

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).

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, eg. 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)ⁱⁱ and impairment.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are positive results for nettle in a study to explore the effect of various herbs on high blood pressure.^{iv}

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

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.^{vi,vii}

Another clinical study has demonstrated positive benefits for nettle in reducing menopausal hot flushes.^{viii}

There is evidence that the use of stinging nettles externally can relieve arthritic pain.^{ix}

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

- ⁱ Randall C, Dickens A, White A, et al. (2008) Nettle sting for chronic knee pain: a randomised controlled pilot study. *Complement Ther Med.* 16(2): 66–72
- ⁱⁱ Jacquet, A., Girodet, PO., Pariente, A., et al. (2009). Phytalgic, a food supplement, vs placebo in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee or hip: A randomised double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trial. *Arthritis Res. Ther.* 11: R192
- ⁱⁱⁱ Chrubasik, S., Enderlein, W., Bauer, R., and Grabner, W. (1997). Evidence for antirheumatic effectiveness of Herba Urticae dioicae in acute arthritis: A pilot study. *Phytomedicine.*4:105–108

-
- iv Samaha AA, Fawaz M, Salami A, et al. (2019) Antihypertensive Indigenous Lebanese Plants: Ethnopharmacology and a Clinical Trial. *Biomolecules*. 9(7): 292
- v Mittman, P. (1990). Randomized, double-blind study of freeze-dried *Urtica dioica* in the treatment of allergic rhinitis. *Planta Med*. 56: 44–47
- vi Kianbakht S, Khalighi-Sigaroodi F, Dabaghian FH. (2013) Improved glycemic control in patients with advanced type 2 diabetes mellitus taking *Urtica dioica* leaf extract: a randomized double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trial. *Clin Lab*. 59(9-10): 1071–1076
- vii Namazi N, Tarighat A, Bahrami A. (2012) The effect of hydro alcoholic nettle (*Urtica dioica*) extract on oxidative stress in patients with type 2 diabetes: a randomized double-blind clinical trial. *Pak J Biol Sci*. 15(2): 98–102
- viii Kargozar R, Salari R, Jarahi L, et al. (2019) *Urtica dioica* in comparison with placebo and acupuncture: A new possibility for menopausal hot flashes: A randomized clinical trial. *Complement Ther Med*. 44: 166–173
- ix Randall C, Randall H, Dobbs F, et al. (2000) Randomized controlled trial of nettle sting for treatment of base-of-thumb pain. *J R Soc Med*. 93(6): 305–309