



B8

# Common nettle

Scientific name:

*Urtica dioica*

Perennial plant (herb) in the Nettle family (Urticaceae)

## B8.1 What is Common nettle?

- Long-lived (perennial), polycarpic (flowers many times) competitive dominant. Some above ground growth may persist through winter.
- Rapid growth from a shallow below ground rhizome (root) in spring and a dense, compact canopy restricts native plant species access to light – may dominate open sites if left unmanaged.
- Very variable in terms of growth characteristics and identification features.
- Several other species and sub-species of native and non-native nettles found in the UK and Ireland.



## B8.2

### What does Common nettle look like throughout the year?

#### Common nettle

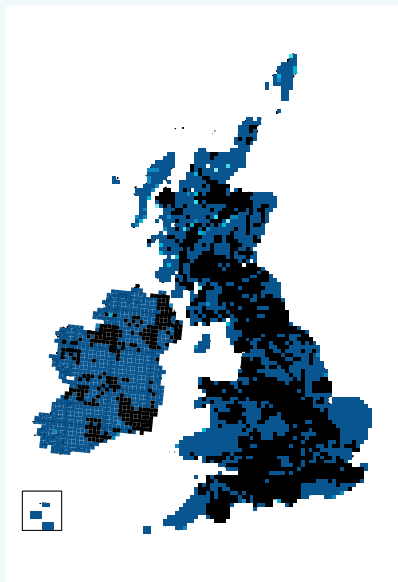


## B8.3

### How does Common nettle grow and spread?

- Normally reaches up to 1.5m tall in full growth (can grow more than 2m tall).
- Spreads by direct rhizome (root) expansion (up to 0.5m per year) and vegetative (asexual, clonal) dispersal via fragments of plant material created by human activities (e.g. agricultural practices) and natural disturbance processes (e.g. animals). Also spreads sexually by seed that may be ingested and transported by grazing mammals; persistent seedbank formed.
- UK distribution still increasing.

## B8.4



### Where does Common nettle grow?

Common habitats where Common nettle is found include:

- Rivers and other watercourses (riparian habitats)
- Roadsides
- Railway embankments and cuttings
- Waste ground
- Agricultural areas (arable)
- Cliffs, sand dunes and limestone pavement

The map shows where Common nettