

The Herbalist

By Dr. Kathy Girard, URI Master Gardener



Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*; Family Rosaceae)

Lady's Mantle is an extremely hardy ornamental perennial which grows to 18 inches in the garden. It is native to the colder areas of Great Britain and has been found up to an altitude of 3600 feet in the Scottish Highlands. The fine-haired leaves are pleated and velvety, and drops of morning dew will be held on them all day. Although it is not fragrant or flavorful, it is a beautiful foliage plant suitable for the herb or perennial garden. Yellow-green flowers are borne in clusters on fully branched stems in June and July.

Starting Lady's Mantle from seed is a slow and difficult process, although the plant may self-sow if undisturbed after blooming. Older plants may be divided after blooming by lifting the entire clump in the fall and carefully working parts of the basal rosette apart with some of the black roots attached. Replant in a shady area of the garden in average, well-drained soil.

Older writers note that the generic name, *Alchemilla*, is derived from the Arabic word, Alkemelych, which translates to alchemy. The plant itself was reported to have magical working properties although some writers indicated that the powers of the plant were related to the collected dew or "celestial water" from the leaves. Herbalists used the fresh root to make an astringent which was used on wounds to staunch bleeding.

In the Middle Ages, Lady's Mantle (once called Our Lady's Mantle) was associated with the Virgin Mary's scalloped edged cloak. It is a favorite of those who collect and grow plants named for her.