

## Nettles, *Urtica dioica*, Urticariaceae family

Sarah Heany

"I use a lot of nettle, along with the raspberry. It is such a good general tonic for anemia and other vit/min deficiencies that it really helps the mothers' overall health. Nettle is an important ingredient in many of the blends that I use a lot. It is not a strong medicinal, but is a powerful support herb. It also improves clotting factor." – Lorri Carr, CPM

### ***Urtica dioica***

Uro means 'urine' in Greek. Nettle is good for the urinary system and strengthens the kidneys.<sup>8</sup>  
Uro means 'I burn' in Latin.<sup>2</sup> Nettles have many little hairs on the leaves and stalks that cause skin irritation when contact is made.

Di-oikos means two houses in Greek. The masculine and feminine flowers are separate on the nettle plant.<sup>8</sup>

### **Other names:**

English- Stinging nettle, Wild spinach, Devil leaf

Chinese- Gsieh-tzu-ts'ao<sup>8</sup>

French- Ortie, Grande ortie<sup>8</sup>

German- Brennesselkraut, Kleine Brennessel<sup>8</sup>

Native American- Anonhasquara<sup>8</sup>

Pakistani- Bichu, Chicru<sup>8</sup>

Russian- Krapiva<sup>8</sup>

### **Folklore and History:**

Nettle fibers have been used for perhaps as long as 8,000 years. Ropes, nets, thread and fabrics have been made of this plant.<sup>1,8</sup> Susan Weed remarks that, thread woven from this herb is fifty times stronger than cotton.<sup>8</sup>

The aerial parts have been used as a green dye and the roots were used to make a yellow dye.<sup>8</sup>

It has been used as animal feed, as can be noted from this 1830 quote, "...cows fed on it give much milk and yellow butter. Makes horses smart and frisky. Stimulates fowls to lay many eggs." –



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### Rafinesque

It was used to treat gout, rheumatism and poisonous snake and insect bites in ancient Greece and Rome. <sup>1</sup>

Native American women used it as a pregnancy tonic and to help stop hemorrhage during childbirth. <sup>1</sup>



### Parts used:

Aerial<sup>4,8</sup>- as a 'whacker' for rubefacient effect, as a green dye, as a hair rinse, as an insecticide  
Leaves<sup>8</sup> for food, teas, tinctures  
Stem<sup>8</sup> for fibers in making thread, cord or rope  
Root<sup>8</sup> for yellow dye, as a hair/scalp rinse

### Identification:

Grooved, 4 sided stem

little hairs on stalks and underside of leaves (very irritating to skin)

blue green serrated leaves, opposite



**Habitat:** Often found near streams, in wet soil. Grows happily in well watered gardens

### Collection:

Just before the small flowers bloom<sup>4</sup>

### Constituents:

Leaves and Stalks

Histamine<sup>4,9</sup>

Formic acid<sup>1,4,9</sup> (in the stinging hairs)

Serotonin<sup>9</sup>

Acetylcholine<sup>9</sup>



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Silicilic Acid<sup>9</sup>  
Volatile oils, including ketones<sup>9</sup>  
Potassium ions<sup>9</sup>  
chlorophyll<sup>4</sup>  
glucoquinine<sup>4</sup>

Root

Sterols- B-sitosterol, stigmasterol, campesterol<sup>9</sup>  
Lectins<sup>9</sup>  
Polysaccharides<sup>9</sup>  
Hydroxycoumarins<sup>9</sup>  
Ceramides<sup>9</sup>  
Lignans<sup>6,9</sup>

Seeds

**Nutrients:**

Calcium, Magnesium, Chlorophyll, Chromium, Cobalt, Iron ("one of the highest sources of digestible iron in plant form"-Rosemary Gladstar)<sup>1</sup>, Phosphorus, Potassium, Zinc, Copper, Sulphur, B-complex, Carotenes, Niacin, Protein, Manganese, Selenium, Silicon, tin, Vitamins C, D, K, Sodium,

**Actions:**

Leaves and Stalks

Adaptogen,<sup>1</sup> alterative,<sup>1</sup> anti-inflammatory,<sup>6</sup>  
Astringent<sup>4,8</sup> anti-asthmatic,<sup>8</sup> expectorant,<sup>8</sup> epispastic<sup>8</sup>  
Diuretic<sup>4,8</sup> Laxative,<sup>8</sup> lithotriptic,<sup>8</sup> anti-purine<sup>8</sup>  
Tonic<sup>1,4,8</sup> Nutritive,<sup>1,8</sup> Galactogogue,<sup>1,8</sup> anti-anemic,<sup>8</sup> anti-scorbutic<sup>8</sup>  
Hemostatic,<sup>1</sup> styptic, anti-hemorrhagic<sup>1</sup> (these when fresh juice is used)<sup>8</sup>

Root

Tonic,<sup>1,8</sup> diuretic<sup>1,8</sup>  
Astringent,<sup>1,8</sup> antidiarrheal<sup>8</sup>

Seeds

Antiseptic,<sup>8</sup> rejuvenative<sup>8</sup>  
Vermifuge,<sup>8</sup> anti-helmintic,<sup>8</sup> laxative<sup>8</sup>  
hypnotic<sup>8</sup>

**Energetics:**

Yang,<sup>5</sup> builds Jing<sup>5</sup>

**Indications:** Use leaf and stalk unless otherwise noted

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### Strengthen and support the whole body<sup>1,3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>

The large number of nutrients (see above) available in Nettle are easily assimilable and the whole body is able to use them. Dried nettles are safe for pregnant and lactating women to eat or drink as a daily nutritive.

### Women's tonic<sup>1,3,6,7,8</sup>

Due to many of its actions and nutritive qualities, this herb is especially good for women of all stages of life; early menstruation age, the childbearing years, pregnant, lactating, and perimenopausal.

It is useful in reducing PMS symptoms, excessive menstruation, increasing mother's milk, reduce water retention, prevent childbirth hemorrhage, prevent or treat nutritional anemia's, fatigue, prevent UTI, mood swings due to adrenal stress or blood sugar irregularity.

### Pregnancy tonic<sup>1,2,3,5,6,7,8</sup>

"Second to none, nettle is a pregnancy herb par excellence, supplying appreciable quantities of highly usable vitamins and minerals, promoting healthy kidney function, strengthening the blood vessels, reducing varicosities, and decreasing the likelihood of hemorrhaging at the time of birth."<sup>7</sup> – Aviva Jill Romm

See also, women's tonic, above.

### Chronic skin conditions<sup>4</sup>

The nutritive effects of nettles in tea or cooked as food, is useful for chronic skin conditions.<sup>8</sup> Eczema,<sup>4,8</sup> acne<sup>8</sup> and fungal infections<sup>8</sup> can be treated by eating half a cup of nettles daily or drinking two cups of nettle infusion daily for 6-10 weeks.<sup>8</sup>

### Acute skin rashes<sup>8</sup>

Hives, chicken pox, measles can be treated with tinctured fresh nettle, or fresh juice or homeopathic *Urtica*.<sup>8</sup> Try ¼ tsp fresh juice or 5-25 drops tincture in water up to 6 times a day for three days, reduce to one or two doses a day.<sup>8</sup>

Heat rash or burns can be treated with a wash or compress of infused nettle.<sup>8</sup>

### Relieve Hemorrhage Symptoms<sup>2,3,4,5,8</sup>

Drinking a tsp of fresh juice, "every hour or as often as the nature of the case requires." –GP Wood, MD & EH Ruddock, MD

Hemorrhagic conditions that can be treated include, Nose bleeds,<sup>4,8</sup> profuse menses,<sup>8</sup> bloody urine,<sup>8</sup> hemorrhage from lungs,<sup>8</sup> bloody coughs,<sup>8</sup> bleeding hemorrhoids,<sup>8</sup> bloody stools,<sup>8</sup> bloody vomit,<sup>8</sup> and childbirth

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hemorrhages.<sup>8</sup> If fresh leaf is not available, a strong nettle infusion can be used in it's place.<sup>8</sup>

Juice or finely powdered leaves can be applied as a styptic to minor wounds such as cuts.<sup>8</sup>

### Kidney Support<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

Drinking one cup of infusion of the leaf 1-3 times daily for ten days can help heal kidney problems.<sup>8</sup> This is helpful for chronic urinary tract conditions (bloody urine, kidney or bladder stones, UTI, diabetic water retention, pregnancy water retention<sup>1</sup> kidney stress from insulin, stress, allergies<sup>1,8</sup>, dialysis, kidney surgery).<sup>8</sup> Can also be used as a kidney tonic when one cup a day of infusion is drank.<sup>8</sup>

