

**STINGING NETTLE (URTICA DIOICA)  
THE HELPER AND HEALER IN MY GARDEN**

ANITA LINDER

The garden season is over. The first snowflakes are falling. They cover the frozen grounds as fast as if they were working on a contract that calls for at least a one foot covering by morning. My garden is prepared for the winter. Though gardening for me is an everflowing pipeline full of health and joy, and I cannot picture how I could live without it, I look forward every year to the great day when frost and snow finally force me indoors. Winter is the time when I read all the books that pile up during the summer. Winter is also the time when I write all the letters I didn't write from spring to autumn. My correspondence during the "Green Season" is mainly signing checks to pay the bills.

Many times during the past summer months I have thought: "As soon as winter comes, I will write a little article for *BIO-DYNAMICS* about stinging nettle." In talking to gardeners—even bio-dynamic gardeners—I found out, to my surprise, that most of them know very little about stinging nettle and practically nobody has a nettle manure tub.

We all know the importance of *Urtica dioica* as a plant used for the bio-dynamic compost preparations, and we are also aware of its great value in the medical field. In his Agriculture Course, Dr. Steiner calls the stinging nettle an "Aller-weltskerl", an all-world-chap, and tells us that the presence of stinging nettle in an area has a beneficial influence on the entire plant growth. He goes on to say that stinging nettle distributes sulphur in the right way and at the same time radiates potassium, calcium and iron into the entire environment. He compares the stinging nettle to the human heart, and says that it is as important to nature as the heart is to man.

But despite a theoretic knowledge of the importance of *Urtica dioica*, many bio-dynamic gardeners still fail to put their knowledge to practical use. I would like to describe, therefore, two easy and beneficial ways in which I prepare stinging nettle for use in my own garden.

I make a liquid manure from stinging nettle by following a very simple procedure. In my compost area under an elderberry tree I have a wooden tub. It is thirty-one inches in diameter and sixteen inches deep, but could be any size. The tub is sunken in the ground except for its top half-inch, and is covered by a wooden board from spring until winter. Stinging nettle grows everywhere in my neighborhood, at the edge of the pine forest, along the brook, and by the stone walls. It is one of the first greens to come up in spring. The young shoots, just a few inches high, are cut for kitchen use. They are the most delicious spinach I have ever eaten. When the plants are about two feet high, I do the first cutting for my tub. They always shoot up again; the same plants I have cut for greens will bloom in summer.

I fill my tub with as many nettles as it will hold, and cover them with water to the rim. I have my own well and therefore no problem with contaminated water, but rainwater would be excellent too. Every day, for about two weeks, I stir the contents with a wooden stick, because many of the nettles float to the top at first. After that they "fall together" and sink to the bottom and in two weeks the leaves have dissolved. What remains is a green liquid and, on the bottom, the fibrous stems. I always add these to the compost.

By this time the liquid has a strong odor, when you uncover it and stir it, much like a healthy liquid manure from a cattle farm. I am puzzled by the way in which stinging nettle and water manage to produce such a strong-smelling liquid. But if something smells, there is something valuable in it. If, for instance, one enters a kitchen where a soup is simmering, it certainly smells great. I use the liquid manure on all my seedlings, including the newly planted ones. I do not sprinkle. I remove the sprinkler top from the watering can and pour. This stinging nettle manure helps, wherever something is "out of balance". For example, in the second part of May, 1972, we had heavy frosts. My wax beans had been healthy and strong with their first two leaves well developed until *that morning*, after the first frost. Now they were brown, just plain brown. I gave them a good dose of stinging nettle manure, and they recovered in a short time. I had a wonderful harvest of healthy, spotless wax beans in spite of the wet summer. A newspaper man who visited me said: "This is certainly the best and healthiest-looking vegetable garden I've seen this summer."

To come back to my tub: when it is almost empty, I cut more nettles and fill it up again with water. I do this again and again all summer long. The best liquid manure, I would say, is made from nettles when they *bloom*. I have found that during a dry period plants that have received the stinging nettle manure withstand the drought much better.

I also use stinging nettle in another way, again following the advice of Dr. Steiner. Under the shade of some big trees, in my regular compost area, I dug a hole about two and a half feet square and one and a half to two feet deep. I cover the ground with an inch or two of peat moss. When the nettles bloom, I fill this hole with them. I pack them tight and cover everything with earth. After a year, when the nettles are blooming again, I empty the hole. The nettles have become rich black earth, more valuable than the finest compost. I throw handfuls over the vegetable and berry gardens. Only a homeopathic dose is needed. Yes, it is a homeopathic medication for the garden, this valuable earth that used to be stinging nettle.

I think I have to thank the stinging nettle a great deal, as I really never have had—so far—any pests or “plant sickness” in my garden.

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## INFLUENCE OF FERTILIZATION ON FEED QUALITY\*

IRMGARD VON GRONE-GUELTZOW

If one observes a grazing cow, one can soon tell which herbs and plants the cow seeks out and which she avoids. The farmer, who knows his animals, also knows their taste. He sees how the cow lets the *Ranunculaceae*, members of the buttercup family which are poisonous when green, stand. He fears the Autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*) and the white hellebores (European, *Veratrum album*; American, *V. viride*), because they don't lose their poisonous quality even in hay. Meadow foxtail, orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*) and meadow fescue (*Festuca pratensis*) are loved by cattle, while the wooly

\* Translated by Conrad Mahle.