

# Nettles in the Kitchen

## Herbstalk 2019

Jade Alicandro Mace, Herbalist at Milk & Honey Herbs



# Materia Medica

**Nettles (*Urtica dioica*)** aka Stinging Nettle. Syn. *Urtica dioica* ssp. *dioica* (European stinging nettle), *Urtica dioica* ssp. *gracilis* (North American stinging nettle), *Urtica dioica* ssp. *Holosericea* (Hoary Nettle)

**Fam Urticaceae**

**Part Used:** Leaves and Stems (young tops), Roots, Seeds

**Collection: Leaves & Stems-** Spring before it goes to flower OR continuously all summer into the fall, as long as the nettles have been continuously harvested/mown to keep them from going to flower. The top 4-6 inches of stem and leaf are best for eating and the entire aerial portion can be harvested for medicine-making or drying for tea. **Seeds-** While they are still green in the late summer. Tincture them while they are fresh and green OR hang them to dry and remove from their stems for storage once they are dried (they turn brown when dried). **Roots-** Anytime, but spring and fall are best

**Habitat:** Old farms, farms in general, compost heaps, fertile soil, gardens, meadows, edges, bike paths, floodplains, lake and riversides.

**Cultivation:** Nettles are quite easy to grow, and will grow in either full sun or part shade. They are especially partial to fertile and somewhat moist, but well-drained soil. Give them composted animal manure and they will thrive! Be sure to give them plenty of room in the garden since they readily spread through their rhizomes. They can be easily propagated by planting cuttings of these rhizomes- best done in the spring, early summer, and fall.



**Description:** If you've met this plant just once, it was probably memorable enough to learn how to ID it for the future! The most distinctive feature of this plant, of course, is its sting. The entire plant is covered with very fine hairs, which are actually hollow tubes with a swollen base which holds the venom. The bristles easily break off when brushed against and deliver the sting! It is an herbaceous, perennial plant with square stems, opposite leaves that are oval and very jaggedly toothed around the edges. It can reach well over 4 feet in height but is often much smaller. The entire plant is vibrant green. In early summer gives rise to very small, green, inconspicuous flowers that dangle on clusters that hang down from the leaf axils. The flowers become green seeds in late-mid summer, and then eventually turn brown. The dead leaf stalk will be left when the plant dies back to its roots in the fall. European Nettles are dioecious, whereas North American Nettles (*U. dioica ssp gracilis*) tend to be monoecious.

**Herbal Ecology:** This is such a "people plant!" Where there are people, and especially farms and animals, there will be nettles. The classic European Nettles (*U. dioica ssp. dioica*) that are widespread in our country were originally endemic to Eurasia- now they are found in every state in the continental US! The range of the European and North American species overlap, and some botanists consider it impossible to tell the different subspecies apart. In general, the presence of nettles often indicates rich and fertile soil. It is a dynamic accumulator and will concentrate minerals and help re-mineralize soil. It will also accumulate heavy metals, so watch out!

**Taste:** Salty, slightly Bitter, slightly Sweet

**Energetics:** Leaves, Stems, Roots- Cool & Dry (some sources say Warm, especially TCM).

Seeds- Warm to Neutral

**Herbal Actions:** Antioxidant, alterative, astringent, anti-histamine, diuretic, galactagogue, hemostat, nutritive, kidney trophorestorative

**Constituents:** **Stingers-** histamine, formic acid, acetylcholine and 5-hydroxytryptamine (serotonin) **Leaf/Stem/Seed-** Protein, linoleic acid, nitrogen, chlorophyll, magnesium, silica, sulphur, manganese, potassium, zinc, iron, beta-carotene, fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C (and on and on...basically every mineral you need!) **Roots-** Sterols

