



Stinging Nettles: worth foraging!

Until recently...before I started my research and decided to offer herbal advice and remedies...to me, nettles have always been a little like willow bark — something I've gone through life vaguely knowing was truly medicinal, yet I'd never really bothered to get around to picking and using. My Oma called it "Brennesseln" and my Opa used to threaten to spank me with it when I stepped out of line, but I always knew he was playfully joking; he never spanked me!

Now every year, my husband, Jim, and I begin our foraging near the middle of March in search of the "Weed That Bites" and continue through the summer to also harvest the seeds once they are formed.

Nettles are fairly easy to find here in the Pacific Northwest and just hiking through the foothills around our farmstead we wild harvest quite a bit! I am always pleasantly surprised to see nettles all along the path up to the top of the mountain we hike up, knowing that what most people call weeds is really a super-food in hiding! The nettles can range anywhere from 20-40% in protein depending on the growing environment, and the leaves also contain high levels of vitamins A and C, fiber and iron. So not only can they be used medicinally, nettles can also be used as a food source. They can be cooked like spinach, put into soups, and new growth (before the stinging parts mature) can be safely picked and eaten fresh in salads.

Now to what the leaves of nettles can do for you medicinally. Nettle herbal tea is nutritious, full of iron, and is helpful during pregnancy in maintaining iron at a healthy level. It is also a galactagogue (a substance that increases milk production), and is therefore useful where this is a problem, either in animals or humans. The juice can be taken as a diuretic for congestive heart failure patients. Extracts can be used for arthritis, hay fever, anemia, kidney problems and pain. Externally, Urtication (flogging with nettles) is a process of deliberately stinging the skin to create redness. This is done to provide pain relief from rheumatism. Fresh nettle can stop bleeding when it is applied to a fresh wound. The herb contains a lot of vitamin K which aids clotting.

Medical Uses

How do I Identify Stinging Nettle?

Fortunately, stinging nettle has a distinctive look to it. The leaves and stem are vibrant green and pubescent, sometimes with a hint of purple. As the nettle grows, the strongly serrated margins or edges of the leaves become more evident. Each leaf has a twin on the opposite side of the erect central stem and they're arranged such that one pair is in the 12 and 6 o'clock positions. The next set down is slightly larger and is at 3 and 9 o'clock. The next set down is even larger and back at 12 and 6 o'clock, and so on. The leaves have a characteristic heart shape to them with a small stem attaching the cleft or top of the heart

(Disclaimer: As with anything medically related, natural or otherwise, it is best to consult a physician. Home remedies do not replace a physician's care or prescribed medication. It is to be understood that such information in this magazine be used with your own discretion while recognizing the historical and educational benefits of holistic information).





to the central stem. The base or point of the heart aims away from the central stem.

By late spring, the nettles are 3 to 6+ feet high, the largest leaves are upwards of 7 inches long and they are flowering lovely whitish/greenish inflorescences or clusters. These clusters will soon go to seed and become slightly brown. And as late summer turns to autumn, the leaves will wither and fall and the stems will turn from green to brown to whitish/gray as they overwinter. The bare stalks may decompose completely before new leaves emerge from the underground rhizomes or they may remain to oversee the beginning of the next generation of foliage.

If you are still unsure whether a plant is indeed a stinging nettle, you can opt to touch it and see what happens. If

you feel a sting/slight burning feeling and possibly even a small welt which may arise, then you have confirmation of the plant's identity! If not, then perhaps you could consult a field guide.

You may harvest nettles from the time the new leaves emerge from the ground until late fall after the flowers have gone to seed, but before the rains begin to rot the stems (while they still maintain their green color and have leaves attached). It all depends upon your goal. If you would like to use nettles for food or tea, then harvest them before they flower. Fortunately, individual plants will often be at different reproductive stages depending on their location. So, look around and you can usually find some that you can still harvest where others are no longer a viable harvest.

Harvest Season

What part do I harvest?

I harvest the tender tops (usually 4-6 leaves or 2-3 leaf sets). There are a number of species of moth and butterfly larvae that feed on nettles. Check the terminal (top) bud for signs of little six legged creatures before harvesting. It just takes a quick glance to notice that the tips or leaves have been chewed on, are slightly blackened or there is bug poop (waste material from plant-eating insects) visible. If the nettles are very young, then I only harvest the top bud and first leaf set. Harvesting the terminal (top) bud will stimulate lateral bud growth causing the plant to become bushier and allowing you to harvest continually from the same plant all summer long.



Preparing and Preserving Leaves:

To prepare and prep the leaves, trim from stems and carefully lay them out to dehydrate. Once they are dehydrated, you can cut and sift them for storage or to make a tincture. The final yield is usually about 15% of the total weight that is harvested. The total time including harvesting is about 12

hours from start to finish for a 2lb, yield of cut and sifted nettle leaves (a bit longer if using the sun to dry and dehydrate).

That is your standard prep when dealing with nettles. Is it worth it? You bet. There is no shortage of information about the benefits of *Urtica dioica*, the common stinging nettle. They are unusually high in protein for a green plant. As mentioned, nettles are also very high in vitamin C and A, iron, fiber and a bunch of other goodies. They've often been called a "super food" for this reason.

