

Weed Information Sheet:

stinging nettle

Urtica dioica

AKA: tall nettle, stinging nettles, *Urtica gracilis*

Urticaceae (Nettle family)

Identification:

Common Perennial forb

Height: 2-5'

Width: ∞

Leaf Arrangement: opposite

Flower: Green, White

Blooms: Late-summer

Fruit:

Fall Color: Green

Stinging nettle is a large perennial forb which typically grows in upright, multi-stemmed clumps but can also form large colonies. Leaves are arranged opposite each other on the stem. They up to 6" long, elongated, being more three to four times as long as they are wide with a sharply pointed tip and evenly serrated margins. Unimpressive white flowers sprout in clusters on thin stems emerging from the leaf axles in late-summer. Fruit are green and equally unimpressive. The stems and leaves are covered with sparse but stiff hairs. Large, stinging hairs are known as trichomes. Indeed, this plant is most easily identified by brushing up against it with bare skin.



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RED HEAD Ecological Consulting

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Habitat:

Typically, found in moist to wet, shady areas, but can be found in moderate moisture soils, especially in disturbed sites like degraded woodlands and pastures.



Hazardous

Description & Impact:

The stinging hairs of nettles cause an acute, burning itch, though the effects are short lived from a few minutes to an hour or two for sensitive individuals. The pain can be relieved by rinsing the area with cold water or smearing the juices of jewelweed, which are often found in the same habitats as nettles.

Nettles will rarely become a management issue. It can become over-abundant in disturbed environments such as degraded woodlands. It can become aggressive in the early years of a prairie planting, especially in wetter soils. It is often simply growing in the wrong place where it can cause harm to people such as trail-sides and shorelines. So the goal in management should be to weaken it in natural areas to allow other species to compete and remove it from areas where it can cause a hazard to people.

Stinging nettles are a larval host for several butterflies species such as the painted lady as well as the larvae of several leaf-mining beetles. Bees feed on the flowers. Nettles even have benefits to humans, being highly nutritious greens if cooked correctly and having legitimate medical applications regulating inflammation, blood sugar and even cancer.

Control Methods:

Manual: Stinging nettle roots are shallow, so if you are wearing thick gloves and thick long-sleeved clothing, you can hand-dig and pull the plants to remove them.

Mechanical: Mowing will weaken stinging nettle especially if done while the plants are actively growing in the spring and during the blooming period. If using a weed whip be sure to wear sufficient protective clothing.

Chemical: Herbicide will be effective, but in most cases would be considered overkill. If you choose to use it, a low-concentration foliar application should be sufficient to kill stinging nettles.

Citations: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/stinging-nettle>
https://illinoiswildflowers.info/savanna/plants/sl_nettle.htm

Updated: 10/7/2026