### Digestive Restorative<sup>5,8</sup>

Eaten freshly cooked nettles, or dried as tea, Internal use of nettles, aids the whole digestive system.<sup>8</sup> It prevents stomach ache, tonifies the liver, gallbladder and spleen, supports the healing of ulcers, relieves constipation or diarrhea symptoms, restores tone to intestinal veins, and helps clear out nests of unwanted bacteria.<sup>8</sup>

Nettle as a sitz bath is very helpful for hemorrhoids.<sup>8</sup> 2 quarts infusion, soak in this sitz for 10-15 minutes 2-3 times a day.<sup>8</sup>

### Respiratory Support<sup>2,5,8</sup>

A syrup, made from the fresh nettle juice and honey is especially healing for wet respiratory conditions or bleeding of these tissues.<sup>5,8</sup> Consider this remedy to help resolve or recover from the following conditions: cold, flu, pneumonia (during and after), bronchitis, pleurisy, tuberculosis,<sup>2,8</sup> chest wall sores.<sup>8</sup>

For asthmatic symptoms, the tincture is more effective.<sup>8</sup>

### Hair and Scalp tonic<sup>1,2,3,4,5,8</sup>

A rinse of the infusion once a week is said to thicken and silken hair, relieve dandruff and improve scalp health.

### Blood Support<sup>1,5,8</sup> Allergies,<sup>6,8</sup> hay fever,<sup>2,6,8</sup> rheumatoid arthritis,<sup>2,6</sup>

Additional indications would be the inclusion of nettle in formula's for candida,<sup>1</sup> osteoporosis,<sup>1,6</sup> infertility,<sup>1</sup> benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)<sup>2</sup>

Nettle seeds are useful as thyroid helper, poison antidote,<sup>1,8</sup> skin and scalp tonic, and many of the above conditions.<sup>8</sup>

Eat up to 13 seeds a day.<sup>8</sup>

Soak a tsp of seeds in hot water for 20 minutes. Use strained liquid on skin or scalp.<sup>8</sup>

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### **Contraindications:**

Known to be safe<sup>6</sup>

The stinging hairs on nettles are very uncomfortable when touched. Although they may have beneficial qualities when used intentionally, in general, they should be avoided when harvesting. The strong histamine reaction that many people get from the sting can last for days and feels like a burn, is very sensitive to touch.

### **Combinations:**

Figwort and burdock (for eczema)<sup>4</sup>

Improve flavor of tea with peppermint, spearmint, lemon balm, lemon verbena<sup>1</sup>

To supplement iron and/or strengthen the liver<sup>7</sup>- yellow dock root, dandelion root, blackstrap molasses, burdock root, red clover blossoms, cleavers

For recipe and dosage of Iron Tonic Syrup, see page 173 of Aviva Jill Romm's, *The Natural Pregnancy Book*.

For recipe and dosage of Liver-Strengthening Tea, see page 202 of Aviva Jill Romm's, *The Natural Pregnancy Book*.

For nettle recipes (edible and topical), see pages 182-189 of Susan Weeds book, *Healing Wise*.

### **Preparation and dosage:**

Infusion: Safe for extended periods of time<sup>1</sup>

Dried leaf: pour a cup of boiling water over 1-3 tsp of dried herb. Let steep 10-60 minutes. Drink up to 3 times daily<sup>4,8</sup> or a quart a day<sup>7</sup> during pregnancy. Use a handful of dried leaves to prepare a quart at a time.

Use 2 quarts infusion 2-3 times daily as a sitz bath for hemorrhoids

Use as a scalp rinse, once a week to thicken and silken hair as well as prevent graying<sup>5</sup>

Dried root: pour ½ - 1 cup of boiling water over 1-3 tsp dried root. Let steep 10-15 minutes. Drink up to 1 cup a day.<sup>8</sup>

Use as a scalp rinse, once a week

Tincture

Leaves and stalk: 1-4 ml of tincture 3 times daily<sup>4</sup> (up to 100 drops/day)<sup>8</sup>

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5-25 drops tincture in water up to 6 times a day for three days, reduce to one or two doses a day<sup>8</sup> for the treatment of hives, chicken pox, measles

Root: 50-90 drops a day, in water<sup>8</sup>

Fresh Juice

1-3 tsp (5-15 ml) a day, in water<sup>8</sup>

¼ tsp fresh juice up to 6 times a day for three days, reduce to one or two doses a day<sup>8</sup> for the treatment of hives, chicken pox, measles

Decoction

Root: sip to stop dysentery, loose bowels and diarrhea. Rinse scalp with it once a week to improve scalp health.

**References**

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