Stinging Nettle

Urtica dioica L.

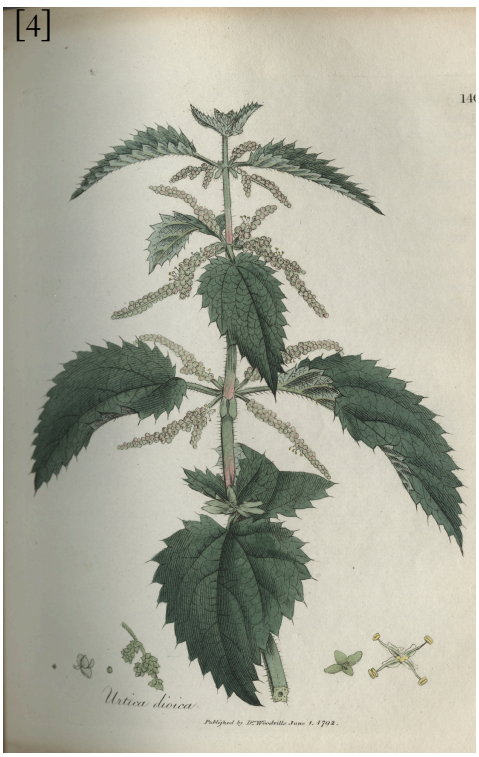
DO NOT TOUCH

Taxonomic Classification

Domain: *Eukaryotes*
Kingdom: *Plantae*
Subkingdom: *Tracheobionta*
Super Division: *Spermatophyta*
Phylum/Division: *Magnoliophyta*
Class: *Magnoliopsida*
Order: *Rosales*
Family: *Urticaceae*
Genus: *Urtica*
Species: *dioica*
[1]

[2] Plant

[3] Serrated leaf



[4]

Botanical Description

Perennial herb, to 6.5 ft tall. Plant with stinging hairs. Stems square. Stipules 5 - 15 cm long. Leaves 4 - 18 cm long, petioles 1-6 cm long, leaf blades 3-15 cm long and 1-8 cm wide, lanceolate (lance shaped) to ovate (egg shaped), margins coarsely toothed, leaf tip acute, base truncate to rounded. Flowers green, small and non-showy, 1-2 mm long, in pendulous clusters arising in axils of leaves. Reproduces by rhizomes and seeds that can form dense colonies. Fruit type achene and that produce copious amounts of seeds [5].

Identification Tips

Stinging nettle can be confused with spearmint and other members of the mint family (Lamiaceae): both have square stems and large-toothed, opposite leaves. However, mints can be identified by their showy, colorful flowers that are mostly upright, whereas stinging nettle has small green flowers that hang down in clusters.

Fun Fact!

Stinging nettle is the home to many butterfly larvae, including Eastern Comma (*Polygonia interrogationis)*, Satyr Comma (*Polygonia comma)*, Milbert's Tortoiseshell (*Polygonia satyrus)*, Red Admiral (*Nymphalis milberti*), and Hawaii's Kamehameha Lady (*Vanessa tameamea*), all found in Utah [6].


