Nettle (Urtica dioica)

Volume Two:
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Ahh Nettles... hated by those who meander aimlessly through the words with no awareness to where they are going, and loved by all herbalists who know of it’s profound virtues and uses as a food, medicine, and utilitarian value. This is probably one of the most famous plants in western herbalism and has been used for hundreds, probably thousands of years- everywhere it is found people discover the vast spectrum of properties of Nettles. We see it used all throughout European folk and medical level practices of medicine, as well as throughout North American herbalism, though it was not highly regarded by the indigenous people’s for some reason. They used it, but it was not a primary medicine for them. It has even crept down into Central and South America, where it has been adopted in their herbal paradigms.

I believe this remedy is of the utmost importance to understand holistically, for it has properties of such a broad spectrum that it can be utilized by almost anyone, of any constitution. It’s one of those herbs many learn when they are just getting into herbs because it treads that fine line between medicine and food, and is a great introductory herb. But for many advanced practitioners and clinicians, it can sometimes be an easy herb to overlook and even forget because it is so common. My goal with this monograph is to illustrate why Nettles should be found in every dispensary and an integral part of your herbal practice- whether for yourself, your family, community or your clinic.
Common Name: Nettle, Stinging Nettle
Latin Name: *Urtica dioica*, *Urtica urens*
Family: Urticaceae
Parts Used: Leaves (young shoots in the early spring), seeds (late summer), and roots (early autumn). Each of these 3 parts of the plant used have radically different properties and can almost be considered different medicines- pointing to the wide range of application of this one plant. Throughout this monograph we will explore all parts of the plant and their properties. Most of the information will be focused on the leaves, but properties specific to either the roots or the seeds will be indicated.

Geographical Data (IE where it grows naturally): Stinging Nettle is widely dispersed throughout the New and Old Worlds, preferring to grow in shaded, damp habitats and disturbed soils. This indicates it’s preference in damp and disturbed habitats within the body of whom it is indicated.

The 5 Keys of Nettles

Tastes
Salty & Sweet. These 2 tastes lend us some critical information about the properties and uses of Nettles. The salty taste indicates it containing a high level of minerals, which it does, and thus acting upon the sphere of the kidneys and urinary tract- which many of our salty remedies do (IE Horsetail, Celery). The sweet flavor of Nettle is quite a bit more subtle than the saltiness, but upon close observation of it’s taste, there is a distinct heaviness to it. Sweetness builds up tissues, strengthens the constitution, and is often used for weakened organ systems due to malnutrition, dryness, or atrophy. There are the primary tastes the leaves of Nettles contain.

Primary Actions

Diuretic: This is one of the primary properties of Nettles. We note that it prefers to grow in moist conditions, indicating it’s use not only in damp conditions in the body but also operating upon the Water Element through the kidneys and urinary tract. Most people think of diuretics as having a primary action upon the kidneys and urinary tract by increasing water output and urination. But, it’s critical to understand that a diuretic is not only working locally on the kidneys, but *systemically* on the Water Element. This is why diuretics can be used to relieve edema in the ankles, ascites in the gut, or drain a puffy swollen arthritic joint. A diuretic is effectively expelling water from the tissues and draining moisture from the body. Thus it is critical to understand that pretty much all diuretics will have a constitutionally drying effect.

One thing that is important and interesting about many herbal diuretics, is that they tend to contain high amounts of the mineral potassium, which tends to be excreted in relative high amounts in the urine due to it’s water solubility. It is common in allopathic medicine to give patients with high blood pressure a “loop diuretic” which radically depletes the bodies store of potassium to dangerous levels, which is why they usually always give potassium pills along with the diuretics. Nature in all of her brilliance makes these herbal diuretics which innately have high levels of potassium to replenish what will be depleted through increasing urination.
This is true of 3 of our primary herbal diuretics: Nettles, Dandelion leaf (*Taraxacum officinale*), and Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*).

**Alterative:** As a “spring tonic” Nettles has a long standing traditional use as a mild but effective remedy for detoxification. In general, alterative remedies open up the channels of elimination of the body, facilitate in the expulsion of waste products, and adjust or “alter” the metabolic functioning of the body. This includes absorption and distribution of nutrients, as well as the elimination of waste products. This is a highly vague herbal action, and there are many different types of alteratives, each with different organ system affinities and energetics—but in short, they are used for detoxification and cleansing the body of accumulated wastes.

As mentioned above, Nettles is a diuretic, thus we see it having a strong kidney/urinary tract affinity as an alterative, but we also see it having a strong action upon the blood and the skin as well. It’s actions upon the blood are two-fold, on the one hand it builds the blood through it’s rich mineral content and nutrients, and second it helps to cleanse and detoxify the blood of stagnation and accumulation of metabolic wastes. In this way it has been used to treat “bad blood syndrome” and it’s accompanying symptoms: chronic skin conditions, low grade infection, damp accumulation within the tissues, digestive stagnation, acidity in the tissues, and liver torpor.

**Nutritive Tonic:** Nettles is likely one of our most nutritious plants in the western materia medica, and it treads that fine line between a food and a medicine. It is extremely rich in iron, protein, chlorophyll, vitamin C, dietary fiber, potassium, silicic acid (silica), and calcium, among others. It has classically been an additive to soups and stews to imbue it’s wide nutrient profile, and many modern day herbalists will make pesto out of it as well - which is a super tasty way to get in you! This broad nutrient profile indicates it’s use in people that are malnourished, thin, weak, pale, emaciated, and lacking in vital nutrients to sustain their body. It strengthens connective tissues, assists in protein metabolism, builds the blood in iron deficiency anemia, and nourishes the body on a cellular level in a quite profound way.

**Astringent:** Nettle leaves are also a quite reliable tonic astringent for tissues that have become weak and lax. It brings extra tone to the intestines, the uterus, as well as the blood vessels, making it quite useful in conditions such as leaky gut syndrome, uterine bleeding and prolapse, post childbirth, high and low blood pressure, and even internal bleeding. It’s important to consider that the astringent action has a drying effect upon the local tissues.

**Rubefacient:** This action is sometimes also referred to as “counterirritant.” It is a pretty specific action that not too many plants have, but our Nettles is truly the shining star of the rubefacients. This is a topical application of a plant where the local tissues upon contact with the herb are stimulated in a greater level of activity, primarily through an increase in blood flow and circulation. This would be the classic Nettle flogging used in Russian bathhouses and for any daring herbalist to deepen in their relationship with this plant.

Why flog oneself with Nettles you ask? Well through increasing the blood flow to a local area, you bring a flood of fresh oxygenated blood loaded with nutrients, which not only benefits the tissues nutritionally, but also enables stagnated waste products and such to be purged from...
the tissues to ultimately be eliminated. The rubefacient action is typically used for stiff, tight, swollen, and achey arthritic joints, sore muscles, and areas of the body that have a relative low grade annoying level of pain. Sure slapping yourself with some fresh Nettles stings and is uncomfortable, but after the initial pain of the Nettles wears off, the sore part of the body is no longer nagging you. This type of treatment can relieve the pain for up to 8 days! This is a great way to learn the overall sensation of the Planet Mars... but more on that later.

•**Inflammation Modulating:** Lastly we see that Nettle is an excellent remedy to modulate the body’s inflammation processes. The rich content of chlorophyll cools and alkalizes the tissues. We see this aspect of Nettles widely dispersed throughout the body- from puffy swollen arthritis joints, GI inflammation, and excessive heat in the cardiovascular system, to inflammation in the urinary tract, womb, and prostate gland. This versatility of Nettles makes it applicable in a wide range of different herbal formulas focused on different organ systems.

**Affinities**

•**Physical Organs, Systems and Tissues:** These are the primary organs, systems and tissues Nettles has an affinity for. I will briefly mention these affinities as they relate to the actions listed above. More detail will be gone into the specific effects this remedy has on these organs systems and tissues later on when we explore clinical patterns and uses.

•**Kidneys and Urinary Tract (all parts):** Here we see Nettles having it’s major action as a diuretic, draining fluids from the body and increasing urination. It can be used with other herbs as a flushing treatment to purify the waters of the body. The seeds of Nettle have a highly interesting property as a kidney trophorestorative, used whenever there is kidney damage, failure, dialysis, and other major problems in the structure/function of the kidneys.

•**Blood and Circulation (leaf):** It’s effects on blood and circulation are broad. On the one hand it helps to build blood and on the other it helps to purify it. It tightens the walls of the arteries and veins and strengthens the connective tissue lining of the vessels as well.

•**Liver (leaf):** It’s effects on the liver include general detoxification and purification of the body, but particularly in regards to protein metabolism and purification of water soluble toxins.

•**Connective Tissues and Musculoskeletal System (leaf):** This affinity works widely throughout the body, from the circulatory system, the joints, the uterus, hair, skin and nails, the muscles, and even the bones. This is achieved through it’s nutritive tonic effects as well as the inflammation modulating activity.

•**Uterus (leaf):** Helps to astringe, tonify, and strengthen the womb during pregnancy and post childbirth.

•**Skin (leaf):** The action on the skin is obvious when you touch the live plant, but it has a very different action internally for the skin. In fact, you can think of Nettles being
applicable internally for skin conditions that look similar to the reaction you get after touching the live plant!

• **Prostate Gland (root):** The roots of Nettle have a strong affinity for the prostate gland, reducing inflammation, improving urine flow, reducing frequency, and reducing BPH.

• **Adrenal Glands (seeds):** This is not a well documented organ system affinity, but based on my own personal experience and that of some colleagues, it seems as if the seeds directly stimulate the adrenals to secrete stimulating hormones such as epinephrine. I had a friend take 1 tbsp in a smoothie and couldn’t sleep for 2 nights it was so stimulating!

**Energetics**

• **Temperature, Moisture and Tone:** The primary energetic pattern of Nettles is that it is cooling, drying, tonic, and stimulant. This indicates it’s use in the damp/heat pattern of Chinese Medicine- where the tissues are hot and inflamed, but swollen with fluids. It will effectively drain the excess moisture from the tissues and cool down the excessive heat.

It should be noted here that some authors describe Nettles as being a heating remedy. I believe this is not necessarily a temperature quality but rather referring to it’s property as being a stimulant to various organ systems and tissues of the body. Because of it’s anti-inflammatory properties and high amount of chlorophyll, I have found it to be quite beneficial for tissues that are overly hot and irritable. The way I think of it is that Nettles treats the state of the tissues similarly to the rash it produces when you touch it. Just because something is a stimulant does not necessarily mean that it is hot in temperature.

The tonic/astringent effects show it’s benefit in tissues that have become lazy and flaccid and need more tone to them, and the stimulant property shows that it increases the vital response of the tissues and organs it has an affinity for. This indicates it’s use in depressed conditions where the vital force is lowered.

• **Effects upon Doshas:** Nettles is one of the most interesting remedies in the way it impacts the 3 doshas, as it is one of the closest examples of a tri-doshic plant that I’ve been able to find. By tri-doshic, I mean that it is a plant that it could benefit any of the 3 doshas. Let’s take a look at how Nettles can benefit each of the 3 doshas.

The Kapha constitution is marked by an accumulation of the Earth and Water Elements, often expressed as damp accumulation in the tissues and a predisposition for toxicity, or what in Ayurveda they call “ama.” Nettles can benefit here as a draining, drying astringent, alterative and diuretic remedy, facilitating in purifying the blood and tissues of metabolic waste products. Through opening the channels of elimination, Nettles relieves an excess of the Kapha dosha.

This remedy benefits Pitta in the sense that it is so cooling and alkalizing. Pitta tends towards patterns of heat, irritation and excitation of the tissues- which often expresses as the inflammation of which Nettles is so good at cooling down. This heat tends to attack the
cardiovascular system quite aggressively, and with a primary affinity for the blood and circulation, Nettles is a quite applicable remedy here in the treatment of excess Pitta.

It’s effects upon Vata are also notable. This constitution, being composed of the Air and Ether Elements, tends towards emaciation, weakness, malnutrition, and tissue atrophy. We see the dense nutrient content of Nettles provides Vata’s with the vital nutrition that they need in order to build up and strengthen their constitution. Now this is the one constitution where it’s important to exercise caution, because one of the major markers for Vata imbalance is dryness. Because Nettles is alterative, astringent and diuretic, it can certainly exacerbate the dryness of Vata- so this is where you need to exercise caution.

The ability of Nettles to increase dryness may also depend on ones environment. One of my teachers Paul Bergner noted that when he lived in Portland Oregon, a notably damp environment, he could give Nettles to almost anyone and it rarely made them more dry, but rather helped their body to deal with the excess of moisture that many in the PNW struggle with. But upon moving to Boulder Colorado, a much dryer habitat, he noticed he couldn’t just give Nettles to anyone because they would start getting dry mucous membranes and such.

So in short, be careful in giving Nettles to Vata constitutions for it may make them more prone to dryness. You can also consider giving it to them in conjunction with moistening demulcent herbs like Marshmallow (Althea officinalis), Slippery Elm (Ulmus rubra), or Licorice (Glycyrrhiza glabra). That being said, if someone already has a very dry constitution, Nettles may not be the most appropriate remedy for them.

- Effects upon Tissue States: As you may have noticed by now, Nettles is a very unique remedy with a broad spectrum of actions, uses, and applications for different tissue states, which are essentially the western equivalent of dosha energetics within the tissues themselves. While it is best used for the cold/depression and damp/stagnation tissue states, it also has applications in conditions of heat/excitation as well as dry/atrophy. Let’s explore some of these tissue states in more detail.

  - Damp/Stagnation: As you have seen, Nettles is a primary remedy for consideration in the treatment of dampness. This is due to it’s diuretic, alterative, and astringent actions upon the tissues, helping them to expel excess water accumulation. One of the other names for the damp/stagnation tissue state is torpor, which essentially means toxic. Water is one of the primary delivery mechanisms in the body for nutrients, oxygen, as well as waste products. When it is not flowing properly, slows and stagnations, we see the tissues are unable to detoxify properly and metabolic waste products accumulate in the tissues. In the vital forces attempt to cleanse the area of the wastes, the immune system initiates an inflammatory response to try and move things along.

  The result is a classic pattern from Chinese Medicine called “damp/heat.” We see this in conditions such as weepy eczema, swollen arthritic joints, arteriosclerosis, and food intolerance/allergy. In these types of situations, Nettles is superior in stimulating the tissues into a greater level of activity, cleansing the extracellular fluids, and moving the waters to the kidneys for evacuation in the urine. It is especially beneficial when protein
metabolism is insufficient and the body is less able to rid itself of the nitrogenous wastes that are a result in breaking down proteins. Nitrogen is ruled by the Fire Element, and when it is stagnant it tends to be pro-inflammatory. Thus, Nettles not only assists in the detoxification, but it also cools down the inflammation in the tissues.

As a diuretic, it is highly beneficial here for damp accumulation in the bladder and urinary tract, often marked by excess mucous discharge in the urine- producing a cloudy heavy urine. There is often infection and heat. It will cool down the heat and help dispel the mucous and dry out the hyper-secreting membranes. One of it’s claim to fames here in terms of damp/stagnation is in the treatment of edema, or water accumulation in the ankles, feet, fingers or elsewhere, as well as the treatment of gout which is usually associated with eating a diet too rich in protein, alcohol, and acidic foods.

**Cold/Depression:** This tissue state can be thought of as when a organ or tissue has started to decrease in its capacity to function properly because of a lack of vital stimulation. While Nettles is a cooling remedy, I would by no means say it is cold, and while this tissue state is called “cold/depression,” it’s important to remember that cold is not just referring to a state of temperature, but to an overall quality in the tissues. In this case, it is referring to a lack of stimulation and depressed function. Simply touching Nettles indicates it’s stimulating properties, and it’s important to think of it whenever a particular organ has a depressed function. This could be the liver not processing waste products effectively, the kidneys not eliminating properly, or the circulation being inhibited (low blood pressure, impotence).

**Dry/Atrophy:** With this tissue state it’s important to consider the second word, which is atrophy. As mentioned earlier, Nettles is a relatively drying remedy, as a diuretic, astringent and alterative, so we need to exercise caution in people with predominant dry symptoms (dry mucous membranes, dry constipation, dry eyes, dry skin etc.). But what
we see here being of importance is atrophy- which is essentially when tissues begin to waste away due to a lack of nutrition. This can be similar to the depression tissue state, but whereas depression is a lack of function due to under-stimulation, atrophy is actual tissue wasting, where the actual structure is being weakened thus affecting the function.

One of the best examples of this would be atrophied muscles. When a muscle is damaged from injury and is unable to be used, it begins to deteriorate and waste away- if you don’t use it you loose it. This is one of the great wonders of Nettles as a primary nutrient tonic medicine, helping to not only build up and strengthen tissues through the wealth of nutrition it provides, but also by stimulating any tissue depression along with it. As a tonic/astringent, it helps to firm up muscles that are maybe overly loose as well. In this way it is considered a “trophorestorative,” meaning that it helps to regenerate and replenish parts of the body that are paralyzed, atrophied, or loosing their function due to inactivity. Matthew Wood notes, “It also works internally on inactive kidneys, thyroid, menstruation, hormones, nerves, muscles and so forth, to bring them back into effective operation.” That gives it a pretty broad spectrum of application!

• **Heat/Excitation:** As previously mentioned, Nettle has a strong affinity for conditions associated with heat and irritation as a cooling, alkalizing remedy. I see this as being a primary affinity for the circulatory system and heart, but also in its application in the treatment of seasonal allergies. Here we see the sinuses, eyes, and mucous membranes in the head are inflamed and loosing a lot of fluids- it is specific for the runny nose where thin clear mucous just streams out of the nose, and the eyes are constantly water and red. Again this would be a damp/heat pattern of which Nettles is a specific. Typically the fluids are able to passively leak out of the tissues because the mucosal membranes are overly lax, allowing the secretions to just flow right now (this would actually be the damp/relaxation tissue state). As an astringent, Nettles helps to tighten those membranes, hold in the fluids, reduce the inflammation, and dry everything up.

I find it also interesting that it has a rich use in homeopathy in the treatment of burns and fevers, which would both be associated with the heat/excitation tissue state.

Now you may see in older literature (such as Culpeper) that Nettles was considered a hot medicine. I want to clarify this here briefly. I believe what they were referring to was Nettle’s use as a stimulant to depressed and atrophied tissues. Many people note that it’s internal use in the winter by itself can make one chilly, likely due to the cooling alkalizing effects of the chlorophyll. Nettle is a good example of how an herb can be cooling in temperature, yet still a stimulant. It’s common for people to immediately associated a stimulant plant with a heating property, but there are some that are not- Echinacea being another good example of a cooling stimulant.

**Prabhava/Specific Indications**

• **Pulse and Tongue Indications:** Because it is so indicated for damp accumulation in the tissues, as well as atrophied, weakened tissues, we will often see this on the tongue as a moist tongue with redness (damp/heat). The pulse may feel slow, weak, relaxed, low, and lacking
strength in it’s force, which would indicate depression and atrophy of the tissues, a lack of vital stimulation and the need for baseline nutrition and stimulation.

• **Psychological Picture:** Matthew Wood notes some of the psychological dynamics in which Nettles is a specific: “mental dullness, lack of concentration, and mental activity; tired, hard to get out of a chair and get going, rises with a sigh or grunt, but stays on task once activated; begins the day slowly; yawns, sighs, sleepiness, pale, gray-pale face and skin tone.” Sharol Tilgner notes that “Symptoms are worse from very cold air, water, cool moist air, touch and the symptoms return at the same time each year.”

I have also found Nettles to be quite an important remedy for people with that have a hot, short temper. They seem prickly, sharp and intense, as if they are ready to lash out any moment. Bloodshot eyes and a red face are another indication, along with general irritability, frustration and anger. These would all be considered “liver fire rising” symptoms in Chinese Medicine. I have primarily used the Spagyric Essence for this and found it to be quite effective, especially for folks that get particularly angry and upset over trivial little things.

I find all of these psychological picture dynamics very interesting and I would say it appears that Nettles operates upon a spectrum. On the one hand we see more of a deficiency picture—cold, pale, low energy, sleepy and such and on the other hand we see more of a pattern of excess—red, hot, irritable and frustrated kind of people. What’s one to do? Which one does Nettle work for, and how exactly could it be both?

This brings us a principle in herbalism (well life as a whole really) which is that of polarity. Everything in life exists within a spectrum of opposites: night and day, male and female, yin and yang, etc. Sometimes herbal medicines will be on one side of the scales and some on the other. We have seen so far in this monograph that Nettle has some seemingly paradoxical qualities- for example it’s use in treating damp/cold tissue states, as well as hot irritated tissue states. What’s up with that?

This could be considered an **amphoteric** quality, meaning that the plant is essentially paradoxical, that it can do 2 completely different things. In some people it might warm them up through dispersing stagnation and stimulating the tissues into a greater level of activity—thus warming them up. In another it might cool, calm and alkalize and excessively irritated tissue and thus cool them down. So which is it? Is Nettles cooling or warming? Does it help people that are tired, deficient and weak, or people that are all fired up and irritable?

The answer is both. This is because Nettles is one of those plants with a high degree of intelligence and operates in a wide range of actions. This would be the **prabhava** of Nettles. Another example of an amphoteric herb is Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) - which we will definitely cover in a later issue. It’s prabhava is that it can equally staunch excessive bleeding and hemorrhage, yet it can also stimulate menses and blood circulation. Anytime I see paradoxical actions of a plant it’s an indication that we are working with a complex remedy that has a wide range of application and should be studied in depth to truly understand it’s nature.
Clinical Patterns and Uses

Now that you’ve seen the critical 5 aspects of Nettles through it’s taste, actions, affinities, energetics and specific indications, let’s bring it all together and look at some of the primary clinical patterns and uses of Nettles and how you might use it therapeutically. Because Nettle’s is somewhat of a complex remedy, there’s a lot of patterns here to keep an eye out for! But ultimately it shows the direct application of what you just learned in the above sections.

1. Diuretic Alterative for Dampness: As you have seen, Nettle is one of our top remedies for clearing damp accumulations from the body via it’s diuretic, alterative and astringent actions. This gives it a quite broad range of application, but in short it is a specific remedy for what the old doctors called “bad blood syndrome,” or systemic toxicity from the accumulation of metabolic waste products. Bad blood syndrome often manifests as damp/heat within the tissues, chronic skin conditions, arthritic pains, gout, and edema among others.

Here we have one of Nettles primary claims to fame, which is as a “spring cleanser” for cleansing excessive cold and damp out of the tissues after a long winter of eating preserved food and meat and not many fresh vegetables- at least it was like that in the old days. A winter diet like that is going to tend to be quite heavy and acidic, and with Nettles popping up in the early spring, it’s one of the first fresh vegetables one could get their hands on.

Now a diet like that is likely to be relatively dense in protein and not so much in other micronutrients. So here we see Nettles do it’s work: first off it helps the liver to process the accumulated metabolic waste products from eating like that all winter, it purges dampness and stimulates the plasma and blood to circulate, and ultimately drains the excess fluids via the kidneys. So it cleans everything out. But, it’s also bringing in a vast spectrum of minerals, vitamins and micronutrients, thus strengthening and rebuilding the constitutional strength.

This example of the “spring cleaner” is but a milder form of how Nettles can be used in more serious health conditions. This dynamic of damp accumulation within the body can lead to a complex variety of other symptoms. First, when damp accumulates in the joints it can lead to puffy, swollen and inflamed arthritic conditions of which Nettles has a longstanding history of treatment, either through topical flagellation with the fresh leaves, or internal consumption to drain the fluids and reduce the inflammation. It is also beneficial for arthritic conditions due to mineral deposition within the joints.

Another manifestation of this would be gout, a relatively uncommon problem in our modern world, but it still does occur. Gout is essentially the deposition of uric acid crystals in the small joints of the body, primarily in the toes- as they are the furthest away from the center of the cardiovascular system and are working against gravity to move them through the system. Picture a shard of glass stuck in a small blood vessel.... ouch. People usually can’t walk during an acute gout attack. Nettles comes to the rescue here as it has a strong affinity for dissolving protein waste products, urates, and other forms of mineral deposits within the tissues.

Matthew Wood summarizes this nicely, “Nettle extract, fresh juice, or tea is used to leech uric acid from the tissues, bring it into the bloodstream, and cause it to be taken up by the kidneys and excreted. It also probably prevents proteins from breaking down as quickly and cluttering
up the system. These symptoms were called the “uric acid diathesis” in nineteenth century medicine.”

Gout is but one manifestation of solid materials precipitating out of the aqueous solutions of the body. All manner of stones and gravel would also apply here, and with Nettles having a strong affinity for the kidneys and urinary tract, it has been used to successfully treat all manner of kidney stones, gravel, and other mineral depositions. This could be indicated by pain in the kidney region and blood in the urine. Now it’s important to know that kidney stones are potentially very serious and should probably be overseen by a physician. The pain is said to be excruciating and one of the most painful symptoms a human can experience.

As a diuretic, it is also an excellent general diuretic remedy to use for urinary tract infections and inflammation. Because of its astringency and drying nature, we want to consider using Nettles when there is an excess accumulation of mucous within the urinary tract. In fact, it has been used for excess mucous accumulation in any of the mucosal membranes- the digestive and respiratory systems included. This would called catarrh in the old days, dampness, phlegm, ama, or canker are other terms. As a nutritive tonic and trophorestorative, it is a primary remedy in the treatment of general kidney weakness, which we will discuss more later on.

