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Stinging Nettle

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Last week I met an herbalist at our local Market and he gave me a jar of dried Nettle - asking me if I knew it was being researched for its cancer curing properties. I told him I did not, but would do some research.

Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*): *Urtica* is from the Latin 'uro' which means 'I burn'- an indication of the stinging pain caused by this plant if you accidentally brush up against it while walking in the woods, while wearing shorts. *Dioica* in Latin means 'two houses'. This refers to the fact that the male and female flowers are normally carried on separate plants. It's thought that the word 'nettle' was derived from the word needle, referring to the stinging mechanism in the leaves, or from the Latin 'nere', meaning to sew.

While there hundreds of species of Nettle, the one that has been researched most for its medicinal properties is the infamous Stinging Nettle. It is a

perennial weed that's native to Europe. Nettle usually appears in the same place year after year in undisturbed habitats such as rich woodlands, thickets, along riverbanks, creeks and partially shaded trails. It grows from 2 to 7 feet high and has pointed leaves with distinctive jagged edges. The flowers are white to yellowish panicles. The plant is covered with nearly invisible stinging 'hairs' (trichomes) which produce an intense, stinging pain, followed by redness and skin irritation.

This stinging sensation from contact with the hairs is caused by the presence of -formic acid, histamine, serotonin and acetylcholine, within the hairs. Each sting is a hollow hair stiffened by silica with a swollen base that contains the venom. The tip of this hair is brittle and when brushed against, it breaks off to expose a sharp point that penetrates the skin and delivers its stinging payload. If this happens to you, always look around for the remedy that Mother Nature has provided. In this case it's Yellow Dock. It always grows near to Stinging Nettle. Take a few leaves of Yellow Dock, bruise them and rub them on the Nettle sting. It will neutralize the sting and cool the skin. Other natural remedies are Rosemary, Mint and Sage. However, most stings require no treatment other than time.

Besides formic acid, histamine, serotonin, and acetylcholine, Stinging Nettle also contains: caffeic-acid, calcium, cellulose, chlorine, chlorophyll, chromium, ferulic-acid, fluorine, folacin, glucoquinones, glycerol, iodine, iron, koproporphyrin, lecithin, lignans, magnesium, mucilage, oleanoic acid (and 9-hydroxyl, 10-trans, 12-cis- octadecanoic acid), P-coumaric-acid, potassium, protoporphyrin, scopoletin, silicon, sitosterol, sitosterol-glucoside, sterols, sulfur, tannin violaxanthin, xantho-phyllepoxide and vitamins A, G, C, and ***K**. (* Because of its vitamin K content, Stinging Nettle may increase the effectiveness of blood-thinning medications.)

Nettle has a cooling energy and is drying and astringent. The aerial parts is used as an astringent, diuretic, expectorant, hemostatic (stops bleeding), circulatory stimulant, nutritive tonic, to lower blood sugar levels, to treat gout/arthritis and to prevent scurvy.

This weed may increase the effectiveness of diuretics and medications that lower blood pressure. It may also increase the effectiveness of anti-diabetic drugs commonly used in adult-onset diabetes, as it has a hypoglycemic effect of its own. Stinging Nettles may still be used in any of these conditions, but a consistent daily amount should be taken to allow for adjustments in medication, if necessary. As in all herbal healing, we need to develop an innate wisdom of listening to our bodies.

Some other conditions that Nettle is good for are: anemia (because of its high iron and Vitamin C content), hay fever and other allergic conditions, goiter, osteoporosis, muscle cramps, high blood pressure and mal-absorption syndrome. Almost any condition that requires improved mineral balance will benefit from Stinging Nettles.

Recent research is demonstrating positive results for benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) with the use of Stinging Nettle root extract. When used in conjunction with Saw Palmetto Berries, Nettle root extract inhibits testosterone metabolites dihydrotestosterone and estrogen, thus proving to be an effective treatment for BPH. It seems that Nettles block a chemical process in the body that has been linked to prostate disorders.

While Stinging Nettles is good for many conditions, I could find no documented research as to its being used in the treatment of cancer. There is a theory about cancer that perhaps you've heard: cancer (whatever its cause) can only 'take hold' in an unhealthy terrain. By keeping all the systems of the body in a healthy condition, cancer is less likely to appear. So in that light, Stinging Nettles might be a cancer preventative.