

HERB - Stinging Nettle

by Karen Unruh

Stinging Nettle, *Urtica dioica*, is very nourishing to the body. If you are looking for a plant to improve your nutrition, look to nettles, especially in the spring when the plant is young and we are often feeling the need of a spring tonic. Nettles have high levels of chlorophyll and protein as well as most minerals and vitamins--a true nutritional treasure. The B vitamins heal our nerves and calm emotions. The minerals purify the blood and cleanse the lymph, thus all cells now gain easy access to the nutrients they need. Gentle, yet powerful enough to heal damaged tissue--increasing the ease and energy in the operation of the circulatory, immune, endocrine, nervous, digestive and urinary systems. Thus nettles are a cherished friend of the tired teenage young woman, the breast-feeding new mother, the crampy multi-tasking mom, the menopausal wise woman, with nutrients for both men and women to nourish all systems of the body.

Nettles also nourish our skin and hair. An herbalist who I met at my herbal course, Rosemary Gladstar, one of the first health food store owners in California in the hippie 70s, uses a nettle rinse on her thick glossy vibrant dark hair and drinks the nettle infusion, one cup 3-4 times a week for the healthiest hair and skin that I have seen. I have included a recipe for a hair lotion to use after washing your hair--it makes my hair feel very clean, and I also use Rosemary's recipe to make a skin moisturizer, which I have shared with a few of you.

So it's soon time to head out and look for some nettles. Nettles are identified by a deeply grooved stem, transparent short hairs on stalks and leaf undersides and green opposed serrated leaves, like a giant mint. Make sure you have some gloves, so that you don't get stung by the small hairs trying discreetly to hide. And if you do get stung, look around where the nettles are to see some Curled Dock, *Rumex crispus* – pick a leaf or two, chew it up so it is nice and moist and pat the minced dock on the nettle stings. The stinging disappears! Of course, if you are a person plagued with rheumatism or arthritis, and you are at your wits' end, you could rub nettles into the affected area. You may experience the circulation increase substantially and the area can be healed! Don Ollsin, my herbal teacher has seen this in action and says it is quite amazing. I sure would want to know the dock was close by if I had to ever try this!!

So, in a few weeks, find a patch of nettles where the moist soils are and appreciate their spring beauty. Since this is the time when nutrients are highest, clip the top 4 to 5 inches of leaves and remember where you found them so you can return weekly through the spring. Gather leaves for making infusions and using in your cooking as you would cooked spinach. A friend worth knowing, worth bringing home to dinner!



Nettle sprouts are starting at the bottom of the old stems. Last year's leaves and stem show fine stinging hairs.

Recipes Using Stinging Nettles

A SIMPLE DINNER IDEA

Cook 4 cups of nettle tops in water, covered for 10-15 minutes. Drain well, then blend well with 2 cloves of chopped garlic and 1/2 cup sour cream or yogurt. Reheat gently. Serve over rice, toast, noodles or vegetables.

NETTLE SESAME SALT

A delicious low-salt seasoning, adding nettles to your menu.

1 cup sesame seeds
1/4 cup dried nettle

Roast sesame seeds in a heavy pan over medium heat. Stir constantly to prevent scorching. When browned to your liking, pour into blender, or use a mortar and pestle, add dried nettle leaves and a pinch of salt. Grind fairly fine.

NETTLE INFUSION

Prepare a nettle infusion by pouring 4 cups of boiling water over 4 cups fresh nettle or 1/2 cup dried nettle and let steep off the heat in the closed container for 4 hours. Canning jars work well as they take boiling water without breaking. Strain out plant material. Dosage for drinking is one cup a day. Store in the refrigerator.

NETTLE HAIR LOTION

4 cups fresh nettle or
1/2 cup dried nettle
4 cups water
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
3 drops rosemary or lavender essential oil

Prepare a nettle infusion as described above. Add vinegar and essential oil to the infusion for this hair lotion. Keep in the refrigerator between uses. To use: Pour a handful of nettle lotion on wet hair after shampooing. Rub in well. For best results, don't rinse.