



Willow Moon Herbals

Stinging Nettles

Latin binomial: *Urtica dioica*

Description: Stinging nettles ~ the word 'nettle' is a derivative of the Anglo-Saxon word for needle ~ referring to the pin-pricking hairs that cover the leaves and stalks. Stinging nettles are a dioecious herbaceous perennial, growing to 1-2m tall in the summer and dying down to the ground in winter. It has very distinctively yellow, widely spreading roots, rhizomes and stolons. The soft green leaves are borne oppositely on an erect wiry green stem. The leaves and stems are very hairy with non-stinging hairs and also bear many stinging hairs (trichomes), whose tips come off when touched, transforming the hair into a needle that will inject several chemicals: acetylcholine, histamine, 5-HT or serotonin, and possibly formic acid. This mixture of chemical compounds cause a sting or paresthesia from which the species derives its common name, as well as the colloquial names burn nettle, burn weed, burn hazel. This sting can last from as long as a week to only a few minutes.



Uses: As Old English *Stiðe*, nettle is one of the nine plants invoked in the pagan Anglo-Saxon Nine Herbs Charm, recorded in the 10th century. Nettle is believed to be a galactagogue (stimulates milk production) and a clinical trial has shown that the juice is diuretic in patients with congestive heart failure.



Urtication, or flogging with nettles, is the process of deliberately applying stinging nettles to the skin in order to provoke inflammation. An agent thus used is known as a rubefacient (i.e. something that causes redness). This is done as a folk remedy for rheumatism, as it provides temporary relief from pain. Extracts can be used to treat arthritis, anemia, hay fever, kidney problems, and pain. Nettle leaf is an herb that has a long tradition of use as

an adjunct remedy in the treatment of arthritis in Germany. Nettle leaf extract contains active compounds that reduce $TNF-\alpha$ and other inflammatory cytokines.

Nettle is used in hair shampoos to control dandruff, and is said to make hair more glossy, which is why some farmers include a handful of nettles with cattle feed. It is also thought nettles can ease eczema.

Fresh nettle is used in folk remedies to stop all types of bleeding, due to its high Vitamin K content. Meanwhile, when the herb is dried, the Vitamin K is practically non-existent. Cooking, crushing or chopping disables the stinging hairs. Stinging nettle leaves are high in nutrients, and the leaves can be mixed with other ingredients to create a soup rich in calcium and iron. Some say that nettles has the most chlorophyll of any plant on the planet. Nettle soup is a good source of nutrients for people who lack meat or fruit in their diets. The young leaves are edible and make a very good pot-herb. The leaves are also dried and may then be used to make a tisane, as can also be done with the nettle's flowers.



Sources: Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places (S. Brill); Plants For A Future website; The Green Pharmacy (J. Duke); Herbal Rituals (J. Berger); Wikipedia;

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