

Stinging Nettle

URTICA DIOICA



HABITAT

Wasteland, neglected corners or fields and gardens, woods and hedgerows.

PARTS USED

Leaves and young Springtime stems.

Nettles have been used for human food for millennia and it really isn't so long ago (about a hundred years ago in fact) that the plant was still being used quite regularly as food in this country. Over the past few years nettles have made something of a comeback as celeb chefs discover how to rustle up nettle soup. Quite honestly that is a waste of the leaves as they make an excellent spinach substitute when cooked properly.

There are varying thoughts on where the name 'nettle' is derived from. One theory is that it from 'naedl' an Anglo-Saxon word for needle, another that it comes from an old word meaning to twist. *Urtica* comes from the Latin for 'I burn', *uro*. Scientifically the plant belongs to the *Urticaceae* or Nettle family. It is a perennial with creeping roots, growing from 30 to 180 cm tall, flowers from May to September, and usually likes soils rich in nitrogen and potassium.

Nettles are a good vitamin A and C source, and there are a variety of other mineral traces too. Repeated stinging (as when you pick the leaves with your bare hands) can cause a recurrent rash while potential contra-indications exist from nettle being diuretic, the older leaves laxative, and an indication that blood pressure and sugar may be lowered. For these reasons readers with a medical condition should probably therefore seek expert medical advice before eating nettles.

Consumption of wild plants is at the reader's discretion and own risk. For personal safety do not eat wild plants if you have a medical condition, during pregnancy, or feed to minors.

WHEN USING ONE OF THE WILD PLANTS LISTED FOR THE FIRST TIME, TRY TASTING JUST A SMALL AMOUNT OF THE PREPARED PLANT TO CHECK YOUR TOLERANCE. IF YOU HAVE ANY BAD OR ALLERGIC REACTIONS AVOID ANY FURTHER CONSUMPTION. NEVER PUT ANY PLANT INTO YOUR MOUTH UNLESS ABSOLUTELY 100% CERTAIN OF ITS IDENTIFICATION AND EDIBILITY.

NETTLE ALOO

Nettles	1-2 garlic cloves
Potatoes	1 tsp. ground coriander and paprika
Water	Pinches of ground cardamom seed &
Butter or oil	cayenne
Mustard seeds	Ground black pepper
1 large onion - sliced	Salt

Sag Aloo is one of those wonderful Indian side dishes and this version uses the spinach-like common nettle as a replacement. Roll on nettle aloo...

- Cut the potatoes into 1-inch sized pieces and place into a pot with the nettle leaves.
- Cover with some warm water, bring to a rapid boil then simmer for 10-12 minutes, or until the potato pieces are tender.
- In another pan heat butter or oil and cook the mustard seeds until they start to pop.
- Add onion sliced lengthways and garlic, and sauté till softened, then add the spices.
- Stir around then remove from the heat to add the drained potato and nettles. • Stir everything together gently so the potatoes don't disintegrate, and add any seasoning at this stage. • Continue simmering gently until the whole mass has lost more water.

VARIATIONS

There are other wild ingredients that might make for interesting variations on this recipe. Some of the larger rootstocks for example, and perhaps leaves like borage, rosebay willowherb, ground-elder [pre-cooked to remove the bitter edge], or elder flowers. Chickweed comes to mind too, although it is so delicate that you would have to add it later in the cooking process to prevent it becoming a green sludge.

[Recipe extract from 'The Really Wild Food Guide' - ISBN 0 9544158 0 9]

NETTLE & SMOKED FISH SAUCE

1 small onion - chopped
Butter or oil [oil preferred]
2-3 cups nettles - young
1 cup water
1 tbsp. peanut butter [coarse / unsweetened]
Cayenne pepper - pinch
Smoked fish - cooked and flaked

- In a pan fry the onion until softened then add the cayenne, nettle leaves, plus the peanut butter mixed with about a ½ cup of water. • Mix together then cover and cook for about 5 minutes at a moderate heat. • Stir from time to time to prevent sticking.
- Add flaked fish on top of the mixture and the rest of the water. • Cover again and simmer for another 5 minutes. • Serve with potatoes or rice.

[Recipe from 'The Essential Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook' - ISBN 0 9544158 1 7]

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