

Expert Herbal Reality Resource

Nettle

Names

Botanical Name *Urtica dioica* L, *Urtica urens* L

Family: Urticaceae

Common names: Stinging nettle (Eng), Haarnesselkraut, Brennesselwurzel, Haarnesselwurzel (Ger), herbe d'ortie, racine d'ortie (Fr), ortica (Ital), brændenælde (Dan)



Description

Urtica dioica is a perennial herb, 25–150cm in height and covered all over with brittle stinging hairs. The leaves are a dark green and deeply serrated with pale pink flowers and seeds appearing on long drooping stems that protrude from the stem and leaf itself. It has shallow, branching yellow roots. Nettles grow wild in a variety of locations, but are most common in hedgerows, wood margins, waste ground, meadows, gardens and roadsides.

Urtica urens is a similar looking annual herb that can also be used.

Constituents

Nettle leaf:

- flavonoids;
- nettle hairs contain leukotrienes, neutrophil chemotactic activity and histamine, also silicon.

Traditional use

Traditional indications for nettle leaf in Western herbal medicine include uterine haemorrhage, epistaxis and cutaneous eruptions. Medicinal monographs in Europe support the traditional use of nettle leaf in rheumatic and arthritic conditions.

There is a long tradition, going back to at least Roman times, of using nettle stings as a counter-irritant for the relief of arthritic pain. (1)

Traditional actions

Traditional Ayurvedic characteristics are

Rasa (taste) Astringent, bitter, sweet, salty

Virya (action) Cooling

Vipaka (post-digestive effect) Pungent

Guna (quality) Light, dry, sharp/ penetrating

Dosha effect: strengthens *vata*, and reduces excessive *pitta* and *kapha*

Dhatu (tissue) Rasa/plasma, rakta/ blood, majja/nervous

Srotas (channels) Rakta/circulatory, prana/respiratory, mutra/urinary, stanya/ lactation, purisha/excretory

Traditional Ayurvedic actions include

Asmarighna Relieves urinary stones & calculi.
Balya Strengthening.
Brmhana Nourishing tonic, anabolic.
Chedana Clears toxins from the tissues.
Jwaraghna Relieves fevers.
Krimighna Eliminates worms & parasites.
Kusthaghna Alleviates skin problems.
Mutrala Diuretic.
Pandughni Useful in anaemia.
Prameha Useful in diabetes.
Raktadhara Enhances circulation.
Raktapitta Curbs bleeding from excess pitta.
Raktashodhana Purifies the blood.
Rasayana Rejuvenative.
Sheetapittahara Helps in management of urticaria.
Stambhana Dries excessive secretions.
Stanya Increases milk supply.
Udaraprasamana Relieves allergies.



What practitioners say

Skin: Nettle is indicated in allergic skin conditions and reactions such as eczema and allergic dermatitis, partly due to its ability to calm the allergic immune response but also because it purifies the blood supply by supporting natural detoxification and cleansing processes within the body.

Immune: Nettle is anti-histaminic and is indicated in any allergic reaction, particularly seasonal disorders such as hay fever but also in allergic skin reactions. It will balance and calm and overactive immune system.

Musculoskeletal: Indicated where there is excessive acidity within the joints, such as in gout. Nettle will also act as a general diuretic, removing any excessive levels of heat and fluid around the joints.

Metabolic: Nettle has demonstrated the ability to balance the blood sugar, particularly targeting hyperglycaemia.

Liver: Nettle supports the phases of detoxification in the liver, enhancing natural cleansing and detoxification processes.

Urinary & Kidney: As nettle is a diuretic, it can help to reduce fluid accumulation and inflammatory congestion within the kidney and urinary systems, including the prostate where there may be early signs of BPH (benign prostatic hyperplasia).

The modern use of nettle root is mainly to treat symptoms of urinary tract discomfort in men with benign prostate hyperplasia where cancer has been ruled out.

External Uses: Apply fresh juice or tea to bleeding cuts & wounds, haemorrhoids, nosebleeds, burns, sunburn, scalds, bites and stings. Ointment/cream for irritating skin conditions, e.g. eczema. "Urtication" involves stinging skin with fresh nettles to stimulate circulation, relieve pain and swelling of arthritis.



Ayurvedic Indications: Excellent nourishing tonic and rejuvenative. Increases *ojas*, good when run down from stress or illness or needing extra nourishment as in pregnancy and breastfeeding. Clears *ama* and excess *pitta* and *kapha* from *rasa* and *rakta dhatus*. Nourishes and cleanses the blood, strengthens blood vessels. Clears toxins via bowels and *mutravahasrotas*, good detoxifying remedy for a “spring cleanse”. Removes excess *kapha* after winter and reduces *pitta* in preparation for heat of spring and summer. Useful in chronic skin problems including eczema, boils & abscesses.

Evidence

There are a number of research studies of variable quality that point to benefits of nettle on relieving arthritic pain (including reducing the need for pain relieving drugs)(2) and impairment. (3)

There are positive results for nettle in a study to explore the effect of various herbs on high blood pressure. (4)

Traditional reputation for easing hayfever and allergies is supported by a study showing positive benefits in the relief of allergic rhinitis. (5)

Two randomised controlled clinical trials involving patients with advanced type 2 diabetes have shown that nettle could effectively and safely control a number of measures of that condition. (6,7)

Another clinical study has demonstrated positive benefits for nettle in reducing menopausal hot flushes. (8)

There is evidence that the use of stinging nettles externally can relieve arthritic pain. (9)

Nettle has shown to be an antagonist for histamine receptors, meaning that it blocks histamine and reduces its effect. (10) This is useful for conditions like hayfever and allergic rhinitis. It also blocks inflammatory prostaglandins. (10)

A total of 246 participants took part in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled multicentre study to investigate the effects of nettle root extract on benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH). They were administered with 459mg, and results showed a significant reduction in International Prostate Symptom Score (IPSS) when compared to placebo (11). Results show that nettle root has an anti-inflammatory effect and it is likely that epidermal growth factor, prostate steroid membrane receptors and sex hormone binding globulin are involved in the antiprostatic effect (11).

A small clinical study with 100 patients showed that nettle had a better effect in relieving clinical symptoms of BPH, however it was not stated which plant part was used (12). Larger clinical studies are needed to confirm nettle roots efficacy for BPH but its favourable safety profile and promising results so far show it may be useful for this condition which effects so many.

Safety

Apart from the familiar risk of nettle stings from the fresh plant, the prepared leaves are very safe and there are only occasional minor gastrointestinal symptoms from use of the root.

Dosage

6–12 g/day of dried leaf as a tea (infusion); 4–6 g/day of dried root by decoction or infusion

References

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