



### Information Sheet – Urtica Dioica

Singing nettles are probably low down on most people's lists of favourite herbs to stumble across whilst strolling in the countryside. The interesting thing is that, despite causing painful welts to the exposed flesh, nettles are also capable of calming and alleviating such distress.

The tiny hairs on the stem and leaf of the nettle plant contain formic acid and chemicals such as histamine, which they inject into your skin to cause irritation and inflammation. This is their defence mechanism and very successful it is too. I loathed nettles as a child growing up in the countryside. Now, though, I love them for the beneficial effects they have on health. You see, the chemicals that hurt you are released from the bulb structure at the end of the needle-like hairs; however, the plant as a whole has a number of constituents, including several known antihistamines. So, in a like-cures-like fashion, taking the herb internally can get rid of the symptoms that it causes externally!

If you are a frequent sufferer from red, itchy rashes, dramatic reactions to bites and stings, or allergic reactions in general, drink nettle tea regularly. If you fall prey to hay fever every summer, use nettles to reduce the severity of your symptoms.

Stinging nettles grow everywhere — in far too many places some might think. For medical purposes the plant is best harvested in May or June as it is coming into flower. Old leaves develop gritty particles that can act as an irritant to the kidneys. When young and lush, the leaves contain much chlorophyll and many valuable vitamins and other nutrients.

Nettles have a purifying action on the body when used internally. They help to remove uric acid from the system and have therefore been used traditionally for the treatment of gout. Any arthritic condition will also be helped, as uric acid levels are usually high in such circumstances. Trials have even been done with people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis deliberately stinging themselves with nettles, as the formic acid is believed to have a beneficial effect on the rheumatic joints. (I would suggest that 'Don't Try This At Home' would be a wise observation at this juncture!)

Apart from the arthritic amongst us, anyone can benefit from regularly imbibing nettle tea, as it has a detoxifying effect and helps to clear some of the acids created by our junk food diets and rushed lifestyles. Traditionally, the high quantities of iron and vitamins in spring nettles made them a valuable food source, commonly used in the early spring to help cleanse the system after a long winter of preserved foods with few fresh vegetables.

The taste of nettle tea or tincture is quite bland and people find it refreshing as a beverage. Try it this summer and you might get a whole new perspective on this dreaded 'weed'.