One of the primary and most noticeable forms of damp accumulation would be edema, which is when the plasma and fluids leak out of the blood vessels and stagnate within the tissues, again primarily in the lower extremities. This is a sign of cardiovascular weakness. Nettles operates here on a number of different levels. First it generally drains dampness through its diuretic effects (which again remember is not just locally on the kidneys but systemically by purging fluids from tissues). Secondly it helps to build up the mineral composition of the blood, which increases the viscosity of the blood by increasing the amount of dissolved elements within it. This prevents the plasma from being so leaky and thin. The minerals strengthen the vessel walls and the astringency helps to bring more tone to the tissues and vessels. This also has an effect on reducing low blood pressure via the plasma leaking out of the tissues rather than staying in the circulation.

Lastly, we see Nettles as having a solid influence upon hypothyroidism. Now it’s important to mention here that it is primarily treating the symptoms associated with hypothyroidism. This condition is marked by a significant decrease in the body’s metabolism, meaning that it is less able to absorb, distribute, and utilize nutrients as well as expel waste products. People are usually cold, deficient, gain weight, accumulate water, and are prone to a certain degree of toxicity. Thus Nettles has a wide range of application through both its detoxification properties, as well as its nutritive tonic properties.

That being said, I have heard of case histories where Nettle has successfully rejuvenated an atrophied or deficient thyroid gland and brought it back into a greater level of functioning. This is likely due to cleaning out the blood so the hypothalamus can get a better read of the body’s hormonal levels, but also through providing bulk nutrition to the tissues and cells of the organ.
2. Nutritive Tonic for Atrophy and Weakness: Our second major clinical pattern here is focused on the nutritive properties of Nettles. As mentioned previously, the combination of proteins, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients help to rebuild and replenish tissues and organs which have become weak due to underuse, malnutrition, or other reasons. We see this nutritive effect occurring in 2 primary types of tissues: the blood and muscles (yes the blood is technically considered a tissue). The critical thing to consider here is that the blood touches literally every organ of the body, as it is what delivers oxygen and nutrients to the cells. The muscles are also of primary importance here, because muscles are not just the skeletal muscles we tend to think of that compose a bulk of our physical frame, but also the smooth muscles which are responsible for lining the blood vessels and organ systems. This is why you can see Nettle builds up and strengthens so many different parts of the body.

Through building and strengthening the blood and muscular tissues, Nettles has the ability to build and strengthen the uterus, the nerves, the bones, the skin, the kidneys and urinary tract, the liver, digestive system, cardiovascular system, as well as the respiratory system. This would be it’s action as a trophorestorative, and I believe it is unique in it’s capacity to restore the proper function of any part of the body.

But as we see it’s focus on blood and muscles, it is primarily used for anemia and blood deficiency, not only by providing baseline nutrients to build the blood, but also through supporting the liver in the building and recycling of blood. This building of the blood makes it one of our chief remedies for low blood pressure as well, indicated by paleness, weakness, dizziness upon rising, low energy, mental fog and dullness, and overall poor nutrition to the heart. It is also highly indicated for muscular wasting and weakness, especially post surgery, from injury, or simply from aging. This is a great remedy for middle to older men and women who are becoming more weak and fragile.

This unique property of Nettle is why it is so commonly used for the female reproductive system. It is often used in small amounts during pregnancy to provide deep sustaining nourishment to both mother and growing fetus, but also tonifies, strengthens, and nourishes the uterus, making the muscles strong for upcoming childbirth and increasing it’s expulsive power. As a tonic astringent, it is also beneficial for post childbirth hemorrhage and bleeding.

This trophorestorative action of Nettles is likely due to its actions upon protein metabolism. Proteins are extremely important molecules, for they are the building blocks for our enzyme systems, cellular channeling mechanisms, as well as the coding and signaling of our genetic materials (DNA-->RNA-->Proteins). There’s something in the intelligence of this plant that operates on the entire sphere of protein metabolism, from it’s digestion, absorption, distribution, and assimilation, to it’s breakdown and elimination.

In short, this action of Nettles should be thought of as restoring atrophied or under-functioning organs, systems or tissues. I believe it has a systemic effect and can be used to replenish any part of the body that has been weakened somehow. This makes it likely one of the most versatile plants in our materia medica and makes it a “polycrest” medicine, meaning it can be used for multiple organ systems and conditions.
Astringent for Bleeding, Diarrhea and Catarrh: This is oftentimes an overlooked property of Nettles, but it is a pretty effective tonic-astringent for tissues that have become overly relaxed and lost their tone. This relaxation tissue state often leads to an excess depletion of fluids from the body—such as a chronic runny nose, diarrhea (classically called relaxed bowels), or bleeding.

Here we see it being used to treat chronically loose stools, especially from protein consumption, and infectious diarrhea (though one needs to exercise caution here as this is an intelligent response of the vital force). But it’s primary application here is for excess mucous found in the stool.

Actually we could say that the pattern of Nettles would dry excess mucous anywhere in the body—but more specifically the mucosal membranes. The tonic-astringent action helps to dry up excessive mucosal secretions from the bowels, the urinary tract, as well as the respiratory system. Not many think of Nettles as a lung remedy, but it indeed has a rich history of use for drying up excessive “respiratory catarrh.”
To quote Nicholas Culpeper on this one, “a safe and sure medicine to open the passages of the lungs, which is the cause of wheezing and shortness of breath and helps to expectorate phlegm, also to raise the imposthumed pleurisy; it likewise helps the swelling of both the mouth and throat if they be gargled with it.” This last usage would be primarily associated with the astringent property, as it would dry up the swelling and dampness.

The astringency of Nettles not only treats diarrhea and excess catarrh from the mucosal membranes, but also in treating bleeding and hemorrhage. It has been successfully used to treat internal bleeding in various parts of the body, but specifically in the urinary tract from the presence of gravel or excessive heat and inflammation wearing down the tissues. You would usually see blood in the urine or at least a pinkish hue to it. This also has applications in women post childbirth whom are bleeding excessively. It combines nicely with Shephard’s Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) and Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) for this purpose.

4. **Female Reproductive System:** The female reproductive actions have been previously mentioned, so I will briefly recap them here. As a nutritive tonic and astringent, Nettles is especially beneficial for strengthening the expulsive power of the womb, increasing it’s tensile strength as well as providing bulk nutrition to the mother and fetus. It is thus a uterine tonic. It also helps to astringe any bleeding post childbirth, but can also be used for spotting in between menses. Lastly it is also a stimulant to lactation- another paradox of Nettles in that it is generally considered drying, but can increase breast milk production. For this purpose it is best combined with Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*).

5. **Seasonal Allergies:** One of the more recent applications of Nettles is in the treatment of hay fever and seasonal allergies. If we consider the net actions and energetics of the plant, this makes quite a bit of sense, but only in a very specific type of allergic response. The key indicator here would be an accumulation of damp/heat, which is commonly expressed as itchy, red, watery eyes, thin watery mucous draining from the sinuses and either out the nose or experience as post-nasal drip, sneezing, redness and swelling in the sinuses, cheeks and overall face.

Nettles to the rescue once again. It helps to drain the fluids down and out of the tissues, astringe, tighten and tonify the mucosal membranes to prevent the passive leakage, cool down the excessive heat and inflammation, and dry everything up. Now, it’s important to understand here that in order for Nettles to really actually do this, you need to administer it in relatively high doses very frequently. It’s not going to work like the over the counter “anti-allergy” medications for sure, but it can alleviate the extreme discomfort people experience with seasonal allergies. In general, the freeze dried extracts are what are recommended for this, in doses of up to 6-12 capsules every hour! Yikes that’s a lot of Nettles! One can also brew a very strong decoction of the leaves- ideally fresh- and drink that in copious amounts, though the person will likely be peeing quite frequently.

I have administered fresh spagyric tincture of Nettles to people with seasonal allergies with varied results. I was using higher doses, 5 dropperfuls every hour and it indeed did help slightly, but never took the entire symptomatic picture away completely.
Ultimately holistic treatment of allergies requires much more than simply acute treatment. One needs to assess what is overly exerting the allergic load other than the pollen in the air. Typically this would be the presence of some sort of food allergen, or even pet dander. Let’s say you have “100 points” worth of an allergic load that your body can tolerate without producing major symptoms. Now if you are eating an intolerant food or around a pet or something that takes up “80 points” of your allergic load, you are still beneath the level of producing symptoms. Now spring rolls around and there’s all this pollen in the air that takes up say “40 points” of allergic load, now you just went up to “120 points,” 20 over your bodies natural allergic capacity and now you start to generate symptoms. Thus from a holistic perspective, you want to reduce any other potential allergens to reduce that load so that when the pollen comes around you won’t be so reactive to it.

