

Herb profile



# Nettles, beyond the sting

Terry Willard, CIH, PhD

Last summer a visitor to our herb farm wondered why we let the weed stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) grow liberally. When it “stung” him, he suggested we pull it out. I explained that we could never do without the herb stinging nettle because it is a gentle and slow-acting cleanser.

Nettle leaf is one of the safest of cleansing herbs, especially in the treatment of chronic disorders that require long-term treatment. Nettle can be eaten wilted or cooked and drunk in generous amounts as herbal tea. Consumed in one of these ways, nettle gently stimulates the lymphatic system, seeming to enhance the excretion of wastes through the kidneys. For this reason nettle is highly reputed as a spring tonic and in the treatment of chronic metabolic disorders such as diabetes, obesity, and syndrome X, a precursor to diabetes.

As a nutritive agent, nettle is valued in the treatment of anemia, especially in women. As nettle is very high in vitamin C, it helps the absorption of iron. For this reason, nettle is a highly valued beverage during pregnancy and post partum to enhance milk production.

Nettle also helps the utilization of digested proteins, while simultaneously preventing them from being discharged through the body as waste products.

## Arrests arthritis

Nettle’s action is similar to dandelion leaf, promoting the elimination of uric acid from joints with a gentle, alkaliniz-



“The high calcium and magnesium count in nettle helps rebuild bone.”

ing diuretic activity. Its use is indicated in most types of joint diseases and doubly so in degenerative conditions.

Not only does nettle have the ability to arrest inflammation and enhance the excretion of wastes, its high nutrient content, especially the minerals calcium and magnesium, aids in bone rebuilding.

## Use it topically

For topical use, the whole nettle plant is picked fresh and wrapped around arthritic joints. The subsequent rash with its profound stinging property will eventually leave the treated joint very much relieved. No observed side effects have been reported, except a

## Dosage data

- Nettle can be harvested and eaten in soups as a spinach-like green.
- Dried nettle leaves can be steeped as a tea (drink a maximum of 4 cups or 1 litre daily).
- The dosage of leaf tincture is 20 to 60 drops twice daily.
- The dosage for freeze-dried leaf capsules is usually 400 mg twice daily or as needed.

transient urticarial (hive-like) rash.

In a 2002 German, open multi-centre clinical trial for rheumatoid arthritis, daily dosages of 50 grams of nettle leaf soup were compared to therapy with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory

drugs (like acetylsalicylic acid or Aspirin). The soup demonstrated a similar reduction in pain and immobility, with excellent tolerability.

### Soothes tummy troubles

Nettle leaf is also an exceptionally useful plant to correct gastrointestinal symptoms such as low stomach acid with sour burping and nausea, as well as chronic diarrhea and mucous colitis.

Similarly, the ability to stop bleeding demonstrated by both nettle leaf and root make it useful in infectious diarrheas, bloody diarrheas, and bleeding hemorrhoids. Note that, because it is slow acting, nettle cannot be considered an emergency remedy.

### Stops spring sneezes and much more

In the treatment of hayfever, the freeze-dried encapsulated herb is generally thought to be best. Take two capsules every 5 to 15 minutes until symptoms have diminished. Nettle tea also provides relief from hay fever for many people.

More recently, the root has undergone a significant degree of investigation in the treatment of enlarged prostate. A combined analysis of its traditional uses and demonstrated activities in clinical trials suggests that nettle root is a good pelvic decongestant, justifying its use in any condition that is affected by such a state, including hemorrhoids, passive menstrual problems, and uterine fibroids.

### You can even weave with nettle

We can't talk about nettles without mentioning that its fibres were

traditionally used for linens in Scotland, and during the Second World War, the Third Reich used the fibre in the manufacture of German uniforms.

We've never woven with nettle fibre, but when we cut nettles down on the farm, we use all of its parts: root and leaf. Nettles are a useful and medicinal botanical. **a**

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