

“Resilience is knowing that you are the only one that has the power and the responsibility to pick yourself up.”

- **Mary Holloway**

Sometimes it's really hard to pick a quote because there are so many great ones out there from which to choose. This one captured my attention for a variety of reasons. Resilience is an important characteristic. It's so important in fact, I dedicated an entire newsletter to the topic back in May 2019. Be sure to take a few moments to read it here: [Be Resilient](#). Everyone goes through difficult periods, but as I said in my newsletter, being resilient means you can bend, but you don't break. For some people, resilience is instinctive. But for others, it takes work and practice. Remember that we all have battles to fight at some point. No one can ever escape a difficult period that will inevitably rear its ugly head, but from pain can come wisdom, from fear can come courage and from suffering can come strength. What will lead you through any or all of them is resilience. Resilience isn't a single skill. It's a variety of skills and coping mechanisms. Sometimes, it's as simple as forgiving yourself for your faults and mistakes and moving on. Other times, it's turning the page on the difficult chapter in your book of life. Resilience also takes courage, so I think the two can go hand in hand. Courage doesn't always roar. It might be a quiet little voice whispering in your ear telling you to try again tomorrow. Resilience ultimately means that you may fall, fail or get hurt, but you pick yourself up, dust yourself off and keep on going.

Yours in health,

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Don't Despise Stinging Nettles



It's the height of hiking season, before the oppressive heat and humidity force the more casual hikers to seek other forms of summer recreation. I'll hike in almost any kind of weather, but the two things I (and most people) don't like about hiking this time of year are the cobwebs and the stinging nettles. For those who don't know what a stinging nettle is, you'll learn quickly if you ever brush up against one on the trail. It immediately lets you know it's there by the painful sting it leaves on your skin. That sting can last for about 15 minutes. The scientific name for stinging nettle is *Urtica Dioica*, which comes from the Latin word "uro", meaning "to burn". That's certainly appropriate. Other than poison ivy, it's probably one of the most hated plants by hikers in nature. It's one of the reasons why I hike in long pants, no matter how hot it is. But I digress. If someone had told me that stinging nettles were a nutrient-dense superfood, I probably would have laughed and wouldn't have believed it. But I recently came across a small article raving about its benefits, so obviously, I had to look into it and learn more.

Some of you may not know what stinging nettles are and they're pictured above. They're a pretty robust, herbaceous perennial you'll see along just about any hiking trail. Since they're perennials, they can live for up to 25 years under ideal conditions. Nettles can grow anywhere from 3-7 feet tall and their leaves, which have coarsely-serrated (toothed) edges, grow in pairs along the square-shaped stem. Both the stems and the leaves are covered in hollow, stinging hairs that inject histamine and formic acid on contact, which causes the pain you feel as you brush against them. They also produce small greenish-white or yellowish flowers arranged in drooping clusters. I was pretty surprised to learn there are both male and female flowers, which grow on separate plants. The males hang loosely while the females are more compact and upright. Nettles have a pretty aggressive root system that spreads quickly, ultimately forming dense colonies that crowd out other vegetation. What's interesting is that one plant it doesn't crowd out is jewelweed, which grows in super close proximity to nettles and is actually nature's antidote for the itch and pain caused by the nettles. Nettles become dormant in the winter and establish new shoots early in the spring. Regeneration comes quickly from root fragments, even small ones, making them difficult to eliminate once established.

Now that you know what they are, let's talk about some of their positive aspects about which most people don't know. In Ancient Egypt, doctors used nettles to treat arthritis and lower back pain. Hippocrates recorded around 60 medicinal uses for them, including treatments for bleeding, respiratory issues and wound healing. Roman soldiers used them to generate heat and stay warm in cold climates. In medieval Europe and in Traditional Chinese Medicine, nettles were a staple for purifying blood and supporting kidney function. It was considered one of nine "sacred herbs". Various native American tribes used nettle teas and poultices for allergies, respiratory complaints and as a general tonic.

