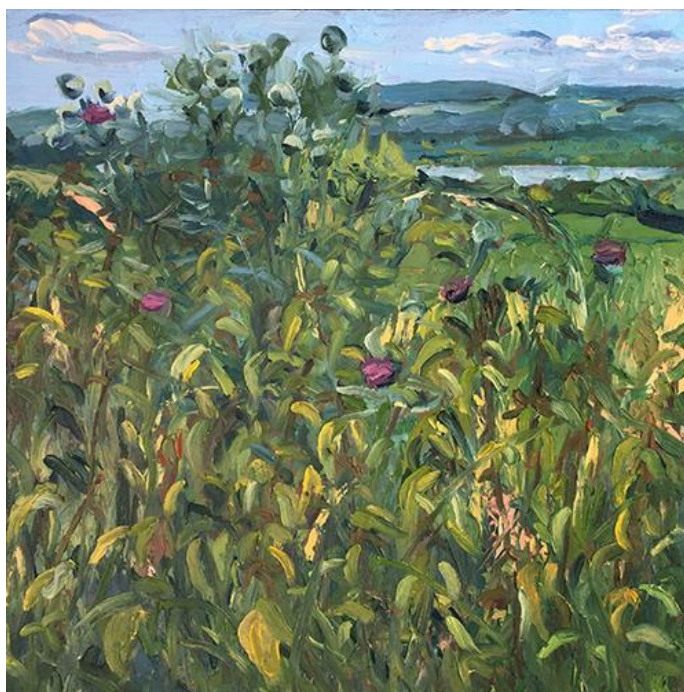


MEDICINAL PLANTS



Source: [Nettles and Thistles](#) by Stuart Nurse

HERBS THAT MOVE, CLEANSE AND NOURISH THE BLOOD

Anna Betz, MCPP, Dip.SW

SUMMARY: Nettle and Cleavers are discussed in this article, two medicinal plants found in abundance in most parts of the world. They are easy to identify, have gentle and effective blood purifying properties and are very versatile in use. For their cleansing and blood purifying properties they can both be used as food as well as medicines, on their own or together. The key differences are that cleavers stimulates lymph flow, while nettle stimulates the detoxifying action of the liver and supports the cleansing action of the kidneys. Thus, they work together synergistically.

Introduction

Nettles and Cleavers are known for nourishing and cleansing our blood. Both are best picked in spring or during the second growth in autumn. They make useful companions both out in nature as well as in our bodies where they complement each other's

many functions related to creating movement and flow.

- Why is it important to stimulate movement and flow?

Stimulating movement and flow of body fluids including blood and lymph helps the body's internal environment to integrate its diverse activities, i.e. exchange of materials between the environment

and cells, metabolize foods, clear metabolic waste and prevent infections and other diseases including cancer. The inability to integrate these diverse activities effectively leads to stagnation, congestion and disease.

- What are some adverse consequences of stagnation?
 - Fluid retention & swellings
 - Bacterial overload
 - Inability to clear cancer cells
 - Accumulation of metabolic waste that result in disease or disorders

CLEAVERS VS. NETTLES

What is the difference broadly speaking between cleavers and nettles?

- **Cleavers** support the lymphatic system in its cleansing and immune work. Its used for treating swollen lymph glands, lymphatic congestion and swollen breasts, as well as for glandular fever, post-viral fatigue and tonsillitis.^{1,2,3}
- **Nettles** stimulate the detoxifying action of the liver and support the cleansing action of the kidneys through their diuretic action. They also inhibit inflammation that can trigger seasonal allergies by blocking histamine receptors and stopping immune cells from releasing chemicals that trigger allergy symptoms.²⁰

Due to its high mineral content, including iron, nettles make for a good iron tonic.

Nettles are also useful in the treatment of arthritis, diabetes, urinary tract infections (UTIs), kidney stones, enlarged prostate and allergies like hay fever.

When would you combine them?

- For spring cleansing, bloating, sluggishness, brain fog
- For inflammatory conditions and swellings with overload of toxins and allergies.
- For the treatment of bladder infections, prostatitis, breast cancer, prostate cancer.

When would you use them separately?

- Cleavers for lymphatic swelling and drainage, states of acidity, disorders of accumulation such as cataracts and loss of hearing
- Nettles for conditions that affect joints, kidneys, prostate, allergies, anaemia, diabetes

What are the complementary plants that help them work better?

Arctium lappa, Rumex crispus, Smilax ornata, Berberis aquifolium, Achillea millefolium, Apium graveolens, Serenoa repens, Betula pubescens, Taraxacum folium, Taraxacum Radix

CLEAVERS

Latin name: Galium aparine L.

