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## Urtica dioica - L.

<b>Common Name</b>	Stinging Nettle
<b>Family</b>	<b>Urticaceae</b>
<b>Synonyms</b>	Urtica galeopsifolia
<b>Known Hazards</b>	The leaves of the plants have stinging hairs, causing irritation to the skin[21, 200]. This action is neutralized by heat or by thorough drying, so the cooked leaves are perfectly safe and nutritious[200]. However, only young leaves should be used because older leaves develop gritty particles called cystoliths which act as an irritant to the kidneys[172]. Possible interference with allopathic drugs for diabetes mellitus, hypertension. Central nervous system depression drugs (e.g. morphine, alcohol) may also interact with nettle. Avoid during pregnancy [301].
<b>Habitats</b>	Waste ground, hedgerows, woods etc, preferring a rich soil and avoiding acid soils[4, 9].
<b>Range</b>	Temperate regions throughout the world, including Britain.
<b>Edibility Rating</b>	
<b>Medicinal Rating</b>	
<b>Care</b>	



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### Summary

### Physical Characteristics



Urtica dioica is a PERENNIAL growing to 1.2 m (4ft) by 1 m (3ft 3in) at a fast rate. It is not frost tender. It is in leaf 11-Mar It is in flower from May to October, and the seeds ripen from Jun to October. The flowers are dioecious (individual flowers are either male or female, but only one sex is to be found on any one plant so both male and female plants must be grown if seed is required) and are pollinated by Wind. The plant is not self-fertile. It is noted for attracting wildlife.

Suitable for: light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils. Suitable pH: acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It prefers moist soil. The plant can tolerate strong winds but not maritime exposure.

### Habitats

Woodland Garden Sunny Edge; Dappled Shade; Shady Edge; Meadow; Hedgerow;

### Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Leaves](#); [Oil](#).

Edible Uses: [Colouring](#); [Curdling agent](#); [Drink](#); [Oil](#).

Young leaves - cooked as a potherb and added to soups etc[1, 2, 9, 12, 13, 36, 183]. They can also be dried for winter use[12]. Nettles are a very valuable addition to the diet[244], they are a very nutritious food that is easily digested and is high in minerals (especially iron) and vitamins (especially A and C)[4, 201, 238]. Only use young leaves (see the notes above on toxicity) and wear stout gloves when harvesting them to prevent being stung. Cooking the leaves, or thoroughly drying them, neutralizes the sting, rendering the leaf safe to eat[4, 244]. The young shoots, harvested in the spring when 15 - 20cm long complete with the underground stem are very nice[85]. Old leaves can be laxative[5]. The plants are harvested commercially for extraction of the chlorophyll, which is used as a green colouring agent (E140) in foods and medicines[238]. A tea is made from the dried leaves, it is warming on a winters day[21, 183]. A bland flavour, it can be added as a tonic to China tea[238]. The juice of the leaves, or a decoction of the herb, can be used as a rennet substitute in curdling plant milks[183]. Nettle beer is brewed from the young shoots[200].

### Medicinal Uses

*Plants For A Future can not take any responsibility for any adverse effects from the use of plants. Always seek advice from a professional before using a plant medicinally.*

[Antiasthmatic](#); [Antidandruff](#); [Astringent](#); [Diuretic](#); [Galactagogue](#); [Haemostatic](#); [Hypoglycaemic](#); [Stings](#); [Tonic](#).

