

Common Nettle

Urtica dioica

Plants · In flower Jun-Sep



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A tall perennial with pointed, coarsely toothed, opposite leaves and drooping catkin-like strings of tiny green flowers, the whole plant armed with stinging hairs. Nettles are abundant wherever ground is disturbed and nutrient-rich — farmyards, riverbanks, waste ground, hedge bottoms, old middens — throughout the Dumfries area.

BEHAVIOUR

Each sting is a hollow silica hair with a brittle tip that snaps off on contact and injects a mix of histamine and other irritants. Nettles need high phosphate, so a dense stand often marks old habitation, a byre or a badger latrine. Ecologically they are essential: small tortoiseshell, peacock, red admiral and comma all lay on nettle, and none has an alternative.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Nettles (Urticaceae)
HEIGHT	60–150 cm
STATUS	Native; abundant, and foodplant of four common butterflies

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