

Legend: [Hyper-links to Glossary or other plant confused with target plant.](#) [BEWARE – Warning exists](#)

Common Nettle – *Urtica dioica*

Other Names that it goes by ...

Also known as the Stinging nettle, Devil's plaything, Hokey-pokey and Jinny nettle.

Plant Description (aka Taxonomy)

Member of the Nettle family (*Urticaceae*).

Ecological Story (Habitat)

Found in big clumps where-ever you find very fertile soils with lots of [phosphate](#) enrichment caused by human activity (e.g. [middens](#), bonfire sites, refuse dumps etc..) A perennial that can grow up to 2m tall with distinct underground golden yellow rhizomes help it to spread. It's stinging hairs are like glass hyperdermic needles that inject [uric acid](#) into the skin leaving an [itchy rash](#). Lots of different habitats but typically found in woodlands, hedgerow bottoms, scrubby waste ground, disturbed ground, garden compost heaps, grassland pastures and orchards that have regular visits from farm animals etc..

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Flowering Time

April through September.

Fruiting time

April through September

Best time to see it and use it

Depends on what you want to do with it?

If you want to eat it then Springtime and again in the Autumn is best for collecting the fresh young leaves from the top 8cm before the flowers appear.

How to Identify it

Flower Structure: Small pale green [pendulous](#) flowers that droop down from the leaf main stem junction.

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Commented [PB4]: Link to glossary - drooping

Leaf: Can be very variable. In general they are deep green to mid green depending on surrounding shade. The [simple](#) leaves have large [teeth](#) along edge and [cordate](#) bottoms where they join the leaf stem. Leaves in opposite and [decussate](#) pairs along stem. Abundant longer stiff stinging hairs and smaller non-stinging hairs on all leaf surfaces.

Stem (trunk, branch if relevant). Stiffly hairy throughout. Look out for the thick multi-channeled rounded stem that is very fibrous.

The key recognition features:

Spring/Summer/Autumn: The leaves are very distinctive in that if touched they'll sting you – it will make it the plant you will always remember with 'fondness'!

In late spring and through summer the pale green flowers droop down from the leaf to stem junction – looking like a length of green knotted string.

Autumn/Winter: Generally the plant dies back but new shoots and leaves emerge at ground level only.

Distribution

Found almost everywhere in the British Isles (check EU distribution) but reduced spread in the North West Highlands. See BSBI Map <https://bsbi.org/maps?taxonid=2cd4p9h.9c0>

National Status

Native wild Plant - very common.

Cultural Links (Folklore, Myths, Legends, uses etc..) – see other springboards

At least 6 villages owe their names to it – Nettlecombe (Somerset) and Nettlesteads (Kent). The phosphates that nettle thrives upon endures for a long time and so ancient nettle clumps will indicate abandoned villages even as far back as the Roman occupation of Britain.

Uses: thread for textile and rope, tea, soil cleansing, hair products, dyes, manure, fly repellent, vegetable rennet, arthritis relief and food.

Risky games The phrase 'Grasping the Nettle' whereby you grab the stem and leaves quickly and hold them tightly will disarm the sting by crushing them.

Edible: Once the leaves have been cooked or crushed the sting will be disarmed enabling you to eat it. Despite their aggressive looking appearance and intent to harm you through their sting, they are in fact delicious and loaded with proteins, vitamin C, beta-carotene, calcium and other minerals.

Magical Power: For millennia it has been used to restore blood circulation under the skin, ward off arthritis in the joints and keep you warm through its irritation of the skin. Its uncomfortable for the first 30 minutes but for hours afterwards there is a delightful warm tingling feeling.

Showman Status: Alarm your friends by picking and eating a raw leaf!. To do it, you must be brave and confident in gently brushing down the hairs with your thumb and then rolling the leaf tightly into a tube and then folding it. Then take it and place it in a well salivated mouth and chew with a smile!

Gypsies used to use it to clean and purify dirty hands – they never ever suffered from arthritis thereafter.

The Impersonators

Similar plants that will grow close-by and may be confused with it include some members of the Dead-nettle family (**Lamiaceae**), such as White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*), Red Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*), Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) and Hedgewound Wort (*Stachis sylvatica*).

