

STINGING NETTLE

Scientific Name: *Urtica dioica*

Dakota Name: Ichahpe hu

Ojibwe Name: Mazaan

Other:

INTRODUCTION

Stinging nettle is a tall, green plant with egg-shaped to lanceolate-shaped, serrated leaves and tiny greenish flowers. Its most well-known feature is the fine, hair-like structures on its leaves and stems that can sting when touched, causing very temporary irritation. Despite this, it is a highly nutritious and medicinal plant valued by many Indigenous peoples, including the Dakota and Ojibwe.



2 ECOLOGY

Stinging nettle grows in moist, nutrient-rich soils, often near rivers, forests, and disturbed areas. It thrives in partial shade or full sunlight and is an important plant for pollinators like bees and butterflies. The plant's roots help stabilize soil, and it provides habitat for various insects.



HISTORY

Indigenous peoples have used stinging nettle for generations as a food, medicine, and fiber plant. The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples value it for its ability to nourish and heal. Stinging nettles grow all over the world and are an important food, medicine, and material throughout their range.



TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The Dakota and Ojibwe use nettles not only for food and medicine, but also as a fiber plant for making cordage and textiles. Nettles have long been used to support overall health. It is known to help with joint pain, boost iron levels, and improve circulation. Traditional knowledge teaches that nettle tea is a strengthening and cleansing medicine. The whole, fresh plant is rubbed on bare skin to treat joint inflammation and pain. The fresh and dried plant is made into a tea that is effective in treating all kinds of inflammation.

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FORAGING AND HARVESTING

The best time to harvest nettles is in the spring when the plant is only a few inches tall and the young leaves are tender. Traditionally, Dakota and Ojibwe harvesters gather the leaves bare-handed, as the stinging effect is considered preventative care for arthritis and joint pain. Cooking, drying, or crushing the leaves removes their sting, making them safe to eat. Many Indigenous peoples make an offering of tobacco to give thanks to the plant before harvesting. It's also important to take only what is needed and to harvest sustainably.

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PRESERVATION

Nettle leaves can be dried and stored in jars for use in teas, soups, and other recipes. They can also be blanched and frozen for later use. The dried plant retains its nutrients and is often used throughout the winter. Make sure to store it away from direct light.

COMMON THREATS

Stinging nettle is a hardy plant with few natural pests. In natural ecosystems, it supports biodiversity by providing food and shelter for insects like butterflies.

CULINARY USES

Young nettle leaves are cooked and eaten like spinach or added to soups, teas, sauces, pesto, and stews. They are rich in vitamins and minerals, making them a valuable food source. The seeds also make a delicious, crunchy topping for everything from soup to yogurt.



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