Nettles have a long history of use in the home as a herbal remedy and nutritious addition to the diet[K]. A tea made from the leaves has traditionally been used as a cleansing tonic and blood purifier so the plant is often used in the treatment of hay fever, arthritis, anaemia etc[254]. The whole plant is antiasthmatic, antidandruff, astringent, depurative, diuretic, galactagogue, haemostatic, hypoglycaemic and a stimulating tonic[4, 9, 21, 36, 165, 238]. An infusion of the plant is very valuable in stemming internal bleeding[4], it is also used to treat anaemia, excessive menstruation, haemorrhoids, arthritis, rheumatism and skin complaints, especially eczema[238]. Externally, the plant is used to treat skin complaints, arthritic pain, gout, sciatica, neuralgia, haemorrhoids, hair problems etc[238]. The fresh leaves of nettles have been rubbed or beaten onto the skin in the treatment of rheumatism etc[257]. This practice, called urtification, causes intense irritation to the skin as it is stung by the nettles. It is believed that this treatment works in two ways. Firstly, it acts as a counter-irritant, bringing more blood to the area to help remove the toxins that cause rheumatism. Secondly, the formic acid from the nettles is believed to have a beneficial effect upon the rheumatic joints. For medicinal purposes, the plant is best harvested in May or June as it is coming into flower and dried for later use[4, 238]. This species merits further study for possible uses against kidney and urinary system ailments[222]. The juice of the nettle can be used as an antidote to stings from the leaves and an infusion of the fresh leaves is healing and soothing as a lotion for burns[4]. The root has been shown to have a beneficial effect upon enlarged prostate glands[254]. A homeopathic remedy is made from the leaves[4]. It is used in the treatment of rheumatic gout, nettle rash and chickenpox, externally is applied to bruises[4]. The German Commission E Monographs, a therapeutic guide to herbal medicine, approve Urtica dioica Stinging Nettle for rheumatic ailments (internal use of leaf), irrigation therapy, for inflammatory disease of the lower urinary tract and prevention of kidney 'gravel' formation, urination difficulty from benign prostatic hyperplasia (root) (see [302] for critics of commission E).

### Other Uses

[Biomass](#); [Compost](#); [Dye](#); [Fibre](#); [Hair](#); [Liquid feed](#); [Oil](#); [Repellent](#); [Waterproofing](#).

A strong flax-like fibre is obtained from the stems[200]. Used for making string and cloth[1, 4, 6, 13, 36], it also makes a good quality paper[115]. It is harvested as the plant begins to die down in early autumn and is retted before the fibres are extracted[4, 99]. The fibre is produced in less abundance than from flax (Linum usitatissimum) and is also more difficult to extract[4]. The plant matter left over after the fibres have been extracted are a good source of biomass and have been used in the manufacture of sugar, starch, protein and ethyl alcohol[4]. An oil obtained from the seeds is used as an illuminant[4]. An essential ingredient of 'QR' herbal compost activator[32]. This is a dried and powdered mixture of several herbs that can be added to a compost heap in order to speed up bacterial activity and thus shorten the time needed to make the compost[K]. The leaves are also an excellent addition to the compost heap[12, 18, 20] and they can be soaked for 7 - 21 days in water to make a very nutritious liquid feed for plants[54]. This liquid feed is both insect repellent and a good foliar feed[14, 18, 53]. The growing plant increases the essential oil content of other nearby plants, thus making them more resistant to insect pests[18, 20, 54]. Although many different species of insects feed on nettles, flies are repelled by the plant so a bunch of freshly cut stems has been used as a repellent in food cupboards[4]. The juice of the plant, or a decoction formed by boiling the herb in a strong solution of salt, will curdle milks and thus acts as a rennet substitute[4]. This same juice, if rubbed into small seams of leaky wooden tubs, will coagulate and make the tub watertight again[4]. A hair wash is made from the infused leaves and this is used as a tonic and antidandruff treatment[172, 201]. A beautiful and permanent green dye is obtained from a decoction of the leaves and stems[4, 115]. A yellow dye is obtained from the root when boiled with alum[4, 115].

### Cultivation details

Prefers a soil rich in phosphates and nitrogen. Plants must be grown in a deep rich soil if good quality fibre is required[4, 115]. Nettles are one of the most undervalued of economic plants. They have a wide range of uses, for food, medicines, fibres etc and are also a very important plant for wildlife. There are at least 30 species of insects that feed on it and the caterpillars of several lepidoptera species are dependant upon it for food[30]. Especially when growing in rich soils, the plant can spread vigorously and is very difficult to eradicate. It is said that cutting the plant down three times a year for three years will kill it[4]. It is a good companion plant to grow in the orchard and amongst soft fruit[53, 54]. So long as it is not allowed to totally over-run the plants, it seems to improve the health of soft fruit that grows nearby and also to protect the fruit from birds, but it makes harvesting very difficult. Dioecious. Male and female plants must be grown if seed is required.

