

# Nettle Leaf and Powder Profile

## Also known as

Urtica dioica, Stinging Nettle, Common Nettle, Gerrais, Isirgan, Kazink, Ortiga, Grande Ortie, Ortie, Urtiga, Chichicaste, and Brennessel

## Introduction

The common nettle comes by its other name, stinging nettle, honestly. The innocuous plant, a perennial that grows in many parts of the world and that has been naturalized to Brazil, delivers a stinging burn when the hairs on the leaves and stems are touched. Its healing properties are as well known among various cultures and are part of folklore and tradition. Those healing powers are even alluded to in at least one fairy tale, *The Wild Swans*, in which the heroine must weave shirts of nettle leaf to cure her eleven brothers who have been turned into swans by an evil stepmother. The nettle leaf and root both have medicinal properties, but each is more effective against different complaints. Nettle leaf is used traditionally as a diuretic, and as a treatment for rheumatism and arthritis. In Germany, a standardized extract is sold for the treatment of inflammatory conditions and prostate diseases. Nettle leaf's effectiveness against rheumatism and other inflammatory diseases is well documented, and borne out by chemical analysis of the plant.

## Constituents

formic acid, histamine, serotonin, choline, minerals, chlorophyll, amino acids, lecithin, carotenoids, flavonoids, sterols, tannins and vitamins. Nettle's main plant chemicals include: acetophenone, acetylcholine, agglutinins, alkaloids, astragalins, butyric acid, caffeic acids, carbonic acid, chlorogenic acid, chlorophyll, choline, coumaric acid, folacin, formic acid, friedelins, histamine, kaempferols, koproporphyrin, lectins, lecithin, lignans, linoleic acid, linolenic acid, neoolivil, palmitic acid, pantothenic acid, quercetin, quinic acid, scopoletin, secoisolariciresinol, serotonin, sitosterols, stigmasterol, succinic acid, terpenes, violaxanthin, and xanthophylls

## Parts Used

leaves

## Typical Preparations

Steamed and eaten in salads, pastas, etc. As a tea, extract and capsule.

## Summary

Nettle's purported anti-inflammatory effects have been repeatedly confirmed by modern research over the past ten years. It is particularly effective in treating allergic rhinitis, relieving nearly all the symptoms of itchy, watery eyes, sneezing and runny nose. It also has performed better than the

prescription drug furosemide in reducing blood pressure, increasing urine output as a diuretic and increasing salt excretion. It also seems to be effective in reducing pain and producing a sedative effect. It is important to keep in mind that the medicinal effects of the leaf and root of the nettle are markedly different. Nettle root, for instance, shows exceptional efficacy in treating prostate complaints in men. Nettle leaf has some of the same effects, but not to the same extent. The leaf, on the other hand, shows some promise in boosting immune system function and is an effective treatment for many skin conditions. One final use should be noted and that is nettle leaf has been used as a hair and scalp treatment for centuries, and again, those uses are being supported by research as well. Nettle leaf extract seems to promote hair regrowth and thicken hair, as well as reducing dandruff and scalp conditions when used as a rinse.

## **Precautions**

Because of its diuretic and hypotensive actions, nettle leaf may lower blood pressure. If you are taking diuretics or other drugs meant to lower blood pressure, consult your doctor before using nettle leaf. Its long term, extended use is not recommended.

# **Nettle Root and Powder Profile**

## **Also known as**

Also Known As- *Urtica dioica*, Stinging Nettle, Common Nettle, Gerrais, Isirgan, Kazink, Ortiga, Grande Ortie, Ortie, Urtiga, Chichicaste, and Brennessel

## **Introduction**

The common nettle comes by its other name, stinging nettle, honestly. The innocuous plant, a perennial that grows in many parts of the world and that has been naturalized to Brazil, delivers a stinging burn when the hairs on the leaves and stems are touched. Its healing properties are as well known among various cultures and are part of folklore and tradition. Those healing powers are even alluded to in at least one fairy tale, *The Swan Princess*, in which the heroine must weave shirts of nettle leaf to cure her twelve brothers who have been turned into swans by an evil stepmother. The nettle leaf and root both have medicinal properties, but each is more effective against different complaints. Nettle root is used as a treatment for prostate problems, including prostatitis and benign prostatic hyperplasia, a condition that affects men starting about the age of 40. Extracts of nettle root have proven effective in reducing the inflammation associated with BPH and prostatitis and even slowing the growth of abnormal cells.

## **Constituents**

formic acid, histamine, serotonin, choline, minerals, chlorophyll, amino acids, lecithin, carotenoids, flavonoids, sterols, tannins and vitamins. Nettle's main plant chemicals include: acetophenone, acetylcholine, agglutinins, alkaloids, astragalins, butyric acid, caffeic acids, carbonic acid, chlorogenic acid, chlorophyll, choline, coumaric acid, folacin, formic acid, friedelins, histamine, kaempferols,

koproporphyrin, lectins, lecithin, lignans, linoleic acid, linolenic acid, neoolivil, palmitic acid, pantothenic acid, quercetin, quinic acid, scopoletin, secoisolariciresinol, serotonin, sitosterols, stigmasterol, succinic acid, terpenes, violaxanthin, and xanthophylls

## Parts Used

Root

## Typical Preparations

Standardized extract, as a decoction, in capsules and incorporated into paste, creams and salves.