6.Kidney Trophorestorative: We have explored the vast trophorestorative effects of Nettles upon the blood, muscles, and other tissues/organs of the body, but the kidneys truly deserve their own section here because the action of Nettles here is nothing short of remarkable. Before I jump into this, I want to start off by mentioning the kidney failure is no joke, it can kill you! When the kidneys are malfunctioning they are unable to maintain the dynamic balance of solids and fluids within the body, which in turn places a lot of stress upon the heart. This can often be recognized by edema in the lower extremities, as discussed earlier. The genius of this plant is that it not only relieves the fluids accumulations, but also helps to strengthen and restore proper kidney functioning. This property has primarily been attributed to the seeds of Nettles, but the leaves also impart a kidney trophorestorative action through it’s ample nutrition. The seeds have even been so strong here as to get people off of dialysis, or at least preventing them from needing to get on it. This shows that the medicine is directly restoring the proper function and even structure of the kidneys, repairing damaged nephrons, the glomerular capsule, filtration capacity, and overall physiological processes of the kidneys. This is profound! It is also beneficial for overall edema and swellings as we have mentioned previously.

Lastly, Nettle seeds have also been reported to be trophorestorative for atrophied adrenal glands. I have never used it in this way, but I have spoken with a small handful of practitioners that have used it to rebuild these glands which, interestingly enough, sit right on top of the kidneys (ad = above, renal = kidney). I did have a friend at Bastyr University who heard Nettle seeds can give you some energy, and she took a tbsp of dried seeds and blended them up in a smoothie. They imparted a good amount of energy to her for sure... unfortunately a bit too much and she was up for 3 days! This would obviously not replenish worn out adrenals and actually would make the condition worse, so it is quite likely that this property is very dose dependent. Low doses may help rebuild them, whereas high doses might overstimulate them. I feel this property is worth of deeper investigation.

7.Male Reproductive System: Here we another unique property of Nettle in it’s affinity for the male reproductive system as well. We mentioned it’s actions on the female system, but many overlook it’s actions on the male system too. Now, the male reproductive system is intimately tied in to the urinary tract, as the prostate gland is like a donut surrounding the urethra. When the prostate swells with inflammation or beings to hypertrophy (meaning
Excessive cellular division) it can crimp down on the urethra, making urination difficult and strained. There is often residual urine held in, dribbling, an excessive need to urinate which is not relieved with urination, and loss of sleep due to the need to urinate. In short, very uncomfortable symptoms.

The leaves of Nettle are as we have seen, a reliable diuretic, as well as a good tonic astringent to help bring more tone back into the tissues which have become over lax and loose (hence the dribbling and lack of expulsive power). But where we truly see Nettle shine here is in the use of its roots, which has been studied rather extensively in its capacity to reduce swelling of the prostate associated with BPH (Benign Prostate Hyperplasia). This is essentially swelling of the prostate due to excessive cellular division leading to growth. Now the key word here is “benign,” but it has been shown that many people that develop prostate cancer first had BPH.

The roots of Nettle have a pharmacological effect on inhibited certain chemicals in the body which lead to the swelling of the prostate in BPH. It is commonly formulated with Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) for this.

It is also an excellent remedy for impotence. This brings us back to its action as an alterative and a stimulant. If the blood is dirty and full of waste products, its circulation is diminished, which would result in a man having difficulty in achieving a proper erection. But it is also a stimulant and can “bring back to life” an organ or tissue which is inactive or weak. As a nutritive tonic, we could also assume that it is providing some baseline nutrition to help replenish and regenerate the reproductive organs, sperm count, and seminal fluids. In the old days they would actually do a topical application of the fresh leaves but... geez... is that really necessary?! Given what we know about its internal properties, I feel Nettles would help achieve the desired result without the... well... pain and discomfort.

8. Excessive Heat in the Tissues: Lastly we come to its affinity for cooling excessive heat in the tissues. I feel Nettle is a pretty reliable inflammation modulating remedy and can be used quite extensively in that regard. I have combined it frequently with Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) and Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) for this purpose with good results. The Licorice is nice there because it helps to balance the constitutionally drying effects of both the Nettles and Turmeric.

We've seen this property mentioned in multiple descriptions above—inflammation in the urinary tract, joints, gout, arthritis, etc. But 2 other classic uses of Nettles we haven’t mentioned yet are its use in the treatment of burns and fever. In regards to fever, it was primarily used in the old days of intermittent fever, or severe alternating heat and chills. This was classically called “auge.” The thing about intermittent fever, is that it tends to “short circuit” the nervous system, making it stick in the sympathetic state. This has a radically adverse impact upon digestion, the liver, spleen and entire portal circulation, because the hepatic artery, well in fact, all the arterial blood flow to the core is constricted so the blood can move to the periphery to either run away or fight off an adversary. In this way intermittent fever is said to damage the liver and create a state called “liver wind” or “liver constriction/tension.” The reverse could also be true, in that constriction in the liver or digestive system could potentially lead to intermittent fever.
Either way, Nettle has proven to be quite effective here. I believe Nettles operates in fevers not necessarily by directly cooling them down per se, nor through diaphoresis like many of our other fever remedies like Elderflower (Sambucus spp.), Peppermint (Mentha piperita), Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) or Pleurisy root (Asclepias tuberosa), rather I think of it as redistributing the heat and draining it out through the kidneys instead of the skin. It is common for people with kidney stones or even gout to get an acute fever in the bodies attempt to cleanse itself. These would be situations where Nettles is particularly applicable in the treatment of fever.

Lastly we have the treatment of burns. Here we are talking about the topical application of the herb directly onto the burn, as well as the consistent internal use of the remedy to assuage the heat. For topical use, a fomentation would be an ideal method of administration, soaking a cloth in a strong decoction of the herb and wrapping the afflicted area with it. Some have applied the tincture directly though be careful here with severe burns as obviously the alcohol would burn. You can imagine, a really bad burn has damaged the proteins on the skin and produced a profoundly irritated tissue with a lot of heat. Thus the cooling and nutritive properties of Nettles are quite beneficial here to provoke healing.

The way the internal use of the remedy works, as I see it, is that it pulls the heat away from the tissues and drains it at the level of the kidneys. Severe burns also generate a lot of metabolic waste products and the immune system is busy cleaning everything up, so using a remedy like Nettles would prove beneficial to support the bodies natural reparation process. We have also seen it modulates inflammation relatively significantly which would benefit the associated pain. And again, providing bulk nutrition to being healing and rebuilding the damaged tissues. The homeopathic preparations have also been used in this manner.

### Pharmacological Data

- **Primary Constituents:** Here is a list of the primary constituents found in Nettles by the different parts used:
  - **Leaves:** Flavonoids (flavonols, quercetin, isorhamnetin, kaempferol), minerals (iron, potassium, silicic acid, calcium), coumarins (scopoletin), phenolic acids (chlorogenic acid), phytosterols (beta-sitosterol), biogenic indole amines (histamine, acetylcholine, serotonin), chlorophylls, and carotenoids.
  - **Roots:** Phytosterols (beta-sitosterol, beta-sitosterolin), coumarins (scopoletin), lignans, alectin, polysaccharides, triterpenes, minerals, ceramides.

- **Mechanisms of Action:** The inflammation modulating effects of Nettles are primarily due to the presence of the phenolic acids, which have an influence over the prostaglandins and leukotrienes- critical biochemical elements of the bodies inflammation cascade. The diuretic properties are mostly due to it’s high content of minerals, especially potassium. The phytosterols, as the name implies, have a steroid composition that has an effect upon the hormonal mechanisms of the body- especially those steroid based androgen hormones like testosterone. This is why the roots of Nettle, as well as the leaves, exert a positive effect upon the prostate gland and treatment of BPH, as it inhibits dihydrotestosterone (DHT). High levels of DHT are commonly associated with BPH. Once these constituents bind to the
appropriate receptors, they reduce to cellular proliferation and growth, reduce the pain, swelling and inflammation on the prostate as well as the urethra.

The presence of proteins, vitamins, and minerals, particularly calcium and silicic acid (silica), are responsible for the nutritive tonic virtues of Nettles. These 2 minerals have a profound affinity for the bones, muscles, and connective tissues of the body, imbuing them with strength, stability and structure. The minerals, vitamins, and proteins also build the blood and simply provide nutrition to the body.

The biogenic amines are primarily responsible for it’s topical irritation effects (the histamine) and thus the rubefacient actions. We see it also contains acetylcholine and serotonin, which are 2 of the most primary neurotransmitters used by the body. This lends it an affinity for the nervous system and is likely why it can be used to strengthen the nervous system for people that are tired, worn out, exhausted, and depleted.