### Propagation

Seed - sow spring in a cold frame, only just covering the seed. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle, and plant them out in the summer. Division succeeds at almost any time in the growing season. Very easy, plant them straight out into their permanent positions.

### Expert comment

### Author

L.

### Botanical References

17200

### Links / References

[K] **Ken Fern** Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon**. RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement. 1956

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[2] **Hedrick, U. P.** Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World.

Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[4] **Grieve**. A Modern Herbal.

Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[5] **Mabey, R.** Food for Free.

Edible wild plants found in Britain. Fairly comprehensive, very few pictures and rather optimistic on the desirability of some of the plants.

[6] **Mabey, R.** Plants with a Purpose.

Details on some of the useful wild plants of Britain. Poor on pictures but otherwise very good.

[9] **Launert, E.** Edible and Medicinal Plants.

Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[12] **Loewenfeld, C. and Back, P.** Britain's Wild Larder.

A handy pocket guide.

[13] **Triska, Dr.** Hamlyn Encyclopaedia of Plants.

Very interesting reading, giving some details of plant uses and quite a lot of folk-lore.

[14] **Holtom, J. and Hylton, W.** Complete Guide to Herbs.

A good herbal.

[18] **Philbrick H. and Gregg R. B.** Companion Plants.

Details of beneficial and antagonistic relationships between neighbouring plants.

[20] **Riotte, L.** Companion Planting for Successful Gardening.

Fairly good.

[21] **Lust, J.** The Herb Book.

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[30] **Carter D.** Butterflies and Moths in Britain and Europe.

An excellent book on Lepidoptera, it also lists their favourite food plants.

[32] **Bruce, M. E.** Commonsense Compost Making.

Excellent little booklet dealing with how to make compost by using herbs to activate the heap. Gives full details of the herbs that are used.

[36] **The Herb Society** Herbal Review. Vol.11. 3.

A very interesting article on the stinging nettle, *Urtica dioica*, giving a lot of information on its uses. Also details on *Tanacetum parthenifolium* and *Melaleuca alternifolium*.

[53] **De. Bray, L.** The Wild Garden.

Interesting reading.

[54] **Hatfield, A. W.** How to Enjoy your Weeds.

Interesting reading.

[85] **Harrington, H. D.** Edible Native Plants of the Rocky Mountains.

A superb book. Very readable, it gives the results of the authors experiments with native edible plants.

[99] **Turner, N. J.** Plants in British Columbian Indian Technology.

Excellent and readable guide.

[115] **Johnson, C. P.** The Useful Plants of Great Britain.

Written about a hundred years ago, but still a very good guide to the useful plants of Britain.

[165] **Mills, S. Y.** The Dictionary of Modern Herbalism.

An excellent small herbal.

[172] **Schofield, J. J.** Discovering Wild Plants - Alaska, W. Canada and the Northwest.

A nice guide to some useful plants in that area.

[183] **Facciola, S.** Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants.

Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world).

[200] **Huxley, A.** The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening. 1992.

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[201] **Allardice, P.** A - Z of Companion Planting.

A well produced and very readable book.

[222] **Foster, S. & Duke, J. A.** A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. Eastern and Central N. America.

A concise book dealing with almost 500 species. A line drawing of each plant is included plus colour photographs of about 100 species. Very good as a field guide, it only gives brief details about the plants medicinal properties.

[238] **Bown, D.** Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses.

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[244] **Phillips, R. & Foy, N.** Herbs

Deals with all types of herbs including medicinal, culinary, scented and dye plants. Excellent photographs with quite good information on each plant.

[254] **Chevallier, A.** The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

[257] **Moerman, D.** Native American Ethnobotany

Very comprehensive but terse guide to the native uses of plants. Excellent bibliography, fully referenced to each plant, giving a pathway to further information. Not for the casual reader.

[301] **Karaliedde, L. and Gawarammana, I.** Traditional Herbal Medicines

A guide to the safer use of herbal medicines.

[302] **From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia** Commission E

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commission\\_E](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commission_E)

## Readers comment

Elizabeth H.

**ravenchortle** Wed May 3 2006

A few years ago I rooted stems by sticking cuttings taken in the spring in a jar of water in the window with indirect sunlight. Roots formed at the end of the cutting rather quickly. I was delayed with sticking them in a growing medium and they eventually died off, so I do know about the viability of these rooted cuttings. If I remember correctly, the roots all formed at the base of the stem, right at the cut. I tried again later in the season with older, harder stems with no success. I will try again this spring with fresh shoots.

