

BBC

breathing places

For many, the troublesome stinging nettle may be a painful and annoying weed, but to the wildlife in your garden it's a lifesaver. So why not leave your stingers where they are?

DO ONE THING

This month...

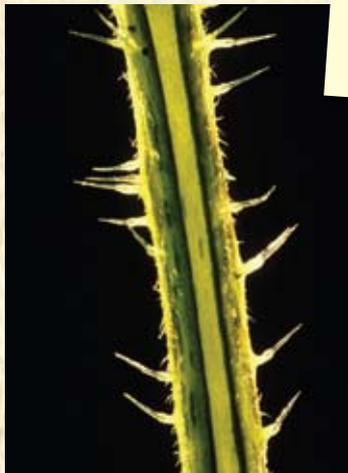
Nurture your nettles

10 things you didn't know about nettles



QUICK FACT

14-25 May is Be Nice to Nettles Week!



*** 1 SHARP NAME**

The word nettle may come from the Anglo Saxon word *noedl* which meant needle, a reference perhaps to its infamous sting. Other possible origins include the Latin *nera*, meaning to sew.

*** 2 INSECT HAVEN**

The common nettle is vital for our wildlife, supporting over 40 species of insects. The red admiral and small tortoiseshell butterflies would all but vanish without nettles as their larvae feed on its leaves.

*** 3 BIRD FOOD**

A large nettle plant is a veritable feast for seed-eating birds, producing up to 40,000 seeds.

*** 4 EFFECTIVE DEFENCE**

The sting of the nettle is caused by the cocktail of toxins that are injected into your skin when you break its delicate hairs. It is this defence mechanism that makes nettles such a great home for many insects as, other than ravenous sheep and goats, most grazing animals stay well clear of munching on those irritating leaves.



*** 5 TASTY TEA**

Nettle juice or tea is particularly useful for hay-fever sufferers as it will reduce the allergic reaction to pollen, especially if you make your own from local nettles. Pick small, young nettles, wash to get rid of soil and bugs, boil up in a pot until the water becomes slightly green and add sugar or lemons to taste. Don't worry, nettles lose their sting if they're cooked or crushed.

*** 6 SUNNY SPOT**

If you want to plant a new nettle patch to help attract butterflies, choose a sunny, sheltered location in your garden. Butterflies aren't fans of shade.

*** 7 PRIME PLANT FOOD**

Nettles make a great natural fertiliser. Carefully pull up some nettles, pop them in a plastic bucket of water and leave to stew for at least a fortnight. Try to give it a good stir every day, and after the two weeks is up you'll have a quality all-purpose liquid feed that is high in nitrogen. Water it down 10 parts water to one part nettle fertiliser and your tomatoes will love you.

*** 8 NATURAL MEDICINE**

Nettle juice is also regularly prescribed by herbalists for arthritis and gout. Nettles have a diuretic effect (in layman's terms making you pee more) to clear your body of toxins, and it can also help your body break down any inflammation in your joints.

*** 9 HEALTHY LUNCH**

Nettles have several culinary uses. They make a nutritious and delicious soup – they're packed with vitamins and iron – and can be made into ale.

*** 10 ASK FOR CUTTINGS**

Nettles are a wildflower, but don't start heading out into the countryside to start digging them up. If you ask around you'll soon find a gardening friend who'll be more than happy for you to transplant theirs.



BBC Breathing Places is a project of wild action and we want you to get involved. Over the course of the project, thousands of people will be helping to transform your local area into a haven for wildlife. To get involved today, visit www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces.

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