

WOMEN'S HERBS: SPRINGING UP EVERYWHERE

If you are a woman and enjoy living in synch with the seasons, then spring is a celebratory time for you. Wondrous herbs are poking their heads through the ground and offering their services specific to women in the teenage, childbearing, and menopausal years. Spring is the prime time to harvest herbs valued for their leaves such as nettles and dandelions. This is the time when the energy is in the leaves, causing the plant to be at its yummiest.

Nettle (or “stinging” nettle), which is nearing the end of its most energetic season, is an ally to many women. As a very rich source of iron, calcium, sulfur, and B complex vitamins- among other nutrients- it is great for teenage girls experiencing anemia and other nutritional deficiencies that may cause skin, hair, and nail problems. In menstruating women, it will curb profuse blood flow while providing the lost iron. Pregnant women benefit from the consumption of nettles as their need for calcium and iron increases. Midwives administer nettles to women who are at risk from hemorrhage in the last trimester of pregnancy. Once the baby is born, the mother can continue to include nettle in her diet in order to improve the quality of breast milk. By acting as a mild diuretic, it will also help her to slough off excess pounds she may have gained.

Herbalist Susun Weed dedicates a chapter to her stinging friend in her book Healing Wise. Her tasty recipes include nettle salsa, nettle spanokopitas, and nettle souffle. Nettles can be harvested around streams and ditches in early spring and are delicious added to soups or added to any recipe in place of spinach. I made a delicious nettle lasagna recently. If cooking is not your thing, however, or if you have missed nettle season, you can purchase dried bulk nettle, nettle capsules, and nettle tincture.

Another delight of the season is the emergence of dandelions. Both nettles and dandelions are great spring tonics for women and men alike. Few North Americans acknowledge and appreciate the strong medicine produced by this common “weed”. The French and the Dutch, however, have long recognized the many properties of the root and the leaf, especially in relation to female complaints. Try adding some of the new fresh leaves to your salad- they are a great source of iron, calcium, vitamin A, and other nutrients. Pregnant women take the leaf to lower high blood pressure and to help the elimination of excess water in the body.

The root can be used by teenage and childbearing women to relieve premenstrual breast tenderness and cramps. Dandelion root is also a strong liver herb and will aid in the removal of toxins from the blood. Continued use is effective in teens with acne.

You will also see dandelion root as an ingredient in menopausal formulas where its special function is to balance estrogen. I used it after discontinuing the use of the birth control pill along with milk thistle and evening primrose oil. Women trying to lose weight will also benefit from the plant's diuretic effect without suffering from the loss of electrolytes often caused by other diuretics.

Dandelion can be purchased as bulk leaf and root, as well as in tinctures and capsules. I'm sure you all know where it can be harvested! Happy Spring!