# Nettle: The Plant, Foraging and Kitchen Uses

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Nettle (the plant), in summary:** Stinging nettle (Urtica dioica) is a widely-distributed UK wild plant, edible as tea, soup or pesto; young tops late March to May, sting deactivated by heat or drying.

*Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.*

**Stinging nettle is the British hedgerow's most overlooked free food. Beyond the sting, the plant offers significant iron, vitamin C, and protein content, used as tea, soup, and food across European traditions. The cup is earthy vegetal, the brewing is straightforward (the sting deactivates with heat), and foraged nettle is one of the few "wild" teas easily available across the UK.**

## The plant

Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is widespread across the UK, woodlands, hedgerows, gardens, road verges. Stinging hairs deliver formic acid (and other compounds) when touched, producing the familiar sting. The sting is gone within hours of cutting; entirely deactivated by drying or heating.

Two main UK species:

- *Urtica dioica*, common nettle (perennial, widespread)
- *Urtica urens*, small / annual nettle

Both are edible; common nettle is more widely used.

## Nettle's nutritional profile

Per 100g of dried nettle leaf:

- Iron: 4-7mg
- Calcium: 200-300mg
- Magnesium: 70-100mg
- Vitamin C: ~50mg
- Vitamin K: significant
- Beta carotene (vitamin A precursor): meaningful

- Protein: ~30% by dry weight

This is unusually nutrient dense for a leaf, comparable to nutritional spinach.

### Tea strength delivery

A cup of nettle tea extracts a fraction of these nutrients but is meaningful for daily drinking:

- Trace iron and minerals (a small extra, not a treatment)
- Polyphenol antioxidants
- Plant compounds with traditional folk uses

For full nutritional benefit, eating nettle (soup, pesto, cooked greens) delivers more than drinking tea strength brew.

### Traditional uses

- **Spring tonic.** Traditional UK herbal practice, fresh young nettle leaves in early spring as nutritional restoration after winter.
- **Hay fever support.** Some evidence (modest).
- **Joint pain.** A traditional choice for rheumatic aches.
- **Hair and scalp support.** Traditional hair rinse.
- **Anaemia adjunct.** Iron content provides gentle nutritional support.

### Foraging nettle

#### Best time

Spring (March May) for young top leaves. Older nettle becomes tough and the leaves develop oxalate crystals that can affect kidneys at very high intake.

#### Where

Hedgerows, woodland edges, garden corners. Avoid:

- Roadsides (pollution / dog urine)
- Sprayed agricultural margins
- Industrial sites

#### How to pick

1. Wear gloves (or carefully grasp from underneath, leaves angle their stings outward).
2. Pick the top 4-6 young leaves (the youngest, most tender).
3. Use scissors or pinch off carefully.
4. Wash on return; rinse thoroughly.

#### Drying

Spread leaves on a tray in a warm dry room or low oven (50°C). Dry 4-7 days. Store airtight.

## How to brew nettle tea

### From dried (commercial or self foraged)

1. 1 tsp dried nettle (or 1 bag) per 200ml.
2. Just boiled water.
3. Steep 5-7 minutes.
4. Sweeten with honey; lemon optional.

### From fresh leaves

1. 6-8 young top leaves per 200ml.
2. Just boiled water.
3. Steep 7-10 minutes (heat deactivates sting and extracts compounds).
4. Strain.
5. Sweeten with honey.

## Cooking with nettle

### Nettle soup (UK classic)

1. Sauté 1 onion + 1 potato.
2. Add 200g washed young nettle leaves.
3. Add 800ml stock.
4. Simmer 15 minutes.
5. Blend to smooth.
6. Season; cream optional.

### Nettle pesto

Blanch nettle 30 seconds; drain; squeeze dry. Blend with garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan, olive oil, lemon. Use as standard pesto.

### Nettle risotto, nettle pasta, nettle gnocchi

Replace spinach in any green vegetable application.

## UK nettle tea brands

- **Heath & Heather Nettle.** UK herbal, pure leaf.
- **Twinings Nettle & Pomegranate.** Mainstream blended.
- **Pukka Cleanse.** Contains nettle alongside other herbs.

- **Yogi Nettle.** An American herbal tea brand.
- **Foraged.** Free, fresher, more characterful.

## Caffeine

0mg.

### Cautions

- **Diuretic medication.** Mild additive effect.
- **Blood thinners.** Vitamin K content theoretically interacts with warfarin.
- **Diabetes medication.** Possible additive blood sugar lowering.
- **Pregnancy.** Mixed advice; consult midwife.
- **Older nettle leaves.** Higher oxalate content; avoid heavy daily intake of older leaves.

### Caffeine free, foraging friendly, cooking versatile

Nettle is one of the most useful free wild ingredients in the British countryside. Tea, soup, pesto, pasta, infused oil: versatile and properly nutritious.

### FAQ

**Does nettle tea sting?** No, drying or boiling deactivates the sting.

**What does it taste like?** Earthy, vegetal, slightly bitter. Resembles spinach water.

**What is nettle tea good for?** Real if modest, iron, vitamin C, polyphenols, traditional uses for hay fever and joint pain.

**Best when?** Spring (young leaves). Dried, it works as a daily cup all year.

**Foraging vs commercial?** Foraged is fresher, free, more nutrient dense. Commercial is convenient.

*Curator's note: nettle tea is the British hedgerow's free gift. £0 in your garden or local hedgerow; £3 in tea bag form. The cup earns its place: modest hay fever support, real iron content and a satisfying spring habit. Worth foraging once. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.*

### Quick reference: nettle the plant (Urtica dioica)

| Aspect | The note |
|---|---|
| Latin | Urtica dioica (stinging nettle) |
| UK habitat | Hedgerows, waste ground, gardens, riverbanks |
| Picking season | Young tops late March to May; tougher older leaves through summer |
| Identification | Heart-shaped serrated leaves, opposite pairs, stinging hairs visible |
| Sting | Formic acid + histamine + serotonin; neutralised by heat or drying |
| Edible parts | Young tops; older leaves get tough and contain more cystoliths |
| Traditional uses | Tea, soup, pesto, scalp rinse, fibre cloth, wound dressing |

| Aspect | The note |
| --- | --- |
| Bronze Age dish | Nettle pudding, an oldest-British-recipe candidate |

## More on nettle

Continue with nettle tea, nettle tea benefits and herbal tea.

## Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

Teas that travel well with this article: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. There is plenty more in the tea shop, and nettle orders, like any other, post free in the UK above £35.

**FROM THE CURATOR**

*teas* · Foraged nettle costs nothing; bought nettle should be judged per cup. Loose dried nettle usually wins, though tea bags sometimes match it.

## More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag


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