Family: Rubiaceae

Common Names: Cleavers, Sticky Willy, Skyscraper, ass rièble, Goose Grass, Lady's Straw, Bedstraw

Velcro also owes its existence to Cleavers

"It is a good remedy in the Spring, eaten (being first chopped small, and boiled well) in water-gruel, to cleanse the blood, and strengthen the liver, thereby to keep the body in health, and fitting it for that change of season that is coming." p.52, *The Complete Herbal*, Nicholas Culpeper, 1814, Richard Evans Publishing (London).

Cleavers are known as the bristly plants that easily hook on to our clothing as we walk through the

countryside or do gardening. The plant uses its hooks to help it climb and to disperse its seeds. Both cleavers and nettles can be found thriving together on derelict land or rubbish dumps where cleavers often use nettles to climb many feet high. In our bodies their actions complement each other in their toning and cleansing actions.



Cleavers Image: with permission from [Botanica Health](#)

Active Principles

Cleavers are saturated with minerals and bioactive plant compounds that detox and nourish the blood. Active ingredients include; phenols, tannins, alkaloids, anthraquinones, coumarins, iridoids asperuloside, alkanes, flavonoids and saponins. Cleavers are also rich in nutrients including chlorophyll, calcium, potassium, and chloride.

The young leaves and stems (before the plant becomes impregnated with silica and becomes too hard) have a taste reminiscent of pea shoots and can be eaten raw (in salad, juice, pesto) or preferably cooked in soups to remove the rough texture. They are rich in Vitamin C.

According to Kamyar Hedayat, the general spirit of the plant is as follows: *“It defines the whole so as to disperse the extrinsic and strengthens functioning of what is intrinsic.”*⁴ Kamyar goes on to further explain, *“It means that cleavers act systemically to communicate through the non-neural fascial and interstitial matrices for the global organism to have a sense of its toxic burden. Then, based on this, it coordinates actions that expel toxins and fortify intrinsic regulatory and buffering actions.”*⁴ Every one of its varied actions is derived from this notion.

MODERN HERBALISM

In modern herbalism cleavers is used in aiding the lymphatic system to cleanse the body's tissues and treat chronic skin problems including eczema, acne, urticaria and psoriasis. Cleavers' ability to support the lymphatic system's ability to flush out toxins, decrease congestion and reduce swelling also enhances the function of the immune system.

Cleavers' slightly bitter taste stimulates the flow of bile, aids the liver in its detoxifying work and improves digestion, especially of fats. Research has demonstrated its hepato-protective effect;⁵ it may be helpful in hepatitis and mild constipation.

As a lymphatic, cleavers help to soften and normalize hardened, swollen lymph nodes, especially in the upper part of the body including breast tissues. They have a particular affinity for the spleen, assisting the organ with waste removal and acting as an alternative to help “cleanse” the blood.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

TRADITIONAL APPLICATIONS

Folk herbalists also like to use cleavers as a cooling herb to help clear heat and stagnation and to increase flow. When making the seasonal transition from winter to spring, cleavers' energy can be a useful force in stimulating the lymphatic system.

Cleavers has a cooling and cleansing action on the whole system making it a good herb for fevers. It is especially valuable in the treatment of inflammatory urinary conditions and suppressed urine. It is used in the treatment of enlarged lymph nodes and lymphadenopathy, where infection is suspected it works best when combined with anti-infectives. It has a reputation to aid in weight loss and cellulite.

Fresh or dried, cleavers also have anti-coagulant effects when eaten, and may also help lower blood pressure. Fresh cleavers can be juiced or added to a green smoothie.

Based on Kamyar's work, the following can be said about *Galium aparine* and its actions on cleansing and detoxification:

ENDOBIOTIC ACTIONS

ORGANS: Improves trans-capsular communication of integrity and integrity disruption through networked paracrine intracellular diffusion, facilitates and increases the speed of capsular-cortical communication through neurochemical feed-forward and veno-lymphatic feedback loops.

DRAINAGE:

- *Ground matrix:* stimulates a "sweeping action" that accelerates the movement of small molecules through the extracellular fluid,
- *Lymph nodes:* capsular drainer, restores integrity of inner portions,
- *Lymphatics:* strengthens the lymphatic wall, stimulates repair of dysfunctional valves,
- *Veins:* improves venous drainage in areas of hypoperfusion through anti-coagulant activity,
- *Hepatorenal:* Indirect through its anticoagulant activity,
- *Hepatobiliary:* secondary to improve gallbladder wall integrity

GI: Cleanses the gastric rugae, reduces gastro-duodenal mucosal irritation

ENDOBIOTIC USAGE

Buffering Capacity: Use in all states of intoxication or need for blood purification (+ *Urtica* ssp. +/- *Arctium lappa*), all states of musculo-tendinous rigidity (+ Magnesium +/- *Uncaria tomentosa*, + *Sequoia gigantea* GM for those 40 years and older), as a general revitalizer (+ *Urtica dioica* + *Betula pubescens* GM or sap)⁵

ID: Recurrent infections, Chronic infections

Dosage:

Cleavers tincture and tea are most widely recommended by herbal practitioners.