The coumarins, primarily scopoletin, has a broad spectrum of actions, including inflammation modulating, anti-spasmodic, and anti-bacterial effects. The polysaccharides found in the roots have a demulcent, moistening, softening, inflammation modulating, and immuno-modulating actions.

The flavonoids have a major influence upon Nettle’s medicinal actions. In general, flavonoids are cooling and sedative to heat, inflammation, and irritation in the tissues and strengthen capillary and vascular weakness. Interestingly enough, quercetin is one of the major supplements used to treat seasonal allergies, as it helps to reduce capillary fragility (hence the
leaking mucous out the nose) and reduce inflammation in the sinuses and dries everything up. Interesting that Nettles has this constituent too!

Contraindications and Safety

**Contraindications:** While Nettles is primarily considered a pretty mild and safe remedy for use, there are a few areas in it’s use to exercise a bit of caution. In general, in the treatment of kidneys stones, one needs to be particularly cautious especially if the stone is obstructive-meaning that it is completely blocking the urinary tract. Acute or chronic kidney disease is very serious and should probably be overseen by a qualified physician.

**Energetic/constitutional side effects:** The primary side effect one would be most likely to experience with Nettles would be the constitutional drying effects. This makes it risky to use in overly dry skin conditions (use Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) instead). Signs of this constitutional side effect would be dry mouth, eyes, mucosal membranes, and stool. It is a bit of a cooling remedy, and I’ve found it to make me a bit chilly if I use it by itself during the cold winter months- though this is easily remedied by adding a small amount of Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) to it.

**Herb-Drug Interactions:** There are no known interactions Nettles has with drugs, though one could assume that as a diuretic it would exacerbate the effects of thiazide or loop diuretics. This could perhaps be a good interaction though as the nutrients could help replenish depleted mineral stores.

Preparations

Nettle extracts well in 3 primary solvents: water, alcohol, and vinegar.

**Infusion/Decoction:** It dries well and can be prepared as either an infusion or a decoction. I’ve found the decoction of Nettle tends to extract more of the mineral content and makes it much more nourishing. Dried Nettles over a year old starts to loose it’s potency, though in order to reduce risk of excessive oxidation I find it best to dry and store the leaves whole rather than powdering and processing it further. You can also still add it to soups and stews when you dry the leaves whole =)

**Acetract:** Vinegar extracts Nettles quite nicely and is the primary solvent used to draw out minerals from herbs. I prefer to use the fresh plant material in this regard. It can be taken in tbsp doses as a general mineral rich tonic, used topically as a hair wash (combined with Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is nice), and also used as the vinegar base for salad dressings and used in food. I will often add some Nettle vinegar to bone broths, as the vinegar again helps to extract the minerals in the bones.

**Tincture:** For tincturing, I much prefer to use the fresh plant material as it contains the signature of the formic acid crystals. I have found this to be much more effective in the treatment of the heat/excitation tissue state and inflammation, as well as seasonal allergies. The dried plant material just doesn’t work quite as well I have found- though it does work, you just have to take a lot of it! Because many of the constituents are water soluble, I prefer
to use a 50-60% alcohol so it will dilute down to about 40-50% after extraction. That yields a nice dark tincture with a heavy, green, salty and slightly sweet flavor.

**Fomentation:** This would be the topical application for the treatment of burns. Make a strong infusion or decoction of the leaves and soak a gauze or cloth in the tea and wrap the burned area. Save some of the tea for the person to drink as well.

**Powder:** I like powdered Nettles primarily for it’s nutritive tonic action. It’s best to have the whole leaves dried and to just powder it as you go. Remove the leaves from the stems and grind in a coffee grinder. This can be taken in tbsp doses or more in a small amount of hot water, or put in a smoothie or something like that. Much cheaper than a lot of the powdered green food products out there and pretty much does it all!

### Dosage

**Liquid Extract:** The homeopaths used Nettles in doses of up to 10 drops at a time for the treatment of gout, burns and fever. Many modern day herbalists will use it in up to tsp doses for the treatment of hay fever and seasonal allergies. Thus we see the dosage range is pretty broad.

**Powder:** 1 tbsp up to 3x a day for nutritive tonic effects. More can certainly be used. I like the powder is smoothies but you need it super fine otherwise it’ll be gritty... 9-30 grams by weight daily (as you can see you can use very high amounts safely! Remember it’s like a food)

**Infusion/Decoction:** at least 1 tbsp per 8 oz of water. I prefer to use it as a decoction than an infusion so as to best extract the minerals. For the tonic effects, the more the better is my opinion. This is one of those herbs you can certainly use in food like doses.

**Acetrate:** 1 tbsp 3x a day for mineral repletion.

### Formulation Strategies

As you have seen, this remedy is a very diverse one and has a lot of different applications and uses. Let’s explore how you might start formulating and pairing Nettles with other remedies for a different set of actions and uses. I will briefly explain each pair and formula, what it’s primary actions/uses would be and other pertinent information.

**Hemostatic Pair**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 50%

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) 50%

This is a super dynamic duo here. First and foremost, it’s a great hemostatic pair, helping to staunch internal bleeding. It also will act upon the liver, as Yarrow is a great bitter tonic. This pair could also be used in the treatment of fever and wounds. But let’s put a couple 3rd herbs to this pair and show how it can be reoriented.

**Hemostatic Triplet**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 33.3%

Materia Medica Monthly Issue 2- Nettle
Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) 33.3%
Shepherd’s Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) 33.3%

This is a wonderful hemostatic triplet. Shepherd’s Purse is probably one of our best styptics for internal or external bleeding, and combined with Yarrow it is even more powerful.

**Cardiovascular Triplet**

Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) 50%
Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) 25%
Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 25%

Here we have the same base pair of Nettle and Yarrow, but with the addition of Hawthorn, which is one of best trophorestoratives for the heart and cardiovascular system. The Hawthorn-Yarrow pair is a classic cardiovascular tonic pair used in British Phytotherapy and is a great place to start for a heart tonic formula. That pair strengthens circulation, tonifies the heart and blood vessels, and reduces heat and inflammation, among many other things. The addition of Nettle here brings in a diuretic action to help relieve edema, swelling, and to purify the blood, as well as building and strengthening the blood. This is a great foundation for a cardiovascular formula.

**Nutritive Tonic-Astringent Pair**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 50%
Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) 50%

This is a pretty classic herbal pair, as both of these remedies are incredibly nutrient rich remedies, used as a general nutritive tonic pair. General, but powerful! This pair can be used to replenish micronutrient deficiencies and more specifically is used to strengthen the uterus during pregnancy and post childbirth. Both are great tonic astringents that tighten and tonify the womb and are deeply nourishing, though it has effects outside of the female reproductive system as well.

**Female Reproductive Tonic Triplet**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 33.3%
Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) 33.3%
Lady’s Mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*) 33.3%

To our base pair of Nettle and Red Raspberry, we could add Lady’s Mantle, which will add an even stronger tonic-astringent property to the womb and female reproductive system as a whole. This is a great triplet for the relaxation tissue state, as it is composed of three astringents which not only tighten and tonify lax and weak tissues, but provide nutrition to them as well.

**Nutritive Tonic Formula**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 25%
Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) 25%
Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) 20%
Alfalfa (Medicago sativum) 20%
Ginger (Zingiber officinale) 10%

From our base pair of Nettle and Red Raspberry, we could add a few more mineral rich nutritive plants such as Horsetail and Alfalfa, or others could be used like Oat grass. This would be an incredible overall mineral rich tonic that would be well extracted in vinegar. The small amount of Ginger is there as a driver to open up circulation, enhance absorption, and distribute the nutrients throughout the body.

**Alterative Pair**
Dandelion root (Taraxacum officinale) 50%
Nettle leaf (Urtica dioica) 50%

This simple pair is a great place to start for a detoxification formula. The Dandelion operates upon the liver, gallbladder, portal circulation, and digestion, and the Nettles operates on the sphere of the blood and kidneys. This provides 2 levels of detoxification that is mutually supportive, even though the herbs have very different actions.

**Alterative Triplet**
Echinacea (Echinacea angustifolia) 33.3%
Dandelion root (Taraxacum officinale) 33.3%
Nettle (Urtica dioica) 33.3%

To that base pair we could add Echinacea, which will give the formula more of an affinity for the lymphatic system as well as raising innate immunity in order to assist in fighting any residual infection and assisting in cleaning up metabolic waste products.