## Summary

Nettle root has showed a great deal of promise in treating benign prostatic hyperplasia, a condition affecting a large proportion of men over the age of 40 that is often a precursor to prostate cancer. The current research shows that constituents of nettle root work by inhibiting the growth of abnormal cells, a property that suggests it may have some use in preventing cancer. Interestingly, the same chemicals may have an effect on hair loss, and at least one company has filed a patent for a formula containing nettle root to treat male pattern baldness.

## Precautions

Because of its diuretic and hypotensive actions, nettle root may lower blood pressure. If you are taking diuretics or other drugs meant to lower blood pressure, consult your doctor before using nettle root. Its long term use is not recommended.

The Nettle tribe, *Urticaceae*, is widely spread over the world and contains about 500 species, mainly tropical, though several, like our common Stinging Nettle, occur widely in temperate climates. Many of the species have stinging hairs on their stems and leaves. Two genera are represented in the British Isles, *Urtica*, the Stinging Nettles, and *Parietaria*, the Pellitory. Formerly botanists included in the order *Urticaceae* the Elm family, *Ulmaceae*; the Mulberry, Fig and Bread Fruit family, *Moraceae*; and that of the Hemp and Hop, *Cannabaceae*; but these are now generally regarded as separate groups.

The British species of Stinging Nettle, belonging to the genus *Urtica* (the name derived from the Latin, *uro*, to burn), are well known for the burning properties of the fluid contained in the stinging hairs with which the leaves are so well armed. Painful as are the consequences of touching one of our common Nettles, they are far exceeded by the effects of handling some of the East Indian species: a burning heat follows the sensation of pricking, just as if hot irons had been applied, the pain extending and continuing for many hours or even days, attended by symptoms similar to those which accompany lockjaw. A Java species, *U. urentissima*, produces effects which last for a whole year, and are even said to cause death. *U. crenulato* and *U. heterophylla*, both of India, are also most virulent. Another Indian species, *U. tuberosa*, on the other hand, has edible tubers, which are eaten either raw, boiled or roasted, and considered nutritious.

## NETTLE, GREATER

**Botanical:** *Urtica dioica* (LINN.)

**Family:** N.O. Urticaceae

---

## NETTLE, LESSER

**Botanical:** *Urtica urens* (LINN.)

**Family:** N.O. Urticaceae

- [Recipes](#)
- [Medicinal Uses of the Nettle](#)
- [Constituents](#)
- [Action and Uses](#)
- [Preparations](#)
- [Other Uses](#)

---**Synonyms**---Common Nettle. Stinging Nettle.

---**Parts Used**---Herb, seeds.

Our Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*, Linn.) is distributed throughout the temperate regions of Europe and Asia: it is not only to be found in distant Japan, but also in South Africa and Australia and in the Andes.

A detailed description of this familiar plant is hardly necessary; its heart-shaped, finelytoothed leaves tapering to a point, and its green flowers in long, branched clusters springing from the axils of the leaves are known to everyone. The flowers are incomplete: the male or barren flowers have stamens only, and the female or fertile flowers have only pistil or seed-producing organs. Sometimes these different kinds of flowers are to be found on one plant; but usually a plant will bear either male or female flowers throughout, hence the specific name of the plant, *dioica*, which means 'two houses.'

The male flower consists of a perianth of four greenish segments enclosing an equal number of stamens, which bend inwards in the bud stage, but when the flower unfolds spring backwards and outwards, the anthers with the sudden uncoiling, exploding and scattering the pollen. The flowers are thus adapted for wind-fertilization. The perianth of the female flower is similar, but only contains a single, one-seeded carpel, bearing one style with a brush-like stigma. The male flowers are in loose sprays or racemes, the female flowers more densely clustered together.

The Nettle flowers from June to September. As a rule the stem attains a height of 2 to 3 feet. Its perennial roots are creeping, so it multiplies quickly, making it somewhat difficult of extirpation.

The whole plant is downy, and also covered with stinging hairs. Each sting is a very sharp, polished



**NETTLE, GREATER**  
(*Urtica galeopsifolia*  
printed as *Urtica dioica*)

[Click on graphic for larger image](#)

spine, which is hollow and arises from a swollen base. In this base, which is composed of small cells, is contained the venom, an acrid fluid, the active principle of which is said to be bicarbonate of ammonia. When, in consequence of pressure, the sting pierces the skin, the venom is instantly expressed, causing the resultant irritation and inflammation. The burning property of the juice is dissipated by heat, enabling the young shoots of the Nettle, when boiled, to be eaten as a pot-herb.

It is a strange fact that the juice of the Nettle proves an antidote for its own sting, and being applied will afford instant relief: the juice of the Dock, which is usually found in close proximity to the Nettle, has the same beneficial action.

'Nettle in, dock out.

Dock rub nettle out!

is an old rhyme.