**Uses:** **Root-** Famous for treating **Benign Prostate Hypertrophy (BPH)**, especially when combined with Saw Palmetto Berries. Also tonifies and strengthens the prostate. **Seed-** A potent **kidney trophorestorative**, with many herbalists reporting dramatic effects with clients who have **severe kidney issues**, going toward complete kidney failure. The use of a tincture of the green seeds seems to work best for this. The seeds can also be eaten once they are dried. Specific for **exhaustion**, the seeds are a potent **adrenal tonic**, helping to correct **adrenal fatigue**, restore proper hormonal levels in the body, supporting the immune system, and also supporting the body's ability to deal with stress. **Leaves & Stems (young tops)-** These are the most well-known part of the plant in terms of its medicinal use. They have so many uses! Famous as a **nutritive tonic**, safe for daily use, chock full of trace minerals and vitamins (use as a nourishing infusion)! Perhaps our most nutritious plant. High in iron, they are excellent for **anemia** and often used in **pregnancy** for anemia and to nourish the mother and baby in general. Also **excellent postpartum and while nursing**, as they not only nourish the mother and baby, but also increase production of milk! The nourishing infusion can be taken daily to help **remineralize**, especially when trying to naturally heal cavities. Known as an **alterative** or "**blood cleanser**," the leaves are often used for arthritis and inflammatory skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis. Also useful for treating **gout**, nettles help remove uric acid from the blood. Famous for treating **seasonal allergies-** a tincture of the fresh leaves or freeze-dried capsules seem to work best for this. A nourishing



infusion can help too, but many herbalists recommend starting to drink the infusion 3-4x/week beginning 2-3 months before allergy season. A strong diuretic, nettles are a **tonic for the urinary system**, and help treat UTI's (cystitis), nephritis, urinary stones, and both chronic and acute kidney issues. **Hemostat when used externally**- the dried powder applied topically to a wound will stop bleeding. The fresh herb can be used topically for "**urtication**"- the process of purposefully getting stung by Nettles- to reduce pain and inflammation from arthritis, general muscle stiffness, and injury. As the old herbal adage goes- "When in doubt, give Nettles!"

**Preparations: Seed-** Harvest when they are plump and green and tincture green (40-50% Alcohol) or let dry and store in a cool, dry place to be added to food or taken by themselves daily.

**Leaf/Stem-** Potherb (aka eat it!), Fresh plant tincture (40-50% alcohol), Infused Oil & Salve, Vinegar, Nourishing Infusion. **Root-** Tincture (40-50% alcohol), Decoction

**Dosage: Seeds-** In/as food-1 tsp to 1 tbsp/day. As a tincture- 2 drops to 1 dropperfull. **Leaf & Stem-** Tincture- 1/2-1 tsp 3x/day. Nourishing Infusion 3-4 cups/day. Vinegar- Liberally in food or 3tsp/day. **Root-** Tincture- 1/2-1 tsp 3x/day

**Contraindications:** In some people the seeds can cause too much energy and act like a stimulant, especially the green seeds. Try the dried seeds or small doses for these folks. Do not eat or use for medicine once the plants have gone to flower, since post-flowering it concentrates calcium carbonate crystals, which can be irritating to the kidneys.

**More:** If you find nettles too drying for your constitution, add some marshmallow root or leaf, violet leaf, or shatavari to off-set the dryness. Fiber from the stem can be used to make cordage and even clothes! Use to make "compost tea" for the garden. Used in cheese-making, is a natural dye, and used traditionally to make beer. A wash of the leaves is said to restore lushness and thickness to hair. "Urtication" is the process of beating the bare skin with fresh nettles! Traditionally used in this way to treat arthritis and rheumatic pains. Can be blended fresh to remove the sting and then added to dressings and eaten raw.



# The Basics



## **What Part of the Plant to Use When Cooking with Fresh Nettles**

When it comes to cooking with fresh Nettles we often use the young “tops,” aka the top 4-6 inches of the young plants in the spring- leaf and stem and all. Once the plant develops throughout the spring you can still harvest and eat the top 4-6 inches as long as it’s pliable and also the older leaves, which can be stripped from the stem. I don’t like including the stem in my cooking once it becomes tough and rigid, although it’s certainly still fine for medicine-making and I also often save them and freeze for making broths!

## **Cooking with Fresh vs Raw vs Dry**

When you blend fresh Nettles in a food processor, cook them (in a batter, soup, sauté, etc), dry them, or mince them very fine, the sting is rendered harmless. However, sometimes folks will still get a bit of a burning sensation in their mouth or back of the throat if they eat fresh blended or fresh minced Nettles that haven’t been cooked. While this certainly isn’t harmful it can of course be uncomfortable. So if you’re one of these people, you can simply give the fresh Nettles a quick blanch in hot water for about a minute and then use in your preparations from there if you aren’t planning on cooking it (like a pesto or dressing, for example). The dried Nettles are best



used in spice blends, added in small amounts to soups and stews, powdered and sprinkled on food and so on, or added in large amounts to bone broth and stocks.