- Tincture (1/2–1 teaspoon or 3–5 ml) can be taken three times per day.
- Tea is made by steeping 2–3 teaspoons (10–15 grams) of the herb in 1 cup (250 ml) of hot water for ten to fifteen minutes. People can drink three or more cups per day.

NETTLES

Latin name: *Urtica* (*Urtica dioica* & *Urtica urens*)

Family: Urticaceae

Common Names: Stinging Nettle & Dwarf Nettle
Parts used: Leaves, roots, flowers, seeds

Urtica dioica (Stinging nettle) and *Urtica urens* (Dwarf nettle) are native to Eurasia, and are considered therapeutically interchangeable¹⁰. Few people will have avoided the childhood initiation of falling into a nettle patch—and so it is generally a well recognised plant. The term nettle is used here to refer simultaneously to stinging and dwarf nettle.

Urtica prefers wet, rich soil and tends to grow in large patches. Stinging nettle is taller than dwarf nettle and is perennial; dwarf nettle is an annual.

Both plants have fleshy, drooping, serrated, roughly heart-shaped leaves. The leaves and stems are covered with stinging hairs (dwarf nettle leaves are smooth and more delicate).

Both produce inconspicuous green-white flowers in late spring or summer. The leaf, flower, seed, and root of nettle are used differently and contain different chemical constituents. In this article we focus on actions and therapeutic uses of Nettle leaves and roots related to their detoxifying and tonifying actions.



Nettle Image: from Pixabay Kapa6

Active Principles

Nettles are rich in micro-nutrients, phytochemicals, minerals and vitamins including vitamins A and C, and minerals particularly iron, silica and potassium. With their astringent, expectorant, diuretic, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, all parts of the nettle can be used as medicine.

Leaf: Acids (carbonic, caffeic, chlorogenic, formic, silicic, citric, fumaric, malic, oxalic, succinic), Amines (Ach, betain, choline, lecithin, histamine, serotonin), lignans, flavonoids (quercetin, kaempferol, and rutin), Nutrients (Vitamins A, B2, B5, C, K+, Ca+, silicon), chlorophylls a and b, dietary

fibre & protein, nitrates, sterols, tannins, glucoquinones

Root: Polysaccharides, lectin, lignans, coumarins, triterpenes, sterols, tannins, phenolic acid

Medicinal actions

Leaf: Anti-inflammatory, anti-septic, mild hypoglycaemic ^{11,12}, diuretic, anti-haemorrhagic, haemostatic detoxifier, vasodilator, circulatory stimulant, hypotensive, nutritive, galactagogue, astringent, expectorant, anti-allergic, reduces BPH (benign prostatic hyperplasia), anti-rheumatic. ¹³

Urtica increases urine output and increases the removal of uric acid. The diuretic action of Urtica makes it useful in the treatment of oedema, arthritis with swollen joints, and congestive heart disease.

Nettle leaves should not be used after flowers or seeds appear. Once the nettles have started to flower, the leaves are traditionally no longer used - they are said to contain insoluble calcium carbonate crystals that are hard to flush out of the body, can build up in the kidneys and cause kidney/back pain, particularly in people prone to kidney problems. In addition, when they flower, all the 'goodness' and energy of the plant is now directed to creating the best flowers and seeds they can, and the leaves are now neglected, dry, tough and stingy.

Root: It is indicated in BPH and uterine haemorrhages. It is specific for nervous eczema. It's tonifying actions will strengthen and support the whole body. It plays an important role in chronic and degenerative condition of the musculoskeletal system such as RA, OA, gout, joint pain and myalgia.

MODERN HERBALISM

Nettle leaf is used for allergies and remineralization as well as chronic inflammatory conditions affecting the joints while the root is used as a depurative

(PURIFYING AND DETOXIFYING EFFECTS) and to treat disorders of androgen excess, such as prostatic adenoma.^{13,14}

Studies have demonstrated that nettle has powerful antioxidant activities which explain its reputation as a rejuvenative. The leaf and root have anti-inflammatory actions by preventing prostaglandin formation. They also have immuno-modulating effects and may inhibit the inflammatory cascade in inflammatory and autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis. Its analgesic effect contributes to its positive effects here. Studies have found that nettles can decrease free radical concentrations in both the cerebellum and frontal lobe of the brain which could prove beneficial in preventing cognitive decline as we age. Nettle could also be helpful in prevention of other immune and endocrine problems including low thyroid function and cancer.¹⁵

The root has long been used in treatment of urinary problems, prostatitis and benign enlargement of the prostate. It contains lectins and certain types of complex sugars which, according to much modern research, are probably the major components contributing its benefits which come about through their ability to affect hormones and proteins that carry sex hormones in the body. The anti-proliferative effect of stinging nettle roots extracts has been observed with an inhibitory effect on the growth of the lymph node carcinoma of the prostate.