If a person is stung with a Nettle a certain cure will be effected by rubbing Dock leaves over the part, repeating the above charm slowly. Another version is current in Wiltshire:

Out 'ettle in dock,

Dock zhail ha' a new smock;

'Ettle zhant ha' *narrun!* (none)

The sting of a Nettle may also be cured by rubbing the part with Rosemary, Mint or Sage leaves.

There are two other species of Nettle found in Britain, both annuals. The Lesser Nettle (*U. urens*) is widely distributed and resembles the Common Nettle in habit, but has smaller leaves and the flowers in short, mostly unbranched clusters, male and female in the same panicle. It is glabrous except for the stinging hairs, whereas *U. dioica* is softly hairy throughout. It rarely attains more than a foot in height and is a common garden weed.

The Roman Nettle (*U. pilulifera*), bearing its female flowers in little compact, globular heads, is not general and is considered a doubtful native. It is also smooth except for the stinging hairs, but these contain a far more virulent venom than either of the other species. It occurs in waste places near towns and villages in the east of England, chiefly near the sea, but is rare. It is supposed to have been introduced by the Romans. The antiquary Camden records in his work *Britannica* that this Nettle was common at Romney, saying that here or near it, Julius Caesar landed and called it 'Romania,' from which Romney is a corruption. Camden adds:

'The soldiers brought some of the nettle seed with them, and sowed it there for their use to rub and chafe their limbs, when through extreme cold they should be stiff or benumbed, having been told that the climate of Britain was so cold that it was not to be endured. '

From their general presence in the neighbourhood of houses or spots where house refuse is deposited, it has been suggested that Nettles are not really natives, a supposition that to some extent receives countenance from the circumstance that the young shoots are very sensitive to frost. However that may be, they follow man in his migrations, and by their presence usually indicate a soil rich in nitrogen.

The common name of the Nettle, or rather its Anglo-Saxon and also Dutch equivalent, *Netel*, is said to have been derived from *Noedl* (a needle), possibly from the sharp sting, or, as Dr. Prior suggests, in reference to the fact that it was this plant that supplied the thread used in former times by the Germanic and Scandinavian nations before the general introduction of flax, *Net* being the passive participle of *ne*, a verb common to most of the Indo-European languages in the sense of 'spin' and 'sew' (Latin *nerere*, German *na-hen*, Sanskrit *nah*, bind). Nettle would seem, he considers, to have meant primarily that

with which one sews.

Its fibre is very similar to that of Hemp or Flax, and it was used for the same purposes, from making cloth of the finest texture down to the coarsest, such as sailcloth, sacking, cordage, etc. In Hans Andersen's fairy-tale of the Princess and the Eleven Swans, the coats she wove for them were made of Nettles.

Flax and Hemp bear southern names and were introduced into the North to replace it.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century Nettle fibres were still used in Scotland for weaving the coarser household napery. The historian Westmacott says: 'Scotch cloth is only the housewifery of the nettle. In Friesland, also, it was used till a late period.' The poet, Campbell, complaining of the little attention paid to the Nettle in England, tells us:

'In Scotland, I have eaten nettles, I have slept in nettle sheets, and I have dined off a nettle tablecloth. The young and tender nettle is an excellent potherb. The stalks of the old nettle are as good as flax for making cloth. I have heard my mother say that she thought nettle cloth more durable than any other species of linen.'

After the Nettles had been cut, dried and steeped, the fibre was separated with instruments similar to those used in dressing flax or hemp, and then spun into yarn, used in manufacturing every sort of cloth, cordage, etc., usually made from flax or hemp. Green (*Universal Herbal*, 1832) says this yarn was particularly useful for making twine for fishing nets, the fibre of the Nettle being stronger than those of flax and not so harsh as those of hemsps.

The fibre being, however, produced in less quantities than that of flax, and being somewhat difficult to extract, accounts, perhaps, for the fact that it is no longer used in Britain, though it was still employed in other countries in textile manufactures some sixty years ago. The greatest objection to its extensive employment is the necessity of growing it in rich, deep soil, for otherwise the fibre produced is short and coarse, and on land fitted for it flax can be grown at less cost compared to the value of the seed and fibre yielded. The most valuable sort of Nettle in regard to length and suppleness is most common in the bottom of ditches, among briars and in shaded valleys, where the soil is a strong loam. In such situations the plants will sometimes attain a great height, those growing in patches on a good soil, standing thick, averaging 5 to 6 feet in height, the stems thickly clothed with fine lint. Those growing in poorer soils and less favourable situations, with rough and woody stem and many lateral branches, run much to seed and are less useful, producing lint more coarse, harsh and thin.

When Germany and Austria ran short of cotton during the War, the value of the Nettle as a substitute was at once recognized, and the two ordinary species, *U. dioica* and *U. urens*, the great and the smaller Nettle, were specially selected for textiles.

