



Plants For A Future

*Edible, medicinal and useful plants
for a healthier world*

[Full Contact Details](#)

 Registered Charity No.
1057719

[Home page](#)
[Back to main Search Page](#)

Database Name:

Urtica dioica - L.

Keyword:

Stinging Nettle

[Search Page](#)
[Index of Latin Names](#)
[Index of Common Name](#)
[Families](#)
[US Database](#)
[Download](#)

Plants

[Edible Uses](#)
[Medicinal Uses](#)
[Other Uses](#)
[Top 20 Plants](#)

Gardening

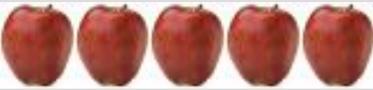
[Woodland Gardening](#)
[Vegan Organics](#)
[Perennial Plants](#)
[Habitat](#)

Links

[New Links](#)
[Old Links Page](#)
[Plant Suppliers](#)
[Databases](#)
[News Groups and
mailing lists](#)
[UK Organizations](#)

About Us

[The Book](#)
[Membership](#)
[Cornwall Site](#)

Author	L.	Botanical references	17, 200
Family	Urticaceae	Genus	Urtica
Synonyms			
Known Hazards	 <p>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].</p>		
Range	Temperate regions throughout the world, including Britain.		
Habitat	Waste ground, hedgerows, woods etc, preferring a rich soil and avoiding acid soils[4, 9].		
Edibility Rating	 (1-5)	5 Medicinal Rating	 (1-5)

Physical Characteristics



Perennial growing to 1.2m by 1m at a fast rate.

It is hardy to zone 0 and is not frost tender. It is in leaf from March to November, in flower from May to October, and the seeds ripen from June 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.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in

[Devon Site](#)
[Other Leaflets](#)

[Mailing list](#)
[Yahoo List](#)



Help keep this site running by making a donation with paypal.

semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It requires 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](#).

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

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

[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].

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.

Links

This plant is also mentioned in the following PFAF articles: [Fiber Plants](#), [Woodland Garden Plants](#), [Alternative Edible Leaves](#).

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 Oxford University Press 1951

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.* Dover Publications 1972 ISBN 0-486-20459-6

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

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal.* Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9

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

[5] **Mabey. R.** *Food for Free.* Collins 1974 ISBN 0-00-219060-5

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.* Fontana 1979 ISBN 0-00-635555-2

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

[9] **Launert. E.** *Edible and Medicinal Plants.* Hamlyn 1981 ISBN 0-600-37216-2

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.* David and Charles 0 ISBN 0-7153-7971-2

A handy pocket guide.

[13] **Triska. Dr.** *Hamlyn Encyclopaedia of Plants.* Hamlyn 1975 ISBN 0-600-33545-3

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.* Rodale Press 1979 ISBN 0-87857-262-7

A good herbal.

[17] **Clapham, Tootin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles.* Cambridge University Press 1962

A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.

[18] **Philbrick H. and Gregg R. B.** *Companion Plants.* Watkins 1979

Details of beneficial and antagonistic relationships between neighbouring plants.

[20] **Riotte. L.** *Companion Planting for Successful Gardening.* Garden Way, Vermont, USA. 1978 ISBN 0-88266-064-0

Fairly good.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book.* Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[30] **Carter D.** *Butterflies and Moths in Britain and Europe.* Pan 1982 ISBN 0-330-26642-x

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

[32] **Bruce. M. E.** *Commonsense Compost Making.* Faber 1977 ISBN 0-571-09990-4

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.* The Herb Society 1986 ISBN 0264-9853

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.* 0

Interesting reading.

[54] **Hatfield. A. W.** *How to Enjoy your Weeds.* Frederick Muller Ltd 1977 ISBN 0-584-10141-4

Interesting reading.

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

University of New Mexico Press 1967 ISBN 0-8623-0343-9

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.* British Columbia Provincial Museum 1979 ISBN 0-7718-8117-7

Excellent and readable guide.

