



## Wildlife Friendly Addingham

# Be nice to nettles!

Nettles may not be the prettiest wild flower, and certainly not the most popular!

The Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is an important native plant for wildlife, supporting over 40 species of insect including some of our most colourful butterflies.



**Small Tortoiseshell butterfly**



**Peacock butterfly caterpillars feeding on nettles**

Nettles are a thug of the plant world, and are a sign that the ground is rich in nutrients like nitrogen and phosphate. Growing strongly they will out compete meadow species which do better in soil which has fewer nutrients.

We let a large clump of nettles grow here to attract egg laying adult butterflies whose caterpillars rely on nettle leaves for food.

*"Stinging nettles give us an insight into both the capacity for nature to flourish even in some of the hardest urban conditions, and how plants are essential in providing us with some of the necessities of life.*

*Not only do they provide excellent food for some butterflies and moths, but we can make tea from their leaves, use them as dyes, and once stung we will never forget their power to protect - as good a piece of environmental education as any."*

Mathew Frith,  
Urban Advisor, English Nature

**Nettles are great for wildlife. So, if you can find room for a patch in your garden, by a compost bin is a good spot.**



**But nettles sting why are insects so keen on them?** The stinging hairs of the nettle developed as a defence against grazing animals. This makes the nettle patch an ideal habitat for insects. There is little danger of the adult insects or larvae ending up in the stomach of a cow! Insects can also move between the spines without activating the sting.

As well as providing food for butterflies, many nettle patches hold overwintering aphids which swarm around the fresh spring growth and provide an early food source for ladybirds. These same aphids are eaten in large numbers by blue tits and other woodland birds agile enough to dart around the stems. In late summer the huge quantity of seed produced provide a food source for many of our seed eating birds.