Among the many fibrous plants experimented with, the Nettle alone fulfilled all the conditions of a satisfactory source of textile fibre, and it was believed that it would become an important factor in agriculture and in the development of the textile industry. Investigations and practical tests made in 1916 at Brünn and Reichenberg confirmed the hopes raised concerning the possibilities to be realized in Nettle fibre; the capabilities of the plant were thoroughly tested, and from the standpoint of the factory it was affirmed that goods woven from this fibre were for most purposes equal to cotton goods, so that it was believed that, for Central Europe at least, a large and increasing use of Nettle fibre seemed assured. Mixed with 10 per cent cotton, it was definitely shown that underclothing, cloth, stockings, tarpaulins, etc., could be manufactured from the new fibre.

In 1915, 1.3 million kilograms of this material were collected in Germany, a quantity which increased

to 2.7 million kilograms in 1916, and this without any attempt at systematic cultivation. The quantity of Nettles grown wild in Germany was estimated at 60,000 tons, but as time went on it was found that self-sown Nettles were insufficient in quantity for the need, and that their quality could be improved by cultivation, and great efforts were made to increase production, but the cultivation proved more difficult than was expected.

Cloth made from Nettle fibre was employed in many articles of army clothing. Forty kilograms were calculated to provide enough stuff for one shirt. In 1917 two captured German overalls, marked with the dates 1915 and 1916 respectively, were found to be woven of a mixed fibre consisting of 85 per cent of the common Stinging Nettle and 15 per cent of Ramie, the fibre of the Rhea, or Grass (*Boehmeria nivea*), a tropical member of the Nettle family, which is used in the manufacture of gas-mantles and is also valuable for making artificial silk and was largely employed in war-time in the making of gas-masks.

German army orders dated in March, April and May of 1918 give a good insight into the extent to which use was made of cloth woven from Nettle fibre. In these orders, Nettle is described as the only efficient cotton substitute.

In Austria, also, Nettles were cultivated on a large scale.

The length of the Nettle fibre varies from 3/4 inch to 2 1/2 inches: all above 1 3/8 inch is equal to the best Egyptian cotton. It can be dyed and bleached in the same way as cotton, and when mercerized is but slightly inferior to silk. It has been considered much superior to cotton for velvet and plush.

The Textile Department of the Bradford Technical College exhibited in March, 1918, samples of Nettle fibre. It had a pleasing appearance to the eye, but when examined under the microscope, magnification showed that it had a glass-like surface, devoid of the serrations which endow wool as a fibre for textile production, and experts considered that its employment in Germany seemed to point to very straitened circumstances as the motive, rather than any recognition of a true textile value in the fibre.

These properties of the Nettle were recognized before the War, and considerable sums of money were spent in the endeavour to utilize that plant, but trouble was experienced in the separation of the fibres. Recently, great progress has been made and some fifty processes have been patented for attaining this separation. In 1917 some 70,000 hectares of Nettles were cultivated, and it is thought possible to plant a million hectares of lowlands, giving a yield of Nettle fibres that would cover about 18 per cent of Germany's cotton requirements.

The by-products of the Nettle were also stated to be of enormous production, the Nettle not only supplying a substitute for cotton, but for such indispensable articles as sugar, starch, protein and ethyl alcohol.

Another use of great importance is the application of the fibres of Nettle to the manufacture of paper of various qualities. They used to be collected in France in considerable quantities for that purpose, and though, owing to the different ages of the fibre, the attempts to use it for paper-making have not always met with complete success, the subject deserves further attention.

From a *culinary* point of view the Nettle has an old reputation. It is one of the few wild plants still gathered each spring by country-folk as a pot-herb. It makes a healthy vegetable, easy of digestion.

The young tops should be gathered when 6 to 8 inches high. Gloves should be worn to protect the hands when picking them. They should be washed in running water with a stick and then put into a saucepan, dripping, without any added water, and cooked with the lid on for about 20 minutes. Then chopped,

rubbed through a hair-sieve and either served plain, or warmed up in the pan again, with a little salt, pepper and butter, or a little gravy, and served with or without poached eggs. They thus form a refreshing dish of spring greens, which is slightly laxative. In autumn, however, Nettles are hurtful, the leaves being gritty from the abundance of crystals (*cystoliths*) they contain.

In Scotland it was the practice to force Nettles for 'early spring kail.' Sir Walter Scott tells us in *Rob Roy* how Andrew Fairservice, the old gardener of Lochleven, raised early Nettles under hand-glasses. By earthing up, Nettles may be blanched in the same way as seakale and eaten in a similar manner. They also make a good vegetable soup, and in Scotland are used with leeks, broccoli and rice to make Nettle pudding, a very palatable dish.

[\[Top\]](#)

## RECIPES

### *Nettle Pudding*

To 1 gallon of young Nettle tops, thoroughly washed, add 2 good-sized leeks or onions, 2 heads of broccoli or small cabbage, or Brussels sprouts, and 1/4 lb. of rice. Clean the vegetables well; chop the broccoli and leeks and mix with the Nettles. Place all together in a muslin bag, alternately with the rice, and tie tightly. Boil in salted water, long enough to cook the vegetables, the time varying according to the tenderness or other vise of the greens. Serve with gravy or melted butter. These quantities are sufficient for six persons.

Pepys refers to Nettle pudding in his *Diary*, February, 1661: 'We did eat some Nettle porridge, which was very good.'