[115] **Johnson. C. P.** *The Useful Plants of Great Britain.* 0

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.* 0

An excellent small herbal.

[172] **Schofield. J. J.** *Discovering Wild Plants - Alaska, W. Canada and the Northwest.* 0

A nice guide to some useful plants in that area.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants*. Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9

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. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

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*. Cassell Publishers Ltd. 1993 ISBN 0-304-34324-2

A well produced and very readable book.

[222] **Foster. S. & Duke. J. A.** *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. Eastern and Central N. America*. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1990 ISBN 0395467225

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*. Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31

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* Pan Books Ltd. London. 1990 ISBN 0-330-30725-8

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* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

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

[257] **Moerman. D.** *Native American Ethnobotany* Timber Press. Oregon. 1998 ISBN 0-88192-453-9

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.

Readers Comments

Plant Rennet

Rich Sat Apr 15 16:59:27 2000

According to [VegSoc](#), in the past, fig leaves, melon, wild thistle and safflower have all supplied plant rennets for cheese making.

[agsieve](#) also has information about another plant source, using the juice

from the plant as a coagulant.

Urtica dioica

Kavagi patrick Tue May 10 08:46:40 2005

Studies to be carried out for comparison purposes of the contents of minerals and vitamins in different portions of the plant that is leaves, stems, and the roots

Urtica dioica

BAC6263@WALMARTCONNECT.COM Thu Mar 9 2006

I HAVE NETTLES ALL OVER MY YARD, I HAVE CUT AND CUT BUT THEY ARE STILL THERE PLEASE TELL ME HOW TO KILL THEM, HOPEFULLY WITHOUT KILLING MY ENTIRE YARD THANKS

Urtica dioica

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 not 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.

Urtica dioica

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 discoloration. Does anyone know what causes this?

Urtica dioica

Paul Wed Aug 30 2006

I suffer from gout and a friend of mine told me to wipe 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..

Urtica dioica

Thu Aug 31 2006

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

Urtica dioica

tom_claybourn@hotmail.co.uk Thu Oct 12 2006

I am writing a paper on nettle growth in relation to light, and am finding it difficult to find information on how they fare in soil with little and organic matter. Any citations would be a great help.

Urtica dioica

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!

Urtica dioica

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.

Urtica dioica

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

Urtica dioica

keith wheeler Fri Jan 19 2007

GOOD BUT DO ME A FAVOUR BY INCLUDING MY BOOK AS A REFENCE 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 stung11

Urtica dioica

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.

Urtica dioica

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-tern, 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.

Urtica dioica

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

Urtica dioica

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 haverest 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.

Urtica dioica

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!

Add a comment/link:

Enter your comment about this page here.

Note: please don't expect a quick reply to comments/questions posted here? We don't have the resources to answer questions ourselves. You can ask questions on our [mailing list](#).

Subject: Urtica dioica

Links

To add a link to another website with useful info add the details here.

Name of Site:

URL for Site:

Details:

Your Name:

email address:

Email addressed added here will not be displayed on the website or be passed to third parties.

They are used incase we need to get in touch with you.

To prevent spam all comments are moderated, comments with spam or swearing are blocked.

Discussion Monitor

To have posts to this page mailed to you enter your email address here:

email address:

(Your email address will not appear on the webpage or be passed on to third parties).

All the information contained in these pages is [Copyright](#) (C) Plants For A Future, 1996-2003. Last modified: June 2004 (may well have been modified since!)

Plants For A Future is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales. Charity No. 1057719, Company No. 3204567,

HTML version prepared by Rich Morris - [Home Page](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons License](#). You can copy, distribute, display this works but: Attribution is required, its for Non-Commercial purposes, and it's Share Alike (GNUish/copyleft) i.e. has an identical license. We also ask that you let us know (webmaster@pfaf.org) if you link to, redistribute, make a derived work or do anything groovy

with this information.