Elizabeth H.

**Hugh Green** Sun Jun 4 2006

In Glasgow by the River Kelvin we have noticed nettles with stunted growth and white leaves and some purple discolouration. Does anyone know what causes this?

Elizabeth H.

**Paul** Wed Aug 30 2006

I suffer from gout and a friend of mine told me to wip the affected area with stinging nettles...i thought this was a wind up, but i thought i'd give it a go anyway...to my utter amazement after a few hours the gout subsided, i tried it again when i had gout in my foot, it worked yet again..

Elizabeth H.

**Lynnette** Sat Oct 14 2006

Freeze dried Stinging Nettle capsules are a wonderful, fast acting and with no side effects for asthma and hayfever. It acts very quickly, within a few minutes, to relieve itchy watery eyes and sneezing, stuffy noses. At last a no druggy feeling remedy for hayfever!

Elizabeth H.

**P.L.H.** Wed Oct 18 2006

I have lived in back pain for nearly ten years now, and seen several various doctors to no avail. My hips are out of place due to a fall and I live with constant muscle spasms. I tried rubbing on fresh stinging nettle and to my surprise it produces a great numbing effect and gives great relief for hours. I use to hate this plant, but now with winter quickly approaching I dread seeing it die out, and have no idea how to save it for the coming months. No doctor, chiropractor, or physical therapist has given me as much relief as this plant. I really don't care if people think this is crazy, because I know how hard it is to live in a constant state of pain. Oct 17, 06

Elizabeth H.

**keith wheeler** Fri Jan 19 2007

GOOD BUT DO ME A FAVOUR BY INCLUDING MY BOOK AS A REFERENCE THE FIRST BOOK THAT TAKES A SCIENTIFIC VIEW OF THE NETTLE URTICA DIOICA AND OTHER NETTLES OF THE WORLD. PUBLISHED BY TRAFFORD PUBLISHING A NATURAL HISTORY OF NETTLES KEITH G.R. WHEELER ISBN 1- 4120-2694 - 6 VIEW PAGES ON TRAFFORD.COM MY E-MAIL keithwheeler@perennis.fsnet.co.uk Read the book without getting stung 11

Elizabeth H.

**Peter Van der Ven** Sun Mar 4 2007

Are there any known risks to exposure of large areas of the body to nettle stings or to their repeated use? I.e., can you "over do it," when treating a painful area or if you have several painful areas? Thank you.

Elizabeth H.

**Ken Fern, Plants for a Future** Mon Mar 5 2007

I can find no records of anyone 'overdosing' on urtication. You cannot 'over do it' when treating a single joint or painful area such as the knuckles of the hand, and I cannot see that there could be a problem when treating a larger area of the body. The two constituents of the nettle sting that are believed to be responsible for the pain relief are histamine and serotonin. The doses received from urtication are very small. I think it is more a matter of how much discomfort you are able to tolerate as you apply the stings. I believe that it is also true to say that, whilst urtication can be very effective in the short-term, in the long-term actually eating the nettles is going to have a more beneficial effect. The stinging hairs are completely neutralised by cooking and steamed leaves make an excellent and very nutritious greens that is packed full of vitamins, minerals and other beneficial constituents. These nutrients help to remove toxins from the joints and, over a period of time, can bring about a real improvement in conditions such as arthritis.

Elizabeth H.

**James Witt** Sat May 12 2007

I had no idea there were so many uses to this plant that I have come across so many times when I used to work in the woods and have felt their stings more times than I really cared too. Well me and my friend just bought some wooded land in Washington State and we now have 15 acres of these plants. He told me they were a usable plant but didn't know exactly what it was. So know how does one harvest these plants and where would a person find a buyer for them. Hope somebody can give a lead for this. Thanks for any response for any help I can get.

Elizabeth H.

**Thu** Aug 31 2006

cut them back then till the yard several times then re-seed the grass and they will go away

Elizabeth H.