### *Nettle Beer*

The Nettle Beer made by cottagers is often given to their old folk as a remedy for gouty and rheumatic pains, but apart from this purpose it forms a pleasant drink. It may be made as follows: Take 2 gallons of cold water and a good pailful of washed young Nettle tops, add 3 or 4 large handful of Dandelion, the same of Clivers (Goosegrass) and 2 OZ. of bruised, whole ginger. Boil gently for 40 minutes, then strain and stir in 2 teacupful of brown sugar. When lukewarm place on the top a slice of toasted bread, spread with 1 OZ. of compressed yeast, stirred till liquid with a teaspoonful of sugar. Keep it fairly warm for 6 or 7 hours, then remove the scum and stir in a tablespoonful of cream of tartar. Bottle and tie the corks securely. The result is a specially wholesome sort of ginger beer. The juice of 2 lemons may be substituted for the Dandelion and Clivers. Other herbs are often added to Nettles in the making of Herb Beer, such as Burdock, Meadowsweet, Avens Horehound, the combination making a refreshing summer drink.

As an arrester of bleeding, the Nettle has few equals and an infusion of the dried herb, or alcoholic tincture made from the fresh plant, or the fresh Nettle juice itself in doses of 1 to 2 tablespoonsful is of much power inwardly for bleeding from the nose, lungs or stomach. Old writers recommended a small piece of lint, moistened with the juice, to be placed in the nostril in bad cases of nosebleeding. The diluted juice provides a useful astringent gargle. Burns may be cured rapidly by applying to them linen cloths well wetted with the tincture, the cloths being frequently re-wetted. An infusion of the fresh leaves is also soothing and healing as a lotion for burns.

Nettle is one of the best antiscorbutics. An infusion known as Nettle Tea is a common spring medicine in rural districts, and has long been used as a blood purifier. This tea made from young Nettles is in many parts of the country used as a cure for nettlerash. It is also beneficially employed in cases of gouty gravel, but must not be brewed too strong. A strong decoction of Nettle, drunk too freely, has produced severe burning over the whole body.



The homoeopathic tincture, *Urtica*, is frequently administered successfully for rheumatic gout, also for nettlerash and chickenpox, and externally for bruises.

'Urtication,' or flogging with Nettles, was an old remedy for chronic rheumatism and loss of muscular power.

Young Nettles, mashed and pulped finely, mixed with equal bulk of thick cream, pepper and salt being added to taste, have been considered a valuable food for consumptives.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Medicinal Uses of the Nettle---***Parts employed:* The whole herb, collected in May and June, just before coming into flower, and dried in the usual manner prescribed for 'bunched' herbs.

When the herb is collected for drying, it should be gathered only on a fine day, in the morning, when the sun has dried off the dew. Cut off just above the root, rejecting any stained or insect-eaten leaves, and tie in bunches, about six to ten in a bunch, spread out fanwise, so that the air can penetrate freely to all parts.

Hang the bunches over strings. If dried in the open, keep them in half-shade and bring indoors before there is any risk of damp from dew or rain. If dried indoors, hang up in a sunny room, and failing sun, in a well-ventilated room by artificial heat. Care must be taken that the window be left open by day so that there is a free current of air and the moisture-laden, warm air may escape. The bunches should be of uniform size and length, to facilitate packing when dry, and when quite dry and crisp must be packed away at once in airtight boxes or tins, otherwise moisture will be reabsorbed from the air.

The seeds and flowers are dried in the sun, or over a stove, on sheets of paper.

The Nettle is still in demand by wholesale herbalists, who stock the dried and powdered herb, also the seeds. Homoeopathic chemists, in addition, employ the green herb for the preparation of a tincture.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Constituents---**The analysis of the fresh Nettle shows the presence of formic acid, mucilage, mineral salts, ammonia, carbonic acid and water.

It is the formic acid in the Nettle, with the phosphates and a trace of iron, which constitute it such a valuable food medicinally.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Action and Uses---**Although not prescribed by the British Pharmacopoeia, the Nettle has still a reputation in herbal medicine, and is regarded in homoeopathy as a useful remedy. Preparations of the herb have astringent properties and act also as a stimulating tonic.

Nettle is anti-asthmatic: the juice of the roots or leaves, mixed with honey or sugar, will relieve bronchial and asthmatic troubles and the dried leaves, burnt and inhaled, will have the same effect. The seeds have also been used in consumption, the infusion of herb or seeds being taken in wineglassful doses. The seeds and flowers used to be given in wine as a remedy for ague. The powdered seeds have been considered a cure for goitre and efficacious in reducing excessive corpulency.

In old Herbals the seeds, taken inwardly, were recommended for the stings or bites of venomous creatures and mad dogs, and as an antidote to poisoning by Hemlock, Henbane and Nightshade.

A quaint old superstition existed that a fever could be dispelled by plucking a Nettle up by the roots, reciting thereby the names of the sick man and also the names of his parents.

Preparations of Nettle are said to act well upon the kidneys, but it is a doubtful diuretic, though it has been claimed that incipient dropsy may be remedied by tea made from the roots.

