

Nibbles for the wild

Nettles

'Nettle chips - yuk, I don't like those!' is how most children react to the idea of this dish. But when they taste these crisps they cannot get enough of them and see nettles with new eyes.

As we move into spring, nettles are starting to appear. Sure they may sting, but they're also hugely versatile. And right now they're at their seasonal best: young, tender and ripe for picking. Nettles have a long history of numerous uses, and it's no wonder why. They are an excellent blood purifier, a mild laxative and extremely high in vitamin C. They're also delicious to eat and make a healthy relaxing herb tea.

Picking Tips

- Nettles are best when very tender, so pick in the spring when the nettles are just coming up or later in the season. Pick the young leaves from the tips.
- Use rubber gloves or pinch the leaves hard, so you don't get stung. Once picked, lay the nettles out on a tray to wilt. Once wilted they can no longer sting you. The sting relies on erect hairs to penetrate the skin and inject the stinging formic acid. When wilted strip the leaves off the stems.
- Like spinach, when cooked, nettles reduce to 1/4 the amount, so a supermarket bag full will be about 500g.

- Always cook nettles, which destroys the stinging formic acid. Nettles are not suitable for salads!

Nettle Crisps

Serves 3-4

Ingredients:

125g clarified butter or vegetable oil
1 bowl freshly picked individual nettle leaves, as young as possible
sea salt, cayenne pepper or paprika, salt

Method

1. Heat the clarified butter or oil in a pan and fry the leaves in it,



constantly stirring, until they are slightly curled and crispy.

2. Take them out of the pan, allow the excess fat to drip off and sprinkle a mixture of salt and cayenne pepper or paprika on them.

3. Serve hot.

Cooking utensils: A large flat pan; a board on which to let the excess fat drip off; a wooden spoon or fork for stirring and taking out the chips.

Fire: Small fire with low flames. Can also just be done on the hob.