Nettle Seed

August is a great time to harvest nettle (*Urtica spp*.) seeds. At this time of year you no longer want to be harvesting the leaves, as by now the plant is putting its energy into reproduction. A stroll, well, pretty much anywhere where there is a little greenery will greet you with tall nettles laden with beautiful dark green seeds.

As if nettles hadn't already given us enough through the spring with their highly nutritious leaves, now we can turn our focus onto their bountiful seeds. These are very nutritious and dense in minerals, vitamins and antioxidants, but this is only the beginning! Nettle seeds also nourish the adrenals, boost energy levels, give mental clarity and help us to adapt to stress. More recently they have been used in their capacity as adaptogens and as an adrenal trophorestorative. Although nothing can replace adequate rest and other lifestyle changes this can help with severe burnout.

In their book Herbal Therapy & Supplements, Winston & Khun define:

“Trophorestorative: An herb that nourishes, strengthens and tonifies a specific organ or function. Considered 'food for the organ'. Hawthorn, with its specificity for the heart and circulatory system, is a cardiovascular trophorestorative.
Examples: fresh oat (nervous system), nettle seed (kidney).”

“Adaptogen: A substance that helps a living organism adapt to stress (environmental, physical or psychological).”

One step at a time...

As always when getting to know a new plant or a new part of a plant, start with a small amount and only increase your consumption over time if there are no adverse effects. Nettle seeds are stimulating and for some people a small pinch could make them feel 'buzzy'. Others wont feel these effect in the same immediate way.

Fresh or Dried?

The stimulating effects of nettle seed are said to be most prevalent in the fresh seed, and so if they are too stimulating for you in this way, dry them first. Some herbalists have agreed that dried seeds are milder in action but have higher adaptogenic properties.

If you want to dry your nettle seed simply lay them out on a tray of newspaper in a dark, dry and airy place for a week or so. Check daily and mix them about to ensure there is air circulation around every part.

Harvesting

Nettles are dioecious, meaning they have female and male reproductive parts on separate plants. In fact, the latin species name *dioica* means 'two houses', reflecting upon this.
Male plants often have a purple tinge to their flowers, which are held in catkin-like inflorescences. They do not droop as much as the female ones and will not produce seeds.

Female flowers often look a silvery/downy colour. After fertilisation these develop into the angular seeds as shown on the previous page – perfect for harvesting! Always harvest nettle seed that is green, discarding any brown ones.

Nettle Seed Salt

Nettle seed salt is a great addition to the kitchen. It takes seconds to make, is really versatile and can be kept in a jar next to where you prepare your food so that you don't forget about it in a dark cupboard somewhere! We tend to sprinkle it over soups and salads – but it has endless uses!

Nettles have a mildly salty taste, therefore you don't have to add salt if you don't want to. The recipe below adds Cayenne pepper, but you could add any spices that take your fancy.

Recipe:

1 cup of nettle seed
¼ cup of salt
A pinch of cayenne

Put everything in the blender until you have a uniform powder. Done.

References

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