## **How to Freeze Fresh Nettles**

Blanch for 1 min. Squeeze-out excess moisture. Pack in Tupperware or freezer bags. Use like frozen spinach!

## **Adding Nettles to Batters**

Fresh Nettles can be added to any batter- bread, cake, pancakes(savory or sweet) , scones, cookies....pretty much whatever you can think of! When you add Nettles to your batters be sure to 1) Blanch the fresh Nettles for about 1 minute in hot water, rinse with cool water, and then squeeze out as much moisture as you can, 2) Blend the blanched Nettles in a food processor well (or hand chop very fine) before adding to the batter and, 3) Reduce the amount of liquid the recipe calls for (just a bit) because of the moisture still contained in the fresh Nettles (it's impossible to squeeze it all out)



# Recipes

## Spring Nettles 'Kraut



### *Ingredients:*

- 9 cups cabbage, thinly shredded (about 1 medium-sized cabbage)
- 3 cups fresh Nettles tops and leaves (*Urtica dioica*), coarsely chopped
- 3/4 cup Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), chopped
- 1/2 cup Garlic Mustard leaves and stems (*Alliaria petiolata*), coarsely chopped
- 4 tsp sea salt

*other nice additions:* Dandelion lvs, Wild Garlic (*Allium vineale*), Chickweed, Violet lvs, Yellow Dock lvs, Garlic lvs

### *Directions:*

First-off, this recipe is meant to be played around with. If you don't have access to one of the greens in the recipe it's ok to leave it out or substitute it for something you have an abundance of! Start by chopping your cabbage. Pile it into a big bowl and sprinkle with about 2 tsp of the salt and begin massaging it with your hands. The cabbage will begin to breakdown, releasing its juices which becomes the brine. Once the cabbage is thoroughly massaged start adding the

Nettles bit by bit, along with the remaining salt, and keep massaging. You can wear gloves for this part if you're worried about the sting (which will be rendered harmless by the fermentation process). Once you've added all the Nettles, add the Garlic Mustard and Chives and mix and massage thoroughly.

Next choose your vessel- a fermentation crock or wide mouth mason jar will work. Pack the 'kraut into your vessel and press in with your hands or use a sauerkraut stamper (also called a pounder or tamper) until the brine covers the 'kraut. Use a heavy lid or small plate with a sterilized rock on it for the crock or mason jar to keep the brine levels over the veggies, or another good trick for this if you don't have a small lid is to fill a ziplock bag with water and use that to keep 'kraut below the brine level. Lastly, you can always make brine to top-off the sauerkraut by mixing 1 1/2 tbsp sea salt with 1 quart hot water (be sure to let cool before adding to your ferment). The bottom-line is that the brine level needs to be over the veggies. Now you sit back and let it ferment! Fermentation time will vary based on the weather but start checking it after a few days to track its progression. It's ready when it tastes sour, crunchy, and still salty, but not nearly as salty as it tasted when it first started fermenting. Then put it into a jar with a lid and keep in the fridge or your root cellar, if you're lucky enough to have one! Enjoy as a condiment, with sandwiches, with breakfast, with a heavy meal, as a base for salad dressing, on a picnic, or even as a simple snack.



# Spring Greens Frittata with Nettles



## *Ingredients:*

8 eggs  
1/2 c milk of choice (dairy or almond, rice, coconut, etc)  
2 cups fresh spring/wild greens (choices are numerous- I used roughly equal parts nettles, dandelion greens, chives, garlic leaves and second year bulbs)  
Sea salt and black pepper to taste  
Ghee

## *Directions:*

Sauté the greens for 3-4 min (add extra garlic if desired), then set aside. In a bowl mix eggs (lightly) and then add the milk. Add the greens to the egg/milk mix. Put a cast iron deep dish skillet on the stove and warm 2 tbsp ghee in it, then add the egg/greens mix and cook on medium for 5-7 min until it sets. Then put it in the oven at 350 to cook an additional 15-18 min. Enjoy!

