

## A Weed or a Wonder?

Encouraging the next generation of upcoming gardeners:

You have decided to go on a wonderful adventure that will be both rewarding and exciting, experiencing food that's grown organically and tasting how it should really taste. You'll get to work in all weather's and season's, seeing how things grow at different times of the year. You'll be working with nature & helping our planet. You'll be making yourself both physically and spiritually a better person. You might enjoy gardening simply as a hobby ... you might decide to turn it into a full-time profession. You'll learn which flowers are edible and discover that there is a lot more to nettles than a nasty sting! It doesn't matter whether you're starting with a plant pot or a huge plot of land, the possibilities are endless.



Almost everyone is familiar with the nettle having experienced its formidable sting. To many it is a troublesome weed that should be eradicated wherever it is found. This point of view has only recently developed. Indeed the humble nettle has played, and continues to play, an important role in the natural world...

Until the latter half of the 20th Century the nettle was regarded as a most useful plant. And just as the nettle has exploited mankind by colonising their waste areas, mankind has exploited the nettle using it for food, clothing and remedies.

Even today there is much research into the medicinal use of the nettle.

People have eaten the nettle for many centuries and at one point it would have been relished as a springtime treat! Pepys wrote in his diary of having eaten '*...some nettle porridge, which was very good*'.

Nutritionally the nettle is an excellent source of calcium, magnesium, iron and numerous trace elements as well as a range of vitamins. The young shoots can be used in soups and stews and in place of spinach. The Northumberland Cheese Company even produces a nettle cheese!

Why not treat yourself to Lady Ridley's Nettle Soup?

## Lady Ridley's Nettle Soup

### **Ingredients:**

1 lb potatoes

½ lb young nettles

2 oz butter

1½ pts chicken or vegetable stock

sea salt & black pepper

4 tablespoons sour cream

### **Method:**

Cook the peeled, chopped potatoes for 10 mins in salted water. Drain.

Wash & chop coarsely the nettles (*Only pick the new, young tops, using gloves!*)

Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the nettles and stew gently for a few minutes. Add the potatoes and heated stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes or until tender.

When all is soft, cool slightly & purée in a blender, adding seasoning and the sour cream.

*"I hope you enjoy the nettle soup. The hardest work is picking the nettles. Half a pound is a lot of small leaves, but it is fun to do, in season, once a year."*

### **THE VISCOUNTESS RIDLEY**

Not only humans have benefited from the consumption of the nettle. When dried and turned into a hay the nettle loses its sting and becomes palatable to livestock. In Sweden the nettle is sometimes cultivated for this purpose and fed to milk cattle because of the increased milk production that results.

Horse breeders have often added nettle seeds to horse feeds to give the animals a sleek coat. As well as the nutritional value, people have exploited the medicinal properties of the stinging nettle.

Native Americans used the fresh leaves to treat aches and pains. European herbalists used the leaves in a similar fashion to treat gout and arthritis.

Surprisingly, although the nettle sting is highly irritant, once dried to neutralise the acid, the leaves are a natural anti-histamine and also have anti-asthmatic properties.

The dried powdered leaves can also be used to staunch the flow of blood from small cuts. In recent times the nettle has also been found to be effective in the treatment of benign prostate hypertrophy.

Cloth has been woven from the fibres in mature nettle stems for many centuries. Ouch! You may be thinking, but the nettle has been used to produce a fine fibre that can be spun and woven into cloth - frequently used for tablecloths and sheets in Scotland. It is, however, difficult to ascertain the extent to which it was used as the term *nettlecloth* came to be used for all manner of fine material whether made from nettle or not.

Being similar in texture to those materials produced by flax and hemp fibres the cloth also became widely used by the German army during the First World War when there was a shortage

of cotton for the soldiers' uniforms. Some of the reports may have been propaganda but it is clear that nettle fibre was used alongside that of the nettles' Asian cousin, Ramie.

The juice of the stems and leaves has been used to produce a permanent green dye, while a yellow dye can be obtained from boiling the roots. Both colours have been used extensively in Russia.

Although just a weed to many gardeners, the nettle has a lot to offer the resourceful gardener. In the organic garden the nettle is responsible for rearing an army of ladybirds in the early part of the year ready to march on the aphids attacking the crop plants later in the summer.

The leaves when used to pack fruit can help prevent moulds forming and the whole plant is reputed to prevent fungal attacks of other nearby plants.

Perhaps the best use of nettles in the garden is as a nutritious plant food that can be easily brewed. As well as providing a rich supply of minerals to your garden plants if sprayed over the foliage it deters pest species and prevents fungal diseases.

Nettles leaves are also a great addition to the compost heap being rich in nitrogen they provide the fuel for the bacteria to break down the more woody material in the heap.

All in all no garden should be without a patch or two!

Matthew 13 v24-30

The Parable of the Weeds

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

<sup>27</sup> "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

<sup>28</sup> "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

<sup>29</sup> "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

What does this parable teach us about God?

This parable teaches us that God is patient with the world. He waits until the time is right before he sends his angels to reap the harvest and separate the wheat from the weeds (the followers of Jesus from those opposed to him). God is giving people the maximum opportunity to mature into either wheat or weeds.

What does this parable teach us about His Kingdom?

It tells us that God's kingdom on earth is mixed with 2 types of people - those who follow Jesus and those who are rebelling against him. But ... even though the kingdom is mixed now there will

be a time when the weeds are taken out and God's kingdom will only be wheat. There is judgement coming, but at present we can't always tell which ones are wheat and which ones are weeds.

What does this parable teach us about ourselves?

It means that we shouldn't be quick to judge whether someone is a weed or wheat. We should tell people of God's patience and encourage them to choose to be wheat instead of weeds because a time for judgement is coming and then it'll be too late.

*You may be wondering how a weed that is planted a "weed" can become a "wheat"? Well it's true - a plant doesn't change as it is grown. But with patience, opportunity and encouragement, even what seems to be troublesome weed can, in actual fact, be something quite wonderful!*