



STONE EDGE FARM
ESTATE VINEYARDS & WINERY

SPRING GARLIC AND NETTLE SOUP

from chef John McReynolds

Serves 4

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 leek, most of green part removed,
cut in half lengthwise, and thinly
sliced
1 bunch green garlic, trimmed of long
green ends and thinly sliced
1 medium potato, peeled and diced
1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
4 cups vegetable stock or water
1 tablespoon kosher salt
4 cups firmly packed nettle leaves
2 cups firmly packed spinach leaves
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black
pepper
1/2 cup Greek-style plain yogurt
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
Zest of 1 lemon
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon
juice

I used to avoid stinging nettles because of the bristly, hair-like spikes on the leaves. They deliver an instant and painful rash on whatever part of the body is unlucky enough to touch them. I certainly had not thought of nettles as an ingredient.

That changed one evening in the 1980s at a restaurant near Lake Garda, in northern Italy, where I was served fresh pasta with a pesto made of nettles. It was bright green, with vibrant notes of citrus and grass, and so delicious that it caused me to look at the fiery plant in a whole new way. The next time I encountered the stinging leaves, I made sure I was wearing a long-sleeved shirt and thick rubber gloves.

Nettles are best in the spring, when the leaves are new and fresh. Handle them with gloves until they are cooked, which renders them harmless. They can actually be eaten raw but first must be puréed in a blender or pounded in a mortar and pestle, to break up the tiny hairs.

Heat a medium-size pot over medium heat, and add butter and olive oil. Add leeks and garlic, and cook slowly until softened. Add potato and cook slowly for a few minutes until barely soft when touched with a knife tip. Stir in salt and cook for 1 minute. Add stock, turn up the heat, and cook potatoes until soft.

Meanwhile, bring 2 quarts water and the 1 tablespoon kosher salt to a boil. Add nettles and spinach and blanch for 1 minute, then drain in a colander and cool in ice water. Drain again and squeeze out excess water with your hands. Bring soup mixture to a boil and add blanched nettles and spinach. Cook for 30 seconds, just until nettles and spinach are heated through. Purée with an immersion blender until smooth. Season with more salt, if needed, and freshly ground pepper.

Make a garnish by mixing yogurt, olive oil, lemon zest, and lemon juice together in a small bowl.

To serve the soup, ladle into bowls and float a spoonful of the lemony yogurt in each bowl.

Chef's Notes

You could just cook the spinach and nettles together with the rest of the soup, but blanching green, leafy vegetables and herbs before puréeing them in a soup helps set the green color. Blanching vegetables simply means cooking them first in boiling salted water and then refreshing them in ice water to stop the cooking.

If you have a coarse conical strainer, you can pass the soup through the strainer to remove any excess fibers.

— *Stone Edge Farm Estate Vineyards & Winery Cookbook*