# Irish Nettles Soup



## *Ingredients:*

4 cups fresh nettles tops and leaves, chopped  
1 large onion, diced  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
4 medium potatoes, cubed  
1/4 cup spring herbs (chives, garlic mustard, thyme, oregano, etc)  
8 cups water, vegetable, chicken or bone broth  
sea salt and black pepper, to taste  
fresh-squeezed lemon, to taste

## *Instructions:*

Sauté the onions and garlic in olive oil, butter or ghee until translucent. Add the potatoes and liquid and bring to a boil then simmer until soft (7-10 min). Next add the nettles and herbs (reserving some for garnish) and simmer about 5 minutes until soft. Add the salt, pepper, and fresh-squeezed lemon to taste and enjoy

# Nettles & Chive Rice Pilaf



## *Ingredients:*

1 cup white basmati rice  
2 cups chicken broth (or veggie broth, bone broth, or water)  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1/2 cup onion, chopped  
1.5 cups Nettles tops and leaves, chopped  
1/2 cup Chives (leaves and blossoms), chopped  
Olive oil  
Salt, Pepper and Ghee to taste  
Optional: Toasted Pine Nuts

## *Directions:*

Sauté the onions and garlic in olive oil until soft. Next add the broth (or water) and rice. Bring to a boil then simmer on low heat until cooked, usually 15-20 minutes. When the rice is about half-way through cooking add the Nettles and Chives. Add Salt, Pepper and Ghee to taste to serve. Toasted Pine Nuts would be a wonderful addition and, as with all my recipes, I encourage you to adapt it to make it your own!



# Nettles & Asparagus Kichari



## *Ingredients:*

4 cups fresh Nettles tops (top 4-6 inches) and/or leaves, chopped  
2 cups Asparagus, chopped into 2-3 inch pieces  
1 cup white basmati rice  
1/2 cup mung beans  
10 cups water  
3 tbsp ghee  
Fresh Cilantro, for garnish

## *Spice blend:*

1.5 tsp Turmeric pwd  
1 tsp Fennel Sd  
1 tsp Coriander Sd  
1 tsp Brown Mustard Sd  
1 tsp Cumin Sd  
1 pinch (1/4 tsp) Hing/Asafoetida powder

*Directions:*

Start by combining your rice and mung beans (ideally soaked in water the night before, but not necessary for the recipe to work) and the 10 cups of water. Cover and bring to a low simmer and let cook until soft, stirring occasionally to avoid any sticking to the bottom of the pan. This part take about 20-25 minutes. When it's ready the entire mixture will have a thick, porridge-like consistency. While the rice and mung are cooking, chop your Asparagus and Nettles and set aside. Then lightly grind your spices in a mortar and pestle- you could use powdered spices instead of the full seeds if desired- and set aside. Once the rice and mung are cooked, add the Nettles and Asparagus and cook for another 5 minutes. The spices and ghee are added last. Brown them for just a few minutes in the ghee- being sure not to burn them- until they start to release their aroma. Then add the ghee and spice mix to the rice, mung, and veggies and cook an additional minute or two, and you're done! Garnish with fresh cilantro and a pinch of sea salt if desired. Enjoy!

# Spring Greens Dressing with Nettles



## *Ingredients:*

1 bunch parsley (about 1 cup)  
1 bunch cilantro (about 1 cup)  
½ bunch fresh dandelion greens (about ½ cup)  
1 bunch fresh chickweed (*Stellaria media*)  
1 bunch fresh young nettles tops and/or leaves (*Urtica dioica*)  
1/3rd cup olive oil  
¼ cup lemon juice  
2 tbsp raw honey  
2 tbsp raw apple cider vinegar  
1 tbsp miso  
2 cloves garlic black pepper to taste

## *Directions:*

Blend all the ingredients in a food processor until smooth. Use on salads, as a dip, on eggs, meats, vegetables, and so on!



# Nettles Pesto



## *Ingredients:*

- 3 cups fresh Nettles (top 4-6 inches and/or older leaves stripped from the stem), chopped and packed
- 1/2 c walnuts, pine nuts, sunflower seeds, or pumpkin seeds (optional)
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced (or to taste)
- 6 tbsp virgin olive oil (add more if needed)
- sea salt and fresh black pepper to taste

## *Directions:*

Process ingredients in food processor, take liberties to adjust ingredients to taste and explore flavoring by adding-in additional medicinal and culinary herbs! NOTE: if you find that you get a bit of a burning sensation in the back of your throat from raw Nettles pesto, you can give the nettles a quick blanch before blending with the other ingredients by plunging the Nettles in a hot water bath for about a minute. Then rinse in cool water and proceed with the recipe!