TRADITIONAL APPLICATIONS

Stinging nettle has been used for hundreds of years as a nutritive and gentle detoxing herb, to treat painful muscles and joints, eczema, arthritis, gout, and anaemia. It has been used traditionally as a 'blood tonic' as it contains many beneficial minerals, particularly iron, magnesium and calcium, for replenishing the body's post-winter depleted stocks.

Nettle has a long history of use for modulating the body's inflammatory pathways and supporting upper respiratory health. In the first and second centuries, Greek physicians Dioscorides and Galen reported the use of Nettle leaf for its diuretic and laxative properties and for the treatment of respiratory issues.¹⁶ Nicholas Culpeper, a renowned 17th-century herbalist, recommended a Nettle-honey preparation for wounds and skin infections, and as a gargle for throat and mouth infections.¹⁷

From an Ayurvedic perspective nettle has light, dry and penetrating qualities with astringent, bitter, sweet and salty tastes. It is considered particularly useful for removing excess *kapha* after winter and reducing *pitta* in preparation for the increased heat of spring and summer. It is an excellent rejuvenative and nourishing tonic, increasing *ojas*, clearing *ama* and excess *pitta* and *kapha* from the *rasa* and *rakta dhatus*.

A good way to take it is by using the fresh nettle tops in nourishing **soups**: Add chopped nettles at the end of cooking for just a few minutes to break down the stings and gain all the goodness!

Dosage:

Nettle tincture and tea are widely recommended by herbal practitioners.

- Tincture (1/2 – 1 teaspoon or 3 -5 ml) can be taken 3 times a day
- Tea is made by steeping 2-3 teaspoons of the dried herb in 1 cup (250ml) of hot water for 10-15 minutes. People can drink three or more cups per day.

ENDOBIOGENIC ACTION: NETTLE LEAF

IMMUNE: anti-allergic (inhibits mast cell degranulation, COX-1, COX-2 and prostaglandins)^{10, 18}

Metabolic [SIPF, powder ONLY]:²⁰

Revitalizing (Fe, Si, Mg, Ca, Cu, Zn, K, S, B2, B5, Folic acid), stimulates growth of hair and nails;

DERM: Purifier of skin,

RENAL: Diuretic (volumetric, chloruretic, uricosuric)

ENDO BIOGENIC USAGE

Hair and nail weakness, allergies, diabetes, osteoporosis, osteochondritis, juvenile arthritis, acne; anaemia (50 g [5 tbsp])

METHOD: FRESH plant: decoct 10 min in 4 c. water, drink in 3-6 even doses/d)

ENDO BIOGENIC ACTION: NETTLE ROOT

IMMUNE: anti-allergic (inhibits mast cell degranulation, COX-1, COX-2 and prostaglandins)^{10,18} anti-proliferatives; anti-inflammatory, anti-rheumatic (inhibits formation of inflammatory agents), stimulates T-cells;

RENAL: Diuretic (volumetric, chloruretic, uricosuric)

DETOX: Purifier, astringent

ENDO BIOGENIC USAGE

All states of over-growth or accumulation, all inflammatory states of burden, such as: Prostatic hypertrophy, prostate cancer, androgenic alopecia, hypertension, congestive heart failure, rheumatic congestions;

METHOD: 3-5 tbsp dry root in 4 cups water; decoct 3 min AND steep 10 min, drink in 3 even doses per day;

“The buffering system is the elements in reserve that are typically not immediately used, but available for any type of acute, subacute, chronic or existential demand for survival. For example, you could consider medicinal plants that are rich in vitamins and minerals. like Urtica dioica leaf, which is stinging nettle, or equisetum species or horsetail. There are plants that help the buffering system through enzymatic regulation.” Kamyar M. Hedayat, MD. ¹⁹
✱

About the Author

Anna Betz, MCPP, Dip.SW, is a medical herbalist, co-founder of Endobiogenic Society UK and member of the professional governing body for qualified Medical Herbalists in the UK. She practices Endobiogenic medicine in conjunction with herbal medicine, dietary, life-style and wellness coaching, utilizing systemic family therapy and narrative approaches. For the National Health Service of the United Kingdom, she pioneered a 'brainfood project' to optimize brain health and to prevent or slow down cognitive decline.

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