**Alterative Formula**
Echinacea (Echinacea angustifolia) 20%
Red Root (Ceanothus americanus) 20%
Nettle (Urtica dioica) 20%
Cleavers (Galium aparine) 10%
Dandelion root (Taraxacum officinale) 10%
Burdock (Arctium lappa) 10%
Sassafras (Sassafras albidum) 10%

This is a good general alterative formula. It starts with a base pair of Echinacea and Red Root for operations upon the lymphatic system and immunity, the Nettles and Cleavers are good diuretics, with Cleavers also acting as a lymphatic remedy. Dandelion and Burdock operating upon the liver, and Sassafras opening up circulation and driving it into the system. Here we see plants with many different properties coming together to achieve a singular net result which is cleansing the system of metabolic waste products- it assists a wide range of organ systems and physiological functions.

**Inflammation Triplet**
Nettle (Urtica dioica) 33.3%
Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) 33.3%
Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) 33.3%

This is a nice simple triplet that has a pretty profound influence upon the bodies inflammatory processes. It can be added in small amounts to pain formulas, or therapeutics for other organ systems to add a net inflammation modulating effect.

**Urinary Gravel Pair**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 50%
Gravelroot (*Eupatorium purpureum*) 50%

Here we have 2 classic remedies used in the treatment of urinary calculi or stones, both are great diuretic remedies for a flushing treatment and help to dissolve deposits from the tissues back into solution. But typically there is a great amount of pain due to cramping in a situation like this, so to that we would add a few other remedies.

**Urinary Gravel Formula**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 30%
Gravelroot (*Eupatorium purpureum*) 30%
Kava-Kava (*Piper methysticum*) 20%
Crampbark (*Viburnum opulus*) 20%

Kava-Kava is a classic anti-spasmodic used specifically for the urinary tract, which is its traditional usage according to the Physiomedicalists and Eclectics. Crampbark is excellent for all manner of smooth muscle cramping, and in the case of a stone, the ureters are typically in a state of spasm trying to expel the stone, resulting in blinding pain. These 2 herbs combined with Nettle and Gravelroot will assist greatly here. But if there was any sort of urinary tract infection in conjunction with this, we could add 3 other herbs to make this a 7 herb formula which operates on a broad spectrum of action for the urinary tract.

**Urinary Gravel with Infection and Bleeding Formula**

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) 20%
Gravelroot (*Eupatorium purpureum*) 20%
Kava-Kava (*Piper methysticum*) 15%
Crampbark (*Viburnum opulus*) 15%
Uva-Ursi (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) 10%
Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) 10%
Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) 10%

The addition of Uva-Ursi, Oregon Grape, and Yarrow lends 3 different mechanisms of action in the treatment of infection in the urinary tract. The essential oils from Yarrow, the berberine alkaloids in Oregon Grape, and the arbutin from Uva-Ursi. The Yarrow and Uva-Ursi will also astringe any bleeding and the Oregon Grape will tonify the mucous membranes. Along with the anti-spasmodic effects of Kava-Kava and Crampbark, and the flushing diuretic effects of Nettle and Gravelroot, this is a pretty solid formula!
BPH Pair
Nettle root \textit{(Urtica dioica)} 50%
Saw Palmetto \textit{(Serenoa repens)} 50%

This is a pretty classic pair in the treatment of BPH in men. Both are working pharmacologically at reducing the amounts of DHT. While both have some tonic astringent properties, we may want to add a few other remedies here to increase that property, as well as some inflammation modulating actions. This could make a more complex formula that looks something like this:

BPH Formula
Nettle root \textit{(Urtica dioica)} 30%
Saw Palmetto \textit{(Serenoa repens)} 30%
Hydrangea \textit{(Hydrangea arborescens)} 10%
Sumac \textit{(Rhus aromatica)} 10%
Yarrow \textit{(Achillea millefolium)} 10%
Turmeric \textit{(Curcuma longa)} 5%
Licorice \textit{(Glycyrrhiza glabra)} 5%

The Hydrangea, Sumac, and Yarrow bring a nice tonic/astringent property to this formula, and the Yarrow, Turmeric, and Licorice will help to bring down any inflammation and irritation in the tissues. The Licorice will also help to moisten up the formula a bit as it is a quite drying formula.

These are just a few examples of how you can start thinking about formulating with Nettles from some simple base pairs and triplets, all the way up to some more complex formulas. As we progress throughout this course, I encourage you to start thinking up your own simple pairs and triplets as to how you might use the plants we study. To study one herb at a time is great, but to start thinking about how you would formulate with it is to branch out your studies and start to see it from a more holistic perspective. It also gives you a great opportunity to start studying some other herbs with similar or synergistic properties.

**Energetic Architecture**
The Energetic Architecture of a plant synergizes all of the information you have learned above into the primary archetypal rulerships of the plant, represented by the 3 primary energetic patterns witnessed by traditions across the globe. Nettles was actually one of the first plants that I worked with in this model - it was one of my first teachers of the power and potency of working with Energetic Architecture. Here you will see how these rulers of Nettle represent and encompass the wholeness of the plant.

- **Ruling Planet**: Nettles is one of our classic plants ruled by the Planet Mars. This rulership is quite diverse and reveals many of the underlying properties and dynamics of this medicine. First off, Mars is the Planet classically associated with the archetype of the warrior, masculinity, power, and intensity. Medically, Mars rules the blood, heat, inflammation, the
excitation tissue state, the adrenals, immune system, fever, the muscles, and iron. You might already be starting to see some of the correspondences....

First off, we see the Mars rulership in the overall morphology of the plant. The leaf margins (edges) of Nettles are sharply serrated, almost like knife blades, and it is covered by the sharp formic acid crystals which provoke a red, irritated, itchy and inflamed condition on the skin when touched. In general, Nettles is kind of a prickly intense looking plant, and all of these qualities are Martian in nature. The whole skin reaction you get when you touch is also very Mars, as it is hot, inflamed and irritated.

Biochemically, we see that Nettles is full of iron and Mars rules iron. The iron component of Nettles is responsible for building and strengthening the blood, which is also under the dominion of Mars. This property is beneficial for the treatment of iron deficiency anemia, which would be seen as a deficiency or weakness of Mars as well. This brings up an important principle in Energetic Architecture, which is that a plant ruled by a certain Planet tends to work on the entire spectrum of that plant, meaning it can mitigate it’s excesses, or strengthen and nourish its deficiencies. We see Nettles does both in regards to the therapeutics associated with Mars.

So on the one hand Nettles builds up the blood for a weak and deficient Mars, but on the other hand it is useful in the treatment of excessive Mars conditions. Under our clinical patterns section, I mentioned it’s classic use in the treatment of burns and fevers, both of which would be seen as an excess of Mars in the body, as Mars rules heat. We also see that it has a specific affinity not only in building the blood, but cleansing and detoxifying the blood, as well as staunching excessive bleeding through its use as styptic or hemostatic. Nettles strengthens the muscular tissues of the body, which is also ruled by Mars. It treats excessive
heat and inflammation through its cooling and alkalizing effects, which would also be an excess of Mars in the tissues.

The red Planet also governs the male reproductive system and the adrenal glands, and we mentioned above that the roots of Nettle are quite beneficial in the treatment of the prostate gland and that the seeds are trophorestorative for the adrenals (and can be quite stimulating to them as well). Here we also see its use in the treatment of impotence and erectile dysfunction, which is also certainly governed by Mars-who rules the Sign of Scorpio which governs the reproductive system, as well as the lower urinary tract (bladder, urethra).

Lastly, we see that Nettles is a stimulant to depressed tissues. The way in which it drains fluids from the body and dries out excessive moisture, as well as how it can stimulate tissues that are not functioning strongly due to atrophy or depression would be a distinctly Mars quality. Even though I don't find Nettles to be a particularly pungent, spicy, hot medicine (which many Mars remedies are, such as Cayenne), it does tend to “wake things up and get things moving along,” which is certainly Martian in nature. This is why it is so beneficial for the depression and stagnation tissue states.

On the psychological sphere, we see more Martian influences. As mentioned above, many classic indications for it would be seen as a deficiency of Mars: low willpower, fatigue and deficient energy, mental dullness, low blood pressure, and to quote Matthew “tired, hard to get out of a chair and get going, rises with a sigh or grunt, but stays on task once activated; begins the day slowly, hard to stop at the end of the day.” Here you see the deficiency of Mars and also its excess, specifically reflected in the “hard to stop at the end of the day” dynamic.

There’s also the other mental picture that I have used Nettles for frequently which is aggressiveness, irritability, frustration, and anger, all of which are an excess of Mars which Nettles helps to cool down. I believe it achieves this through draining excess heat out through the kidneys, cleaning out the blood, cooling inflammation, detoxing the liver, and alleviating the “liver fire rising” pattern. For this it combines quite nicely with Oregon Grape root (Mahonia aquifolium).

