

# Playful springboards: NETTLE



## Don't pick nettles...

...when they are in flower (they are temporarily poisonous)

...if the leaves are tinged purple (the plant is stressed and bitter tasting)

...from polluted areas (for obvious reasons!)

...without gloves!

## Foraging Top Tips

Have scissors or secateurs handy. Take a basket or bag to put them in.

Collect the top, youngest leaves. Wash the leaves well in cold water. Blanch in hot water for 2 minutes to remove the stings, then squeeze the water out.

For millennia Nettles have been used to restore blood circulation under the skin, ward off arthritis in the joints and keep you warm through its irritation of the skin.

## Treating nettle rash

If possible, try not to touch the area that has been stung for the first 10 minutes. It's easier to remove the nettle's chemicals if they are dry.

Use soap and water to wash away the chemicals from the surface of the skin – but sluice or dab, don't rub.

A clean cloth can be used if you aren't close to soap and water, until the area can be cleaned properly.

Once clean and dry, use sticky tape to remove any remaining nettle fibres.

If needed, a dose of antihistamine will relieve the itching. Dab on topical creams like calamine lotion or hydrocortisone to reduce redness and itching

Use age appropriate paracetamol or ibuprofen for provide pain relief.

A cold compress can provide additional relief, but avoid hot temperatures.

And don't scratch!

Celebrate *Be Nice to Nettles Week* (May is a good time – before they flower, if you wish to cook with them).



Muddy Faces



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Nettle has a wide variety of uses including as thread for textile and rope, tea, soil cleansing, hair products, dyes, manure, fly repellent, vegetable rennet, arthritis relief and food.



## Stinging nettle tea

This herbal tea has so many benefits and is filled with all sorts of vitamins and minerals that support your body's natural function as well as improving your hair and skin. The best thing is...

IT'S FREE!

- 1: From the top of the plant, pick enough large stinging nettle leaves to fill a small bowl (don't be a hero, wear a glove).
- 2: Boil the water and pour it into the empty bowl.
- 3: Add the leaves to the *cooling* water and wait until it turns green.
- 4: Strain the nettle tea into a cup.
- 5: Add honey to taste 😊

## Nettle Soup

### Ingredients:

Onion, olive oil or butter, carrot, nettles, stock, salt and pepper, crème fraiche.

### Instructions:

Dice onion and saute in butter or oil. Add peeled cubed carrots, potatoes. Add chopped clove of garlic and celery. Add nettle. Add stock, salt and pepper to taste and Simmer for 10-12 mins. Serve (you can puree). Nice with crème fraiche swirled into garnish.

## Nettle Dip

### Ingredients:

Nettles, olive oil, roasted garlic (2 cloves), or 1 fresh clove, or wild garlic leaves  
Fresh mint leave, lemon, cayenne pepper, salt, crème fraiche or soured cream.

### Instructions:

Mix together the ingredients in a blender  
Taste and adjust seasoning  
Serve with chopped vegetables, crisps or breadsticks





## Story Starters

Read about the role of nettles in Hans Christian Anderson's tale, *The Wild Swans*, the moral of which is that courage can be painful!

In mythology, nettles are associated with the god of thunder, Thor. In some cultures, nettles would be burned in a fire during thunderstorms.

Several butterfly species lay their eggs on nettle leaves. Create a story to tell the tale of a butterfly's life cycle.

Imagine what might happen in a dream about nettles.

## Making string from nettles

Find a tall straight nettle and uproot it. Wearing thick gloves, brush off the stinging hairs and leaves until you are left with a bald stem. Crush the stem between your thumb and forefinger and then run your thumb nail down the stem to open it up. Now bend the stem backwards over a finger to cause the inner fibres to break. Remove them, leaving just the outer fibres. Leave the fibres to dry a little before braiding fold a length of fibre in half and then roll the fibre separately between your fingers until you get to the end then let go. The fibres will start to break themselves. Repeat this step until you feel the piece of cord has been made. You can then use your cord to weave with and to tie things together

Meek (2015, p.12)

## Making dye from Nettle

Use the above search terms to find links to guidance and refer to the websites below.

<https://rebeccadesnos.com/blogs/journal/dyeing-with-nettles> 

This website has a lot of information to help you use nettles to dye a range of different fabrics. You could experiment with different fabrics and mordants to explore the range of colours you can achieve with nettles.

<https://botanicalcolors.com/how-to-mordant/>  
This website includes lots of information about mordants.