Stinging nettles are rich in Vitamins A, C, K and B vitamins, as well as several minerals such as iron, calcium, magnesium and potassium. They also contain all of the essential amino acids and even some protein! Their primary therapeutic uses include the following:

- **Anti-inflammatory and Pain Relief:** This is super surprising since they cause pain when you touch them.
- **Allergy Relief:** They contain natural antihistamine properties that can help reduce sneezing, congestion and itchy eyes, which are often associated with seasonal allergies.
- **Detoxification and Diuretic Effects:** They act as a natural diuretic to support kidney health and gently detoxify the body.
- **Nutritional Support:** They provide plant-based protein and antioxidants that defend cells against oxidative stress.
- **May Lower Blood Pressure:** They stimulate the production of nitric oxide, which helps relax the blood vessels' muscles, helping them widen.

This interesting plant clearly belongs in my *"Food as Medicine"* series. As I mentioned above, their sting is super painful, but the good news is that their stinging hairs are neutralized when they come into contact with heat. Because of how painful the sting is, you must wear gloves if you decide to harvest them and reap their many benefits. Here's the step-by-step process for that:

- **Harvest and Wash:** Pick young leaves (preferably in the spring when they are the most tender) and rinse them thoroughly in cold water to remove any dirt or debris that may be attached.
- **Blanch:** Put them in a bowl and pour boiling water over top. Let them sit for about a minute. The heat will instantly neutralize the sting. Drain and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking and preserve their bright green color. Alternatively, place them in a shallow pan with just 2-3 tablespoons of water. Cover and steam/sauté for 3-4 minutes until wilted and deep green. This will help retain their nutrients.
- **Squeeze:** Squeeze out the excess water. They're now safe to handle with bare hands.
- **Freeze for Later Use:** After blanching and squeezing, use them immediately or place them in airtight bags and freeze. Later, you can drop them into soups without thawing them.
- **Other Cooking Tips:**
 - Soups and Stews: add the blanched nettles to any fresh soup you're cooking until wilted. You can blend them for a creamier soup.
 - Sauteed side dish: Sauté with garlic and olive oil like spinach.
 - Pesto: Blend them with garlic, nuts, parmesan cheese and oil. You will essentially substitute the nettles for basil.
 - Tea: steep dried nettle leaves in hot water for 5-10 minutes.

An important thing to note is do **NOT** eat them raw.

Here are a couple of other health benefits:

- **Metabolic and Cardiovascular Health:** Consumption of nettles helps with blood-sugar control, high-blood pressure and reducing LDL cholesterol and triglycerides.
- **Joint Pain and Arthritis:** Apply fresh nettle leaves directly to painful joints to create a "counter-irritant" effect. Studies suggest they can reduce pain for over 24 hours. Additionally, nettle extracts have been shown to reduce the need for NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) in osteoarthritis patients as well as lower inflammation markers.
- **Hot Flashes:** Randomized trials found that 450 mg/day of nettle extract significantly reduced the frequency and severity of hot flashes, comparable to some hormone therapies.
- **Enlarged Prostate:** The root (rather than the leaves) of the nettle plant has been used to treat enlarged prostates. The root extract (300-600 mg/day) significantly reduced prostate symptom scores and improved urinary flows without side effects.

While generally safe, therapeutic doses of nettles **CAN** interact with some medications. Since they are high in Vitamin K, they can counteract the effects of blood thinners and therefore increase the risk of clotting. Because they lower blood sugar, combining their use with things like insulin can cause low blood sugar, so be sure to monitor levels carefully. They're a natural diuretic, so they can enhance the effect of prescription water pills (but I'm not sure why anyone would be taking these), which could lead to dehydration or an electrolyte imbalance. Finally, pregnant women should avoid medicinal amounts of nettles as they could stimulate uterine contractions and cause miscarriage.

Overall, it's so nice to learn that a plant this, which seems to be universally hated and avoided, provides so many positive benefits. This is just more proof that God doesn't make mistakes. Hopefully this information will inspire you to learn more about stinging nettles and give them a try.

Have a wonderful month!