



# Wild Nettle

A surprising feature of herbal research is that it is seldom the rare, exotic and beautiful plant that proves the most interesting: more often it is some common, familiar, and despised weed that is discovered to have undreamed of virtues. The common nettle is a good illustration.”

I was thinking this very thought as I researched nettles and then I came upon this quote by Euell Gibbons and thought he said it so well, I'd let his quote stand. Nettles really are one of the most nutritious greens you can eat. They are high in protein, calcium, magnesium and iron. They are also rich in vitamins A and C.

They have a long history of medicinal use and are reported to help relieve asthma, headaches, eczema, lower blood sugar levels and blood pressure, increase breast milk, reduce arthritis pain and produce healthy, shiny hair. Sounds like a cure-all to me!

Nettles are best gathered in spring (with gloves on!) when the plants send out tender new shoots. The stingers are similar to hypodermic needles. They are made up of a hollow hair stiffened by silica with a swollen base that contains the stinging solution, which is a mix of formic acid, histamine, acetylcholine and serotonin. In related species in other countries the sting can last as long as a year or more! Lucky for us, we are dealing with the common stinging nettle and the Harmony

Valley crew has done the hard part of collecting the nettles and giving them a good wash, which dissipates the stinging solution. If, perchance, you are stung by any residual solution, or by nettles collected on your own, the pain can be relieved by rubbing the affected area with rosemary, mint and sage.

Currently, nettles are cultivated more for their use as a hemp-like fiber rather than a food crop. Fortunately, they remain prolific in the wild. The nettles available locally are wild gathered. They are best in spring before the growth becomes fibrous.

Two general uses are in blended soups and in noodles, pasta or another carbohydrate base. Always start by washing well, plucking the leaves from the stem and finely chopping. To use in a soup, add a generous amount to any creamy soup recipe at least 20 minutes before the soup is finished. (It can be added at the very beginning when sauteeing the base ingredients in oil.) When blended, the soup will become dark green.



Nettle

## SPRING POTATO RAMP SOUP WITH SORREL AND NETTLES

2 bunches nettles, leaves separated from stems  
2 bunches sorrel (about 4 cups)  
2 bunches ramps, chopped  
2 Tbsp. butter  
2 large potatoes, peeled and sliced  
5 cups water  
salt  
pepper  
sour cream or cream (optional)  
2 tsp. orange or lemon zest

Heat butter and saute ramps until soft. Add potatoes, water, salt, and greens. Simmer until potatoes are soft. Puree with zest and cream or sour cream if a richer soup is desired.

One of my favorite quick summer lunches is good bread topped with whatever is in season. This is a nice early spring rendition. -- Lee Davenport

## NETTLE BRUSCHETTA

1 lg. Bunch nettles, stems removed  
3 cloves garlic  
1 baguette or Italian country style loaf  
olive oil  
salt

Boil nettles until bright green. Drain and cool in ice water. Drain and set aside. Mince garlic and saute over low heat in olive oil until fragrant and tender, about 5 minutes. In the meantime, slice and toast bread. (If you don't mind the extra oil, it's nice to brush some on the bread before toasting.) Squeeze any excess moisture from the nettles and add to the garlic. Season to taste with salt. Heat through. Top warm toast with nettles. If you have a stash of special sea salt, now is the time to break it out and top the bruschetta with a few grains.

*Recipes and information provided by Lee Davenport for Harmony Valley Farm; its farmers and staff.  
For more information go to [www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com](http://www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com)*

# A Midwestern Palette - Eating With the Seasons

Though many fresh foods are available year round, our regional agricultural community, and the urban communities surrounded by them, benefit when we choose to eat seasonally, from local producers. Knowing the seasonality of our favorite produce allows us to make informed choices.

Jan. Feb. Mar. **April** May June July Aug. Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec.

## Nettle Season

Nettles are at their very best when picked young. They begin poking through the ground once the spring days warm and should be picked or purchased in April and May. Summer nettles are tough and strong flavored, though will still make a nice tea. For cooking, plan to enjoy nettles fresh. They discolor when frozen.

### Preparation and Storage Tips

Nettles are very perishable and should be eaten immediately. If this is not possible, the best way to prolong their life is to blanch them and then store the blanched greens. Strip the leaves from the stems and drop into boiling water. Boil in large pot of water for one minute, until nettles are bright green and limp. Strain and chill in ice water to halt the cooking process. Drain and store for up to 3-4 days. Nettles are best in soups, sauces or included in dough or batter for pasta, gnocchi or blinis. They can even be included in a fresh salad as long as they have been washed very well or minced finely to get rid of the sting.

### NETTLE TEA

Using 1/4 C. of packed leaves per quart of water, crush nettle leaves, then pour boiling water over the leaves and cover. Steep for 10 - 20 minutes. Strain off the infusion and drink warm or cold.

Nettle tea is used as a blood purifier and an metabolic energizer.

### NETTLE FRITTATA

1 lg. bunch nettles, stems removed, chopped  
1 small onion, chopped (may substitute ramps)  
8 eggs  
1 Tbsp. oil  
2 Tbsp. parmesan, freshly grated  
salt and pepper

Heat oil in a pan the can also go in the oven (cast-iron is my favorite). Sauté onion (or bulb of ramp) until translucent. Add the nettles (and chopped ramp leaves) and continue frying until the greens are limp. Meanwhile break the eggs in a bowl, season with salt and pepper and mix until just combined. Pour over greens mixture. When the eggs begin to set around the edges, sprinkle with parmesan and place pan in a 350 degree oven until firm, puffy and golden.

**Harmony Valley Farm** is a family owned farm in western Wisconsin, dedicated to producing high quality, beautifully clean, and deliciously fresh certified organic produce. Our farming methods protect the environment and enhance diversity.