A novel treatment for diabetes was reported by a sufferer from that disease in the daily press of April, 1926, it being affirmed that a diet of young Nettles (following a two days' fast) and drinking the brew of them had been the means of reducing his weight by 6 stone in three days and had vastly improved his condition.

An efficient Hair Tonic can be prepared from the Nettle: Simmer a handful of young Nettles in a quart of water for 2 hours, strain and bottle when cold. Well saturate the scalp with the lotion every other night. This prevents the hair falling and renders it soft and glossy. A good Nettle Hair Lotion is also prepared by boiling the entire plant in vinegar and water, straining and adding Eau de Cologne.

For stimulating hair growth, the old herbalists recommended combing the hair daily with expressed Nettle juice.

The homoeopathic tincture of Nettle is made of 2 OZ. of the herb to 1 pint of proof spirit.

The powder of the dried herb is administered in doses of 5 to 10 grains.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Preparations---**Fluid extract of herb, 1/2 to 1 drachm. Infusion, 1 OZ. of the herb to a pint of boiling water.

**---Other Uses---**Nettles are of considerable value as fodder for live-stock, and might be used for this purpose where they occur largely. When Nettles are growing, no quadruped except the ass will touch them, on account of their stinging power, but if cut and allowed to become wilted, they lose their sting and are then readily cleared up by livestock. It is well known that when dried and made into hay, so as to destroy the poisonous matter of the stings, cows will relish them and give more milk than when fed on hay alone. In Sweden and Russia, the Nettle has sometimes been cultivated as a fodder plant, being mown several times a year, and given to milch cattle.

Nettles were much used as a substitute for fodder during the war, and instructions for their use were laid down by German military authorities. It was found that horses which had become thin and suffered from digestive troubles benefited from the use of Nettle leaves in their rations. When dried, the proportion of albuminoid matter in Nettles is as high as in linseed cake and the fat content is also considerable.

The Nettle is also of great use to the keeper of poultry. Dried and powdered finely and put into the food, it increases egg-production and is healthy and fattening. The seeds are also said to fatten fowls. Turkeys, as well as ordinary poultry, thrive on Nettles chopped small and mixed with their food, and pigs do well on boiled Nettles.

In Holland, and also in Egypt, it is said that horse-dealers mix the seeds of Nettles with oats or other food, in order to give the animals a sleek coat.

Although in Britain upwards of thirty insects feed solely on the Nettle plant, flies have a distaste for the plant, and a fresh bunch of Stinging Nettles will keep a larder free from them.

If planted in the neighbourhood of beehives, it is said the Nettle will drive away frogs.

The juice of the Nettle, or a decoction formed by boiling the green herb in a strong solution of salt, will curdle milk, providing the cheese-maker with a good substitute for rennet. The same juice, if rubbed liberally into small seams in leaky wooden tubs coagulates and will render them once more watertight.

A decoction of Nettle yields a beautiful and permanent green dye, which is used for woollen stuffs in Russia: the roots, boiled with alum, produce a yellow colour, which was formerly widely used in country districts to dye yarn, and is also employed by the Russian peasants to stain eggs yellow on Maundy Thursday.

The expressed seeds yield a burning oil, which has been extracted and used in Egypt.

The following passage from *Les Misérables* on the utilization of Nettles, shows how conversant Victor Hugo was with the virtues of this commonly despised 'weed':

'One day he (Monsieur Madeleine) saw some peasants busy plucking out Nettles; he looked at the heap of plants uprooted and already withered, and said - "They are dead. Yet it would be well if people knew how to make use of them. When the nettle is young, its leaf forms an excellent vegetable; when it matures, it has filaments and fibres like hemp and flax. Nettle fabric is as good as canvas. Chopped, the nettle is good for poultry; pounded it is good for cattle. The seed of the nettle mingled with fodder imparts a gloss to the coats of animals; its root mixed with salt produces a beautiful yellow colour. It is besides excellent hay and can be cut twice. And what does the nettle require? Little earth, no attention, no cultivation. Only the seed falls as it ripens, and is difficult to gather. That is all. With a little trouble, the nettle would be useful; it is neglected, and becomes harmful." '

Nettles are increasing all over the country, and for the benefit of those who desire their eradication, the Royal Horticultural Society, in their Diary for 1926, informed their members that if Nettles are cut down three times in three consecutive years, they will disappear.

[\[Top\]](#)

---

## NETTLE, WHITE DEAD

**Botanical:** *Lamium album* (LINN.)

**Family:** N.O. Labiatae

---**Synonyms**---Archangel. White Dead Nettle. Blind Nettle. Dumb Nettle. Deaf Nettle. Bee Nettle.

---**Part Used**---Herb.

The White Dead-Nettle owes its name of Nettle to the fact that the plant as a whole bears a strong general resemblance to the Stinging Nettle, for which it may easily be mistaken in the early spring, before it is in bloom; but the flowers are absolutely different in the two plants, which are quite unrelated. It can, moreover, be always readily distinguished from the Stinging Nettle, even when not in flower, by the squareness and hollowness of its stem.