It’s interesting to note that the leaves of Nettle tend to be best in the early spring, when the Sun enters the Sign of Aries. The Sign of the Ram is governed by Mars, and we see this is one of the best times to harvest the plant-though it may differ from bioregion to bioregion, where I am from in the PNW this is ideal Nettle harvesting season. In Medical Astrology, Aries rules the head, and Mars relates to inflammation, so we might think of it as inflammation in the head. This could manifest as seasonal allergies, and indeed it is during this time that many pollens start floating around the air and allergic symptoms arise. We can think of Nettles as treating the Mars/Aries dynamic.

Also of interest, is that the opposite Sign of Aries is Libra, the Sign of the Scales, whom is ruled by the Planet Venus. Venus and Libra both rule the kidneys, which is another primary site of action of Nettles. This illustrates an important principle in Medical Astrology which is that the Signs of the Zodiac exist in polarity to one another. I was taught that really there are
6 Signs that exist in opposites. Sometimes a plant or a person will display dynamics that are energetically connected to the Sign directly opposite to it, a principle called reflex.

Thus, I see Nettles as acting upon the Aries-Libra axis, which represents the dynamic balance of acidity and alkalinity in the body. Interestingly enough, around the period of Libra (again this might different from bioregion) is when the seeds of Nettle are at their optimum, which have a strong affinity for the kidneys as a trophorestorative. The roots, which act primarily upon the reproductive system, are best harvested during the fall when the Sun enters Scorpio, who rules the reproductive system, lower urinary tract, and is also governed by Mars.

So you can see here how the astrology of an herb shows the underlying energetic patterns that influence a particular plant, its growth cycle, morphology, chemistry, parts used, organ affinities, energetics, uses and properties. This is why it is such a profound tool, because it enables you to see into the plant on a much deeper level, weaving together all of its dynamics into a cohesive whole.

- **Ruling Element:** As you see, the Planetary correspondence of Mars covers a wide range of the uses, properties, and dynamics at play within Nettles, but it doesn’t necessarily cover all of them. I realized this while working with the planetary rulers of plants, and typically would alleviate the discrepancy by adding a second planetary ruler. This is something many alchemists do, but I have found that the Elemental rulers tend to cover a wider range of influence and tell us more about what the plant is doing.

From my perspective, Nettles is a plant governed by the Water Element. Again we see this reflected in a wide range of aspects of the plant. First off, the plant tends to prefer moist habitats, and does not do so well in dry environments. It likes to grow in depressions in the soil, the bottom of hills, in the valleys, trenches, creek beds and other waterways. So we see the Water Element relating to the habitat in which the plant likes to grow.

This correspondence also relates to its affinities and actions in the body. As mentioned, the leaves of Nettle are a premier diuretic remedy, helping to expel water from the tissues and eliminate it through the kidneys and urinary tract. This is one of its primary organ affinities. It is also used to treat an excess of damp accumulation and stagnation in the tissues, such as when the flowing creek slows and stagnates and turns into a swamp! It cleans the internal waters, interstitial and extracellular fluids, purifies accumulated waste products, and dumps it out of the kidneys.

It is also used to clear out catarrhal and phlegmatic states from the mucosal membranes in the lungs, colon, and urinary tract. This excess mucous accumulation would be another reflection of the damp/stagnation tissue state. It also has a primary affinity for the womb and female reproductive system, a major site of the Water Element, as it is what nourishes the growing fetus which is floating in the Sacred Waters. As a galactagogue, it stimulates lactation and breast milk production, another Water Element correspondence.

Thus the combined influence of Mars and Water reveal the broad spectrum of influence Nettles has upon our physiology and psychology, but again it doesn’t encompass the
the wholeness of the plant, which is brought together in the final pattern of Energetic Architecture: the 3 Philosophical Principles of Alchemy.

- **Ruling Principle:** One of the major claims to fame for Nettles is it’s use as a nutritive tonic with all of it’s vitamins, minerals, protein and other nutrients. This is best represented by the Salt Principle of Alchemy. This principle reveals to use Nettles properties as a tonic-astringent, as it brings a greater level of structural integrity to the tissues, as well as the fact that it directly builds, nourishes, and strengthens the body through it’s ample nutrients. This could be seen as it’s affinity for building up a deficient and emaciated vata constitution, or as cleansing an excessively damp kapha constitution.

In Alchemy, the Salt Principle is represented by the mineral alkali of the plants, that is, the mineral salts. These are extracted from a plant via calcination of the physical plant material, dissolving the ash in water, and precipitating out the water soluble minerals. This is the purified body of the plant. It is said that the salt of a plant is the delivery mechanism for it’s Soul and Spirit (Sulfur and Mercury Principles, respectively), and is what anchors the medicine deeper into our physical body. In this way, it is the plants salt principle which makes it physiologically active. The entire art of Spagyrics is oriented around the extraction, purification, and recombination of the Salt, Mercury and Sulfur of plants to create a truly holistic medicine that operates on the wholeness of the person.

Different plant yield different ratios of Salt, Mercury and Sulfur. Some have high amounts of Sulfur (or essential oil) like Lavender or Rosemary, others yield a lot of Mercury (or alcohol) like Hawthorn berries, and still others yield a high degree of Salt. Those that yield a lot of the Salt Principle are those remedies which contain a high amount of minerals, and Nettles is one of the most mineral rich plants I have ever worked with spagyrically (the only other that compares would be Horsetail (Equisetum arvense) or Alfalfa (Medicago sativum)). The beauty of this method of extraction, is that you directly see for yourself how many minerals are in the plant, and Nettle is full of them.

From an alchemical perspective, this would indicate that it has a strong affinity for the physical body and the primary structural elements that compose it, which you have seen is true. Thus Nettle receives a Salt level rulership, making it’s Energetic Architecture: Mars-Water-Salt.

**Esoteric Significance**

With the knowledge of the Energetic Architecture of a plant in mind, you are then able to see how that plant might relate to other esoteric patterns, primarily the Qabalah and the Tarot. There are a handful of ways to spread this out, and I’d like to run through a few that I find to represent Nettles quite nicely.

The first would be looking at it’s overall architecture, which I mentioned above is Mars-Water-Salt. The Salt Principle of Alchemy is the equivalent to the Fixed Mode of Astrology. Taking the Element and the Mode and putting them together generates a particular Sign of the Zodiac. In this case, Fixed-Water is the Sign of Scorpio. Interestingly enough, Scorpio is classically ruled by Mars, so it lines up quite nicely. I also mentioned above how the roots of
Nettle would be the Scorpio portion of the plant as it has a primary affinity for the male reproductive system, and reproduction is governed by Scorpio.

We could also look at how Nettle leaf is best picked during the season of Aries, and how Aries is also ruled by Mars. If we were to put the two together, we would have Mars in Aries. This corresponds to one of the cards of the Minor Arcana of the Tarot, which would be the 2 of Wands, Dominion. This is essentially a card about empowerment, of coming into your own personal strength, willpower, and basically not being a pushover, of clarifying your personal boundaries. I would say Nettle has a pretty strong sense of boundaries, wouldn’t you? Because it correlates so strongly to Mars, I would say it could also potentially relate to the Major Arcana card that represents Mars, which would be The Tower, or if we took the Sign of Aries, it could potentially relate to The Emperor.

In regards to the Qabalistic Tree of Life, if we see Nettle as relating to the Water Element and Mars, this would place it in Briah of Geburah, or the Water of Mars. Translating this area of the Tree onto the Tarot would make a possible card the 5 of Cups, Disappointment. Interestingly enough, this card is represented astrologically by... Mars in Scorpio, and another layer of the pattern is revealed.

It is not my intent to go into a lot of depth into the Qabalah and the Tarot in this program, but rather lay out the principles behind how I go about corresponding a plant to these archetypal forces. If you are interested in learning more about these, I suggest picking up a copy of The Mystical Qabalah by Dion Fortune, A Garden of Pomegranates by Israel Regardie, and The Tarot Handbook by Angeles Arrien. These are a few good places to start.

Ultimately, these models (Tarot and Qabalah) lay out a map of the archetypal realm, the full spectrum of human experience, and chart the evolutionary processes of the soul. These systems dawned on me as important, for it enables you to start to get a glimpse into the psycho-spiritual properties of plants and their initiatic virtues. These are the sister sciences to Alchemy, and form the map of the territory that is explored in the physical and spiritual domains. Their study is critical to anyone interested in Alchemy.

This concludes our 2nd issue of Materia Medica Monthly and our depth exploration of Nettles. I truly hope you feel for competent in regards to the power of this plant and feel inspired to either start working with it, or reintegrate using it in your work with plants, for I’m sure you can see by now this is a super useful remedy to know how to use.

Learn everything you can from this monograph and from the video associated with it- but don’t take it all from me... get out there and roll around in a patch of Nettles and learn from the source!! =)