[7] Flowers

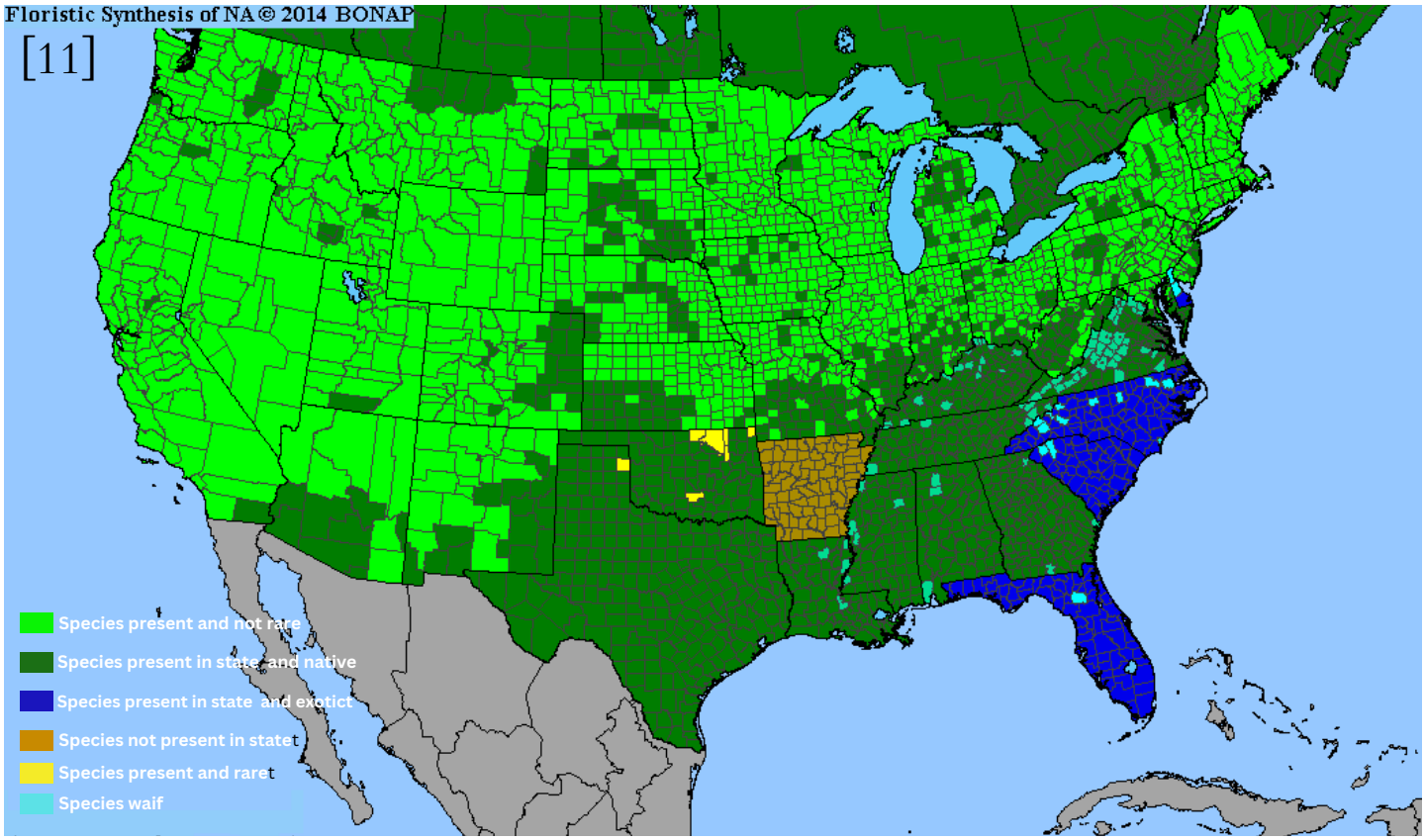

[8] Stinging nettle hairs


[9] Leaves

Ethnobotanical and Other Uses

Young, fresh leaves of *Urtica dioica* are often dried, ground to a powder, and consumed in other forms as they are abundant of bioactive compounds (flavonoids, phenolic acids, and amino acids). Leaves can be eaten as a potherb after several boilings and water changes. Stinging nettle is also commonly used during a process called urtification (external stinging), in which fresh stems and leaves are applied locally to relieve joint pain. It has a history of being used as as a diuretic, as well as a treatment for cough, cold, cuts, and wounds [10].

Habitat Range



Conservation Status

On a global scale, stinging nettle is considered a secure species!

Plant Ecology

Native to Eurasia and naturalized in North America [12]. In Utah, occurs in moist, shaded, nitrogen-rich habitats from riparian areas in sagebrush desert riparian areas or wet areas of open forests, meadows, and streambanks [13]. It is known to dominate mountain slopes, along forest edges, and disturbed sites [13].

References:

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Information collated by Sarah R. Dayley under the direction of Dr. Ashley N. Egan in collaboration with UVU’s summer 2023 BOT 2050 and fall 2023 BOT 4300 classes and through the UVU Excelerate Program.