The 'Dead' in its name refers to its inability to sting. Lord Avebury points out that this resemblance is a clever adaption of nature.

'It cannot be doubted that the true nettle is protected by its power of stinging, and that being so, it is scarcely less clear that the Dead Nettle must be protected by its likeness to the other.'



**NETTLE, WHITE DEAD**  
(*Lamium album* LINN.)

[Click on graphic for larger image](#)

the two species being commonly found growing together. The resemblance serves probably not only as a protection against browsing quadrupeds, but also against leaf-eating insects.

Many other country names refer to this false suggestion of stinging power. In some localities it is called White Archangel, or Archangel alone, probably because it first comes into flower about the day dedicated to the Archangel Michael, May 8, old style - eleven days earlier than our May 8.

This plant is also known as the Bee Nettle, because bees visit it freely for the honey which it provides lavishly. The flower is specially built to encourage bee visitors - especially the bumble bee. In the axils of the leaves are whorls, or rings, of the flowers each ring composed of six to twelve blossoms of a delicate creamy white; out of the spiky green, five-pointed calyx rises the white petal tube, which expands into an erection of very irregular shape, composed of five petals, one forming the lip, two the hood, and two form the little wings.

Four stamens lie in pairs along the back of the flower, with their heads well up under the hood and their faces downwards. The long column from the ovary also lies with them, but its top, the stigma, hangs a little out beyond the pollen-bearing anthers of the stamens. At the bottom of the corolla-tube is a rich store of honey.

When a bee visits the flower, he alights on the lower lip, thrusts his proboscis down the petal tube, which is nearly 1/2 inch long, and reaches the honey, his back fitting meanwhile exactly into the conformation of the corolla, so that he first, as he settles on the lip, rubs the projecting stigmas with the pollen already on his back (thus affecting the fertilization of the flower), and then presses on to the stamens and gets dusted with their pollen in exchange, and this is then passed on to the next flower he visits. Unless the insect visitor is a big one, his back will not fill the cavity and neither stigma nor stamens are touched. The honey is placed in such a position that only the big humble bees with their long probosces can reach it. The flower also guards against smaller insects creeping down its tube by placing a barrier of hairs round it just above the honey. Some insects, whose tongues are too short to reach the honey, get at it by biting through the wall of the white tube right down at its base, and sucking away the honey without taking any share in the fertilization of the flower.

When the flower fades, the green calyx still remains to protect the tiny nutlets. It is somewhat stiffened, and when the nutlets are ripe and ready for dispersal, any pressure upon it forces it back and on the pressure being removed, the nuts are shot out with some force.

The plant is to be found in flower from May almost until December. The heartshaped leaves, with their saw-like margins, are placed on the square, hollow stems in pairs, each pair exactly at right angles to the one above and below. Both stems and leaves are covered with small rough hairs, and contain certain essential oils which probably make them distasteful to cattle, even after their powerlessness to sting has been discovered. When bruised, the whole plant has a strong, rather disagreeable smell.

The corners of the hollow stems are strengthened by specially strong columns of fibres. In the country, boys often cut the stems and make whistles out of them.

The generic name of the Dead Nettles *Lamium*, is derived from the Greek word *laimos* (the throat), in allusion to the form of the blossom.

[\[Top\]](#)

---

# NETTLE, PURPLE DEAD

**Botanical: *Lamium purpureum* (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Labiatae**

- [Medicinal Action and Uses](#)
- [Other Species](#)

**---Synonym---**Purple Archangel.

The Purple Dead-Nettle is a common weed in cultivated ground and by waysides, found in the same spots as the other species, but less conspicuous.

It has heart- or kidney-shaped leaves, blunt, not pointed as in the preceding species, and is distinguished by the purple tinge of its foliage, crowded upper leaves and small, reddish flowers, which have much shorter petal tubes than the Yellow and White Dead Nettles, so that bees with shorter tongues than the humble-bee, can reach its honey and fertilize it. It is, indeed, a favourite with bees, who find abundance of honey in its blossoms. The upper leaves are often densely clapped with silky hairs.

It flowers all the summer - from April to September and in mild seasons, both earlier and later. This species of Dead-Nettle is an annual, propagated by its seeds alone. It is one of the earliest weeds in gardens, but being an annual is easily eradicated.

The plant varies greatly in appearance, according to the situation in which it grows. On the open ground, it is somewhat spreading in habit, rarely more than 6 inches in height, whilst specimens growing in the midst of crowded vegetation are often drawn up to a considerable height, their leaves being of a dull green throughout, whereas those of the smaller specimens grown in the open are ordinarily more or less warm and rich in colour. At first glance the variation in the appearance of specimens grown under these different circumstances would leave the casual observer to suppose them to belong to different species.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**The herb and flowers, either fresh or dried, have been used to make a decoction for checking any kind of haemorrhage.

The leaves are also useful to staunch wounds, when bruised and outwardly applied.

The dried herb, made into a tea and sweetened with honey, promotes perspiration and acts on the kidneys, being useful in cases of chill.