**P.L.H.** Wed Oct 18 2006

I have lived in back pain for nearly ten years now, and seen several various doctors to no avail. My hips are out of place due to a fall and I live with constant muscle spasms. I tried rubbing on fresh stinging nettle and to my surprise it produces a great numbing effect and gives great relief for hours. I use to hate this plant, but now with winter quickly approaching I dread seeing it die out, and have no idea how to save it for the coming months. No doctor, chiropractor, or physical therapist has given me as much relief as this plant. I really don't care if people think this is crazy, because I know how hard it is to live in a constant state of pain.

Elizabeth H.

**nicole** Thu Apr 5 2007

i have done some research and find that nettle is good for hair growth along rosemary is there any other know herb that the two mix well with for hair growth thanx nicole

Elizabeth H.

**Sat** Aug 4 2007

Thankyou for this - up until today I had no idea what I was going to do with all the "weeds" in my side yard - now i will dry them and cook them - what a great resource!

Elizabeth H.

**Christine** Tue Jan 15 2008

How do you make fibre from stinging nettle stems? I know you soak them but what then? Can anyone help?

Elizabeth H.

**Boniface** Mon Jan 28 2008

Can you please tell me how stinging nettle can be used to treat a chronic sneezing problem. Please give some elaborate dosage whether of leaves or roots. Thank you. I am in the tropics, KENYA.

Elizabeth H.

**Maria Wells -Burr** Tue Apr 15 2008

Thank you for these very informative facts about Stinging Nettles. Some of beneficial properties of this much under-rated weed were known to me before hand. I have used Stinging Nettle infusion as a Hair Tonic for quite some time and I strongly believe that it is very good for your scalp as well as for your hair. The recipe for the Stinging Nettle Infusion is publicized with a step-by-step photographic guide on my website, listed below. I have created various photographic recipes on this site... I look forward to your visit... Kind regards, Maria

Elizabeth H.

**Giovanni** Fri Apr 25 2008

The powerful effect of stinging nettles certainly gives me the idea we have much to learn and discover. I noticed that when I've been stung by it the area tends to go white, which suggests to me that the sting acts as a vasoconstrictor or in any case stems blood flow in that area. This in turn suggests to me that it might be a useful remedy or component for persons with psoriasis of the scalp.... I wonder whether you would actually sting the area or simply brew up tea and rinse your hair. This ties up with it's common use for dandruff I suppose. Any comments or knowledge in this sphere, as well as its use in ancient times would be most welcome. Thanks Gio (in Rome, Italy).

Elizabeth H.

**Syed Taffazull Hussain** Fri Jun 20 2008

It is said that Rennet like substance is made by boiling Urtica leaves in strong salt solution. Is urtica Rennet an Enzyme? Is it heat stable?

Elizabeth H.

**Ian liston** Wed Jul 9 2008

does nettle water used as a plant fertiliser contain appreciable amount of potash? I am hoping to use it as a tomato feed. Ian L, Telford

Elizabeth H.

**Patty Fiorella** Tue Jul 15 2008

I blanche top 3-4 inches gathered in early spring, stems and all. Rinse in cold water, drain/lightly squeeze out excess. Place about 8 ounces in freezer Zip-Loc bags, pounding out air and flattening package. Freeze. I have frozen packages from 1994 that still do not have freezer burn and taste as good as fresh. I substitute in any recipe calling for spinach, pizza being a favorite.

Elizabeth H.

**Jack** Sun Oct 5 2008

In response to the cordage question see [www.naturessecretlarder.co.uk](http://www.naturessecretlarder.co.uk) as the guy who runs the site, Kris Miners has a tutorial on the subject.

[Natures Secret Larder](#) Wild Food, secret uses, bushcraft, plants and trees.

Elizabeth H.

**John** Fri Oct 17 2008

I have Lyme Disease and found that light urtication (so that it begins to itch where the nettle touched) relived most of my pain. I found that a light sting to the hand relives pain in my legs too. I have gotten more relief from urtication than from all the medicines and other herbs I have taken.

Elizabeth H.

**Chris Sames** Sat Sep 5 2009

I have recently started adding nettles to the Irish potato dish "champ" I read somewhere that champ with added nettles was fed to children in the late afternoon (teatime), now I have read more on the subject I am amazed that it is not a major part of our European diet. Chris France

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