It could be said to feel the sting alone as a way of identifying it, but let's not resort to that technique just yet!. Try looking at the stem and any flowers that are present. All the Dead-nettles have colourful flowers in whorls around the **leave junction to the stem** and the stem is strongly square in cross-section, while Nettle has very small pale green **pendulous** flowers and a thick multi-channeled rounded stem that is very fibrous.

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Commented [PB7]: Link to glossary - drooping

Its food chain link

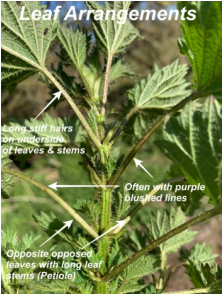
Danger Level Rating – Low (Truly!)

Only the Nettle top leaves (down to 8cm) should be gathered during the spring and autumn new growth. Thereafter when flowers emerge the chemistry changes and it produces little gritty particles within the plant called **cystoliths** made of calcium carbonate. These cause kidney pains if a lot is eaten. **Health Warning**. The flowers and berries are edible but the leaves and twigs contain toxic levels of cyanogenic glycosides. It's fine to handle and make cordage and other practical things but not to be eaten. As with all plants you must always wash your hands after handling and before eating.

Nettle in pictures

Early Spring:

Commented [PB8]: Include scale in cm's.

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|  | <p>Short Film Clip – getting up close (see dropbox)</p> | <p>Stem, Twig or Trunk</p> |
|  |  |  <p>Le</p> |
| <p>Special Play Feature</p> |  | <p>Flowers (Individual) – Top View</p> |
| <p>Flowers (Group of) – Top View</p> | <p>Flowers (underside view)</p> | <p>Young developing fruit</p> |

Commented [PB9]: Leaf arrangement 1 (simple

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Summer

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|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Full plant in habitat situ | Short Film Clip – getting up close | Stem, Twig or Trunk |
| Mature leaves | Leaf arrangement 1 (simple) | Leaf arrangement 2 (Compound) |
| Leaf arrangement 3 | Mature flower/s | Mature Flowers (Individual) – Top View |
| Mature Flowers (Group of) – Top View | Mature Flowers (underside view) | Maturing Fruit |

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Autumn

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| Full plant in habitat situ | Short Film Clip – getting up close | Stem, Twig or Trunk |
| Dying leaves | Mature Fruit | Mature Fruit (up close) |
| Special play feature | Special play feature | Special play feature |

Any known Parasites (or other) linked to the Plant

None known




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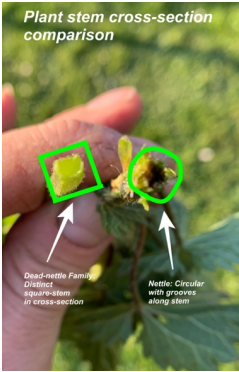
Winter Features that help you identify it in Winter

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| Full Plant | Vegetative condition | |
|------------|----------------------|--|

The Impersonators – similar Plants that might confuse you and the features that separate them

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| Full Plant | Key Feature | Key feature |
|  |  <p>Many coloured flowers in whorls at leaf-stem junction.</p> <p>Dead-nettle family features</p> |  <p>Dead-nettle Family Features</p> <p>Flowers are whorled at junction</p> <p>Fruit is like a Red-Cross Bush in shape</p> <p>Dead-nettle family features</p> |

Commented [PB10]: This will vary from plant to plant so focus on the key diagnostics that separate them is all that is needed.

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| Key feature | | |
| <div><p>Plant stem cross-section comparison</p><p>Dead-nettle Family: Distinct square-stem in cross-section</p><p>Nettle: Circular with grooves along stem</p></div> | | |

Habitats: Typical places where you will be likely to find your plant growing.

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|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Woodland | Grassland (Pastures & Meadows) | Roadside Verge |
| Farmland (Arable) | Freshwater | Heathland moorland |
| Towns and Gardens | Hedgerow | Coastal |

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|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | |
| Scrubby waste ground | Walls (including base of) | |
| | | |

Commented [PB11]: Includes building sites, forestry plantations and excavation sites were the disturbance as allowed the dormant seeds to germinate enabling short-lived plants to thrive – known as pioneer species.