

Stinging Nettles: A Spring Treat, and so much more!

Recipes and Information

Be sure to wear rubber gloves to protect your hands when preparing nettles!

Stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*) grow in swampy places and riparian corridors along streams throughout North America, Europe, Asia, and northern Africa. They resemble a mint, though they're in their own botanical family (the Urticaceae). They're easily identified by their pairs of deltoid (slightly triangular), dentate leaves (opposite-decussate in orientation), with fine spines covering the stems and leaves.

Apart from the slight fact that even the very young plants sting, nettles are a wonderful ingredient to use in soups, pasta dishes, frittatas—basically in any cooked dish where you would use young spinach. They're certainly worth the slight challenge involved in picking them, for they are rich in vitamin C, calcium, potassium, flavonoids, histamine, and serotonin—all the great chemicals one needs to reenergize after a cold winter and to combat Spring allergies.

The stinging power of nettles is instantly dismantled when they're cooked (and by cooked, we mean anything from pureeing into a soup or quickly steaming/blanching the leaves). What you're left with, once the scary stuff is out of the way, are delicate greens, with a flavor like a spinach-cucumber hybrid and so many nutrients we don't even have time to list them all. Nettles have long been used in natural medicine for their anti-inflammatory properties, and they have the added bonus of tasting delicious and not like medicine at all. You can really use nettles anywhere you'd use cooked spinach, and we've collected a couple of easy recipes for you to try!

Some Ideas for Nettles: Use in green smoothies | Enjoy a simple sauté with garlic and butter| Blanch and freeze for easy future use in stews and soups | Enjoy healthful nettle tea brewed as a simple infusion by pouring boiling water over nettle leaves and steeping them for as little as 15 minutes or as long as overnight. | Substitute for cooked spinach in recipes | Create a lustrous hair tonic by steeping nettle leaves for 2 hours and applying the cooled liquid to the scalp | Pairs well with goat and other creamy, strong cheeses | Great in savoury tarts, crepes, and egg dishes | Nettle Beer | Nettle Pesto | Create Nettle Vinegar by adding nettle leaves to organic Apple Cider Vinegar and steeping in a dark place for a few weeks



SPRING NETTLE SOUP RECIPE

Submitted by Cyndi Fendley Sweeney

Ingredients:

- 1 – 2 TBSP olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped or pressed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cups brown mushrooms, wiped clean and sliced
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1 bag Nettles: about 2 cups
- 6-7 cups good quality vegetable or chicken stock
- Optional: dash of thyme or nutmeg

Optional: 1 cup of cream or almond milk. (This adds a richness to the soup but is not necessary. If you are not using the cream, add a little more potato and stock, purely to make the soup stretch.)

Method:

In a large stock pot, 'sweat' the onion in the olive oil, covered with a lid over low heat for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, boil kettle. Carefully tear open the nettle bag (without touching the nettles) pour into a large bowl and cover with the freshly boiled water. Let sit for 2 -3 minutes.

This should remove all the stings from the nettle leaves. Drain, and pick out and discard any stems or hard pieces. Roughly chop.

Add garlic and mushrooms to the onion pot, return the lid and sweat for 5 minutes.

Add chopped potato and stock. Bring to a simmer, partly cover for 15 minutes.

Add nettles, simmer for 4 minutes. Puree the soup with a hand mixer or blender.

Stir in cream or almond milk if using. Salt and pepper to taste.

STINGING NETTLE FRITATTA RECIPE

PREP TIME: 15 min COOK TIME: 30 min YIELD: 6 servings

Ingredients:

- 6 eggs
- 1 pepper, diced
- 6 medium stalks stinging nettle, chopped
- 1 tomato (or 2 roma tomatoes), diced
- 8 stalks chives, diced
- 1-2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 - 1 tablespoon cilantro, diced
- Olive oil, for sauteeing
- Salt & pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup milk [to mix with eggs]

Method:

Begin by cleaning the stinging nettle thoroughly using rubber gloves to protect your hands.



Sauté/cook down in olive oil and a bit of water on low to medium-low for 10-15 minutes. This will "disarm" your stinging nettle and make it safe to eat.

Prep all other ingredients as indicated.

Sauté peppers, tomatoes, chives, & garlic in olive oil - add with already cooked down stinging nettle in cast iron. I suggest cast iron as you will be putting this into the oven a bit later, making for easy transition.

In medium bowl, combine 6 eggs & 1/4 cup milk, whisk thoroughly until well-combined.

After veggies are well-cooked, add egg & milk mixture to pan.

Continue to cook, covered, on a low simmer for about 10 minutes, or until egg begins to coagulate but before it really hardens.

Meanwhile, preheat oven to 350°.

Put pan into oven and cook for about 10 minutes, until egg is thoroughly cooked.

Remove from oven, let cool and . . . Enjoy!

STINGING NETTLE PESTO RECIPE

PREP TIME: 25 min YIELD: 1 cup

Ingredients:

- 1/2 pound nettles
- 4 large garlic cloves, smashed
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 1/4 cups extra virgin olive oil
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Method:

Bring a large pot of salted water to a simmer for the nettles. Add the nettles directly from their bag and cook, stirring continuously, for 2 minutes. (This denatures their sting.)

Dump into a colander to drain. When the nettles are cool enough to handle, wrap them in a clean dishtowel and wring out as much moisture as possible, like you would for spinach. You'll have about a cup of cooked, squished nettles.

In the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the paddle attachment, whirl the garlic, pine nuts, salt, and pepper to taste until finely chopped. Add the nettles, breaking them up as you drop them in, and the lemon juice and whirl until finely chopped. With the machine running, add the oil in a slow, steady stream, and process until smooth. Add the cheese, pulse briefly, and season to taste with additional salt, pepper, or lemon juice.

