

STINGING NETTLES

do not always sting



A photograph of a stinging nettle plant with serrated green leaves and a reddish-brown stem, set against a blurred natural background.

Urtica Dioica, Latin to stinging nettle, is a herbaceous perennial plant, meaning it lengthens in the summer but withers away in winter. Stinging nettle originates from Europe, Asia, and North Africa, but it practically can be discovered in most temperate parts of the world. This plant brings plenty of herbal benefits when consumed properly. However, it may cause skin irritation when touched due to the hairy structures covering the leaves and stem thus the name is stinging nettle.



Often known and perceived only as a herbal plant, not many know stinging nettle other utility as an element for sustainable fabrics; the idea of reviving nettle fibres derived from the concerns over cotton fibres production environmental damages. While cotton has been the most popular choice in fashion for natural fibre, the manufacturing itself takes a substantial amount of water and pesticide use; worst of all, it severely degrades the soil quality. Being natural does not always promise that cotton is eco-friendly after all. As an alternative, nettle grows everywhere and can be harvested every year. Moreover, the fibres produced are also strong and versatile, and as opposed to the majority belief, it does not sting.





stinging nettle barks



nettle fibres



nettle yarns

The process of manufacturing stinging nettle fabric goes back from selecting wild nettle; the nettles are usually picked from high and remote Himalayan ranges. The barks then separated from the plant and laid under direct sunlight for three days. After the drying process, the barks were then soaked underwater for another ten days and later boiled. They are separated afterwards, next comes carding the barks into fibres. The final step is to spin the fibres into yarns, the rest depends on the fabric constructions; each will be woven according to the methods.



nettle fabrics



This fibre has actually been used for the past 2000 years, and when cotton arrived in the 16th century, it was slowly forgotten. However, nettles made a brief return during the First and Second World Wars. At the time, Britain controlled 90% of the world's cotton trade. Therefore, Germany suffered a hefty shortage of cotton. As a replacement, nettles were developed to make uniforms for the troops. By the end of the war, synthetic fibres started to enter the game; nettles were back into the void.

Even so, the revival of nettle utilisation in fashion does not stop there yet; in the early 2000s, an Italian fashion house, Corpo Nove, rallied stinging nettle fibre and made a whole denim collection out of it. The brand claimed that the clothes produced give proper insulation due to the nettle's hollow structure that accumulates air inside; they are also hypoallergenic, meaning they are suitable for eczema and rheumatism patients. The glad tidings is humanity starting to acknowledge stinging nettle's existence; fashion brands are getting more conscious of the environmental damage and switch to nettle fabrics.




One of the recent uses of stinging nettle fabrics can be found in Vin & Omi's collections. As one of the U.K's fashion brands, they collaborated with Prince Charles to make their nettles wardrobe; the nettles used were taken from the prince's private gardens in Highgrove Estate. The collaboration was showcased as a part of Vin & Omi's Sting project in the Spring/Summer 2020. This project was purposed to campaign sustainable and eco-friendly fashion or "stop screwing the planet" as quoted from the show.





VIN + OMI
SPRING/SUMMER 2020



Today, stinging nettle and other eco-friendly fabrics are starting to be widely used. As sustainability has been a keyword for recent years, civilisation is reacting to the nettle fibres rather acceptably. Within a year of development, the thread is already produced and able to enter the market. The fashion industry is also much more open to new ideas and movements to make a better world; views such as replacing cotton with nettle are considered deliberately. In a hopeful future, this might not seem unimaginable.

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