How do I harvest Stinging Nettle without getting stung?

The easy answer is to use scissors and wear long sleeves, long pants and gloves. But it's much more interesting to harvest nettles when you understand how the stinging process works and learn how to handle them without getting stung. When looking at a stinging nettle, you can see little hairs on the stem and leaves. These hairs are hollow and when they get under your skin, the tips break off and allow the formic acid (among other things) under your skin. Now I don't know if every hair is hollow or if every hollow hair has acid associated with it. I do know that sometimes even the lightest touch will get you stung and sometimes it takes some effort to get stung. The key is that the hairs on the leaves all aim from the cleft or top of the leaf to the point or bottom of the leaf. If you run your finger from cleft to point, you will not get stung. If you run your finger from the pointy end up toward the cleft and central stem, chances are excellent you will get stung. It's as simple as that. So now after reading this tid-bit of info, you can go out and impress your family and friends while harvesting nettle leaves without getting stung. At least that is the theory!

Let's imagine you want to harvest some nettles, and you have your scissors, but forgot your gloves (something I DO NOT recommend). No problem, because you know the secret (or you pull your sleeves down over your fingers!). All you need to do is cut the portion you need, hover your fingers above and below the leaf, then pinch it. Ta-Da, no sting, because you know the hairs don't point straight out, they angle down the leaf. All you've done is press them flat against the leaf where they cannot poke you. Now you can place the nettle in your

Rules of Foraging

For those of you who want to forage for your own nettles, here are 10 things to consider:

1. Do you need it? Wild harvest with a purpose or plan in mind, not just for the fun of it.
2. Harvest only as much as you will use and process it as soon as possible (don't waste it).
3. 1 in 20 rule. It is ok to harvest a plant if there are 20 others available to maintain the population.
4. Leave what is known as the Grandmother. Allow the biggest and best plants to remain so they can continue to propagate the healthiest population.
5. Leave damaged plants or plants with "residents or tenants." Select quality material for your food and medicine. If a critter makes its home there, choose another.
6. Harvest 1/3 or less of an individual plant (leave some roots) so it can continue to survive and thrive.
7. Harvest with a clean cut so the plant will heal well and continue to survive and thrive.
8. Avoid polluted areas.
9. Be appreciative and bring a positive attitude to your harvest.
10. Never put anything in your mouth unless you are 100% sure it is safe to ingest.





collecting bag and continue harvesting. If you've forgotten your scissors, you can harvest leaf by leaf, but it does extend your harvest time. If you choose to go this route, be extra careful; I speak from experience! No matter how much experience you have, you will experience some stinging. When you select your leaf and pinch it, look at the location of the nearby leaves before you pull it from the stem. Beware the smaller upper leaves that dangle down and zap the top of your hand. And be mindful of the larger lower leaves that sneak out and get you on the wrist as you're watching out for those wily upper leaves. Stinging nettle is a plant that demands respect, so be sure to do so.

What do I do if I get stung by a Stinging Nettle?

Plantain is one of the many potential natural remedies for a stinging nettle sting. It works for me every time! Getting stung is a bit of a pain (no pun intended) but not a very big deal. And it's certainly not enough of a negative to keep me from harvesting and enjoying these amazing plants. I rarely get stung (I am kidding!), but when I do there are a few natural remedies nearby that I like to use. You'll find that different remedies work for different people, so you may have to try a few to find what works for you. Some swear that mud does the trick for them, but it doesn't do a thing for me except get me dirty. My #1 go-to plant to stop the sting is Plantain. Simply pick a couple of fresh leaves (usually growing close to where you are harvesting), put them in your mouth and chew (making a spit poultice) till it's wet and yucky, then rub it on and the sting is eliminated. Others crush and apply Yellow Dock leaves or rub the welt/sting with the spores on the under side of Sword Fern leaves. And, if you're so inclined, you can smash some of the stems with a rock and apply the juice from the plant that stung you or from its roots. If you're close to home, you can apply aloe vera gel, make and apply a paste of baking soda and water, apple cider vinegar, Desitin (diaper rash cream), tooth paste, etc. I encourage you not only to research (field guide or online) the plant remedies listed above, but go outside and look around to make sure you can identify them in the field where you'll actually be when you need them.



Mountain Maus Remedies

Patricia 'Maus' Delgado is a wife, mother and grandmother. She has always had a love of plants and gardening, and in the fall of 2014 she had a desire to provide family members with an alternative to pharmaceuticals and simply asked God for direction. She began learning and studying about various plants and natural remedies that have been lost over time and the Lord increased her knowledge and love for not only plants, but in being a vessel to help others with her knowledge of plants and their medicinal properties. Although it started with a desire to help out family, a business blossomed and she is now a Master Herbal Practitioner and is proud to say that the business, Mountain Maus Remedies, was born out of the thankfulness and awe for the many plants and all their healing properties that were so amazingly created, and lovingly given to all of us from God Himself! (Genesis 1:29). For more information visit <http://www.mountainmausremedies.com>