

Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

Common Name: Nettle.

Location: Stinging nettle is found in temperate climates around the world. It is a perennial plant growing to a height of five feet.

Description: It bears lance-shaped leaves and green flowers with yellow stamens. If you come into contact with the fine hairs on the leaves and stem, you may develop a burning pain that lasts for hours.

Properties: Both the leaves and the roots are used in herbal medicine, but they have very different uses.

Uses: From ancient Greece to the present, nettle has been used for treating coughs, tuberculosis, and arthritis, and as a hair tonic. Stinging nettle leaf is an anti-inflammatory, especially for the allergic reactions of the skin, as well as a diuretic. It can relieve symptoms of hay fever and allergies such as a runny nose and congestion. It is used to treat urinary tract infections, and European folk medicine uses it to treat seborrhea of the scalp and overly greasy hair. Stinging nettle helps to increase mother's milk production in nursing mothers. Taken as a health treatment, stinging nettle root takes the "sting" or inflammation out of allergic reactions, benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH), and lupus. It also keeps an active form of testosterone from affecting both men and women. Benefits of stinging nettle for specific health conditions include treatment of the following: allergies (hay fever), anemia, benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH), diminished sex drive, hives, and upus.

Doses: Stinging nettle leaf is available in capsule and juice forms. It can also be used as a tea. Stinging nettle has a long history of use as a food, and is regarded as safe.

Warnings: In rare cases, some people develop an allergic reaction, such as a rash, after taking stinging nettle leaf. If such a reaction occurs, use of the herb should be discontinued. People should not use stinging nettle products made from either the leaf or the root of the plant if they have fluid retention due to congestive heart failure or kidney disease. Men should not use stinging nettle to treat urinary problems without medical examination. Similar symptoms can be caused by a more serious condition, such as prostate cancer, that requires medical treatment. Because stinging nettle leaf reduces the body's production of an immune chemical known as interleukin-6 (IL-6), it should be avoided by people who have, or think they may be coming down with, the flu. There are concerns that nettle may interact with prescription medications used for diabetes, high blood pressure, and inflammation, as well as sedative medications. There have not been any reports of actual problems occurring, but if you are taking such medications, you should use nettle with caution. In addition, you should not use uncooked stinging nettles. They may cause kidney damage and other symptoms of poisoning. Stinging nettle is a diuretic and may remove potassium from the body. If nettle is used regularly, you should eat foods high in potassium, such as bananas and fresh vegetables, or take a potassium supplement daily.

Less well known as a pregnancy tonic but deserving a kinder reputation and use, *Urtica* is one of the finest nourishing tonics known. It is reputed to have more chlorophyll than any other herb. The list of vitamins and minerals in this herb includes nearly every one known to necessary for human health and growth.

Vitamins A, C, D and K, calcium, potassium, phosphorous, iron and sulphur are particularly abundant in nettles. The infusion is a dark green color approaching black. The taste is deep and rich. If you are blessed with a nettle patch near you, use the fresh plant as a pot herb in the spring.

Some pregnant women alternate weeks of nettle and raspberry brews; others drink raspberry until the last month and then switch to nettles to insure large amounts of vitamin K in the blood before birth.

The benefits of drinking nettle infusion before and throughout pregnancy include:

~ Aiding the kidneys. Nettle infusions were instrumental in rebuilding the kidneys of a woman who was told she would have to be put on a dialysis machine. Since the kidneys must cleanse 150 percent of the normal blood supply for most of the pregnancy, nettle's ability to nourish and strengthen them is of major importance. Any accumulation of minerals in the kidneys, such as gravel or stones, is gently loosened, dissolved and eliminated by the consistent use of nettle infusions.

~ Increasing fertility in women and men.

~ Nourishing mother and fetus.

~ Easing leg cramps and other spasms.

~ Diminishing pain during and after birth. The high calcium content, which is readily assimilated, helps diminish muscle pains in the uterus, in the legs and elsewhere.

~ Preventing hemorrhage after birth. Nettle is a superb source of vitamin K, and increases available hemoglobin, both of which decrease the likelihood of postpartum hemorrhage. Fresh Nettle Juice, in teaspoon doses, slows postpartum bleeding.

~ Reducing hemorrhoids. Nettle's mild astringency and general nourishing action tightens and strengthens blood vessels, helps maintain arterial elasticity and improves venous resilience.

~ Increasing the richness and amount of breast milk.