge of a path, especially when in bloom. It could even be used in large containers. The soft, mounding appearance of this plant contrasts nicely with vertical perennials such as iris, *Liatris*, ferns, and *Salvia* (when in bloom) and the boldly textured, soft-colored foliage looks great in combination with dark green or purple leaved plants, and with finer textured plants. The cooling yellow-green or green-yellow of the flowers is a superb companion to almost all colors, but especially violet, blue, and pink. The blooming plants complement pink shrub roses nicely.



Alchemilla mollis 'Auslese' just before blooming.

A mollis is easily propagated by seed (and readily self seeds in many gardens, to the point of being invasive in ideal growing conditions). Seedlings are easily identifiable, as they have the same three-lobed leaves as the adult plants. Volunteers are easily weeded out

or moved. It will take at least two years from seeding until plants bloom. Established clumps can be divided in spring or fall, although early spring is best. It has almost no pests and is not favored by deer.

A. mollis is the most widely grown of the genus, and only a few cultivars are available (and seem to be rather similar):

- 'Auslese' is a European selection, chosen for its more upright, lime-green flowers. The plant is larger than the species (15-18" tall).
- 'Irish Silk' grows to 2 feet tall and is particularly florific.
- 'Robusta' is more upright with larger leaves than the species, growing to 2 feet tall and wide.
- 'Thriller' is a slightly more compact variety with flowers that tend more toward green than yellow.



Flower buds.

Other species sometimes available include:

- *A. alpina* (mountain lady's mantle) – a mat-forming species only 3-8" tall that needs good drainage, so would be good for rock gardens. The deeply lobed leaves have silvery-white margins. Zones 3-7.
- *A. conjuncta* appears similar to *A. alpina*, but is larger and is hardy in zones 3-7.
- *A. ellenbeckii* is a low-growing species (~2" high) with red stems and silver-edged foliage, only hardy to zone 6.
- *A. erythropoda* – looks like a miniature version of *A. mollis* with yellow flowers, only growing 5-6" tall. It is another good choice for the rock garden, troughs or small spaces. Zones 3-7.
- *A. faroensis* is a dwarf species from Eastern Iceland that only grows a few inches tall and is hardy in zones 4-7. The cultivar 'Pumila' is only 2-3" tall, and is well suited to growing in a trough.
- *A. fulgens*, from the Pyrenees, is a low-growing, spreading species with bluish-green leaves. Zones 4-7.
- *A. sericata* 'Gold Strike' is a new introduction from Jellito, with smaller, deeply lobed leaves on 12-14" plants promoted as a ground cover.



Alchemilla erythropoda.

– Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Additional Information:

- *Alchemilla mollis* – on the Missouri Botanic Garden's Kemper Center for Home Gardening website at www.mobot.org/gardeninghelp/plantfinder/Plant.asp?code=B210
- An Evaluation Study of Alchemilla – Plant Evaluation Notes No. 24 (2004) of the Chicago Botanic Garden at www.chicagobotanic.org/downloads/planteval_notes/no24_alchemilla.pdf