# Nettles Vinegar/Pickled Nettles



## *Ingredients:*

Fresh Nettles- tops and/or leaves  
Raw Apple Cider Vinegar

## *Directions:*

If you are wanting to use the Nettles you're infusing into your vinegar as pickled Nettles (to eat straight, put on a bread board/charcuterie, add to foods, have as an condiment, put on salads, etc) then I recommend using the young tops or the pliable top 4-6 inches of the plant). No need to chop, just put the tops right into a mason jar. If you plan on straining out your plant material then you can use older stems and leaves as well as the tops and chop it all. Whichever part of the plant you're using, place into a mason jar and then just barely cover the plant material with raw apple cider vinegar. Put a layer of wax or parchment paper under the lid, label, and let steep 2-4 weeks, shaking well as often as you remember. Strain and reserve the pickled Nettles tops (must

be refrigerated once strained from the vinegar) and use the vinegar for cooking, marinades, dressings, salads, in bone broth, in warm water, and so on. Or you can choose not to strain and simply leave the pickled Nettles in the vinegar and eat as-needed and use the vinegar as-needed.

It's ok if you don't strain it right at 2-4 weeks (I rarely do), that's just when it's ready. I often don't strain my vinegars for 6 months to a year! If you chose not to make pickled Nettles then you can simply strain-out the plant material and compost and use the reserved Nettles-infused vinegar in the kitchen! Herbal infused vinegars do not need to be refrigerated and have a lifespan of 1-2 year, and often longer.



# Simple Nettles Sauté



## *Ingredients:*

Nettles tops and/or leaves  
Gluten-free Tamari  
sea salt (to taste)

## *Directions:*

Chop your Nettles if desired, although when they're really young I like to sauté the tops whole without chopping, in a little olive oil, ghee, or pasture butter. Add a little bit of water so they just barely steam in their own juices and the small amount of water. Cook for 3-5 minutes, just until cooked through and bright green. Splash with Tamari and add a bit of sea salt if needed and enjoy as a side dish, with eggs, with meat, or as a nourishing snack!



# Nettles Gomasio



## *Ingredients:*

1.5 cups sesame seeds  
1/2 cup dulse flakes  
3/4 cup dried nettle leaf  
1/8thth cup dried rosemary  
1 tbsp himalayan pink sea salt OR any other unrefined sea salt

## *Directions:*

Toast the sesame seeds lightly until fragrant and just turning golden. Grind the Nettles, Dulse, and Rosemary in a mortar and pestle so they are coarsely ground, or you could give them a very quick zoom in a coffee grinder, spice grinder, or vitamix. Combine with the salt and sesame seeds and enjoy! Best stored in the fridge. Will keep at least a few months. Some other nutritious seeds to consider adding include Nettle Seed, Hemp Seed, Evening Primrose Seed, and Yellow Dock Seed. Mineral rich additions include dried Plantain Lf, Lambs Quarters, and Dandelion Lf. You can also experiment with spices like garlic powder, chilies, cumin, coriander, turmeric and so on! Sprinkle on just about everything- eggs, veggies, salads, grains! Or use as a supplement- take 2 teaspoons/day.

## More Ways to Use Nettles in the Kitchen



- powder the dried leaves and sprinkle on your foods, add to smoothies, make a Nettles “matcha”, add to zoom balls, add to batters, and so on
- sprinkle the dried seeds on your food or add to sauces/soups to thicken them up
- put the dried leaves and/or seed in Gomasio (see recipe) or spice blends
- add dried leaves or powder to soups and stews
- add dried leaves to bone and veggie broths and stocks
- use fresh young tops and leaves in place of cooked spinach- in egg scrambles, quiche and frittatas, casseroles, spanakopita, soups, stews, in pasta (esp homemade fresh pasta), risotto, etc
- add fresh Nettles to hummus, falafel, tabouli
- ferment fresh Nettles- sauerkraut (see recipe above), kimchi

Enjoy all!!





Netles Cake