Linnaeus reported that this species also has been boiled and eaten as a pot-herb by the peasantry in Sweden.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Other Species---**

- [Part Used Medicinally](#)
- [Medicinal Action and Uses](#)

The HENBIT DEAD-NETTLE (*Lamium amplexicaule*, Linn.), a small annual, fairly common on cultivated and waste ground, is not unlike the Purple Dead-Nettle, but somewhat lighter and more graceful. Its fine, deep rose-coloured flowers have a much slenderer tube, thrown out farther from the

leaves.

The SPOTTED DEAD-NETTLE (*L. maculatum*), not considered a true wilding, but an escape from old-fashioned cottage gardens, is by some botanists regarded as a variety of the White Dead-Nettle, which it closely resembles, the flowers being, however, pale purple, instead of white and the foliage often marked by a broad, irregular streak of white down the centre of each leaf, with a few blotches on each side.

The HEMP NETTLE (*Galeopsis tetrahit*, Lirm.) (named from *gale* (weasel) and *opsis* (a countenance), because of a fancied resemblance of its blossom to a weasel's face) is supposed to have been the source of one of Count Mattei's nostrums: *Pettorale*.

It is found on roadsides and borders of cornfields, tall-stemmed and erect, covered with long, dense bristles, the stem-joints thickened and the egg-shaped leaves hairy. The flowers, in dense whorls, are white, purple or yellow and are specially adapted for the visits of long-lipped bees, being much visited by the Humble Bee.

See [DODDERS](#).

Gerard tells us:

'the White Archangel flowers compass the stalks round at certain distances, even as those of Horehound, whereof this is a kind and not of Nettle. The root is very threddy. The flowers are baked with sugar; as also the distilled water of them, which is said to make the heart merry, to make a good colour in the face, and to make the vital spirits more fresh and lively.'

Linnaeus tells us that although refused by cattle, the leaves are eaten in Sweden as a pot-herb in the spring, in like manner as the True Nettle.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Part Used Medicinally---**The whole herb, collected in May and June, when just coming into flower and the leaves are in their best condition, and then dried in the manner directed for 'bunched' herbs.

The characteristic Dead-Nettle odour is lost in drying, but a slightly bitter taste remains.

The herb may be cultivated and propagated by means of seed sown in shallow drills, or by cuttings or division of roots - it spreads rapidly by means of its creeping, perennial roots, so that when once established, it is hard to get rid of it - but it would hardly pay for cultivation and is generally collected in the wild state.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**The whole plant is of an astringent nature, and in herbal medicine is considered of use for arresting haemorrhages, as in spitting of blood and dysentery. Cotton-wool, dipped in a tincture of the fresh herb, is efficacious in staunching bleeding and a homoeopathic tincture prepared from the flowers is used for internal bleeding, the dose being 5 to 10 drops in cold water.

As a blood purifier for rashes, eczema, etc., a decoction of Nettle flowers is excellent.

It has the reputation of being effectual in the healing of green wounds, bruises and burns.

This and the other species of Dead-Nettle have also been used in female complaints for their astringent properties.

Culpepper and the old herbalists tell us that the Archangel is an exhilarating herb, that it 'makes the

heart merry, drives away melancholy, quickens the spirits, is good against the quartan agues, stauncheth bleeding at the mouth and nose if it be stamped and applied to the nape of the neck.'

It was used with great success in removing the hardness of the spleen, which was supposed to be the seat of melancholy, a decoction being made with wine and the herb applied hot as a plaster to the region of the spleen, the decoction also being used as a fomentation.

Bruised and mixed with salt, vinegar and lard, it has proved useful in the reduction of swellings and also to give ease in gout, sciatica and other pains in the joints and muscles.

[\[Top\]](#)

---

## NETTLE, YELLOW DEAD

**Botanical: *Lamium Galeobdolon* (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Labiatae**

**---Synonyms---**Yellow Archangel. Weazel Snout. Dummy Nettle.

**---Part Used---**Herb.

The closely-allied Yellow Archangel and the Purple Dead-Nettle (*Lamium purpureum*) have also been used medicinally for the same purposes as the White Dead-Nettle, Culpepper telling us that the Yellow Archangel is most to be commended of the three for healing sores and ulcers.

All three species have hollow, square stalks, with the leaves opposite, in pairs.

The Yellow Archangel resembles in habit the White Dead-Nettle, but its stems are straighter and more upright, the pairs of leaves farther apart, the leaves themselves, narrower, longer and more pointed. The flowers, which also grow in whorls, are a little longer. They are large and handsome; pale yellow, blotched with red, visited by both Humble- and Honey-bee.

It has a much shorter flowering season than either of the other Dead-Nettles, being only in flower for two months - mid-April to mid-June, or May to July, according to district.

The plant is not infrequent in damp woods and shady hedgerows, but is much more local in its habitat than either the White or Purple Dead-Nettle, being common in some localities and altogether absent from others.

Its specific name, *Galeobdolon*, is made up from two Greek words, *gale* (a weasel) and *bdolos* (a disagreeable odour), an allusion to the somewhat strong odour of the plant when crushed.

The whole herb was used medicinally, dried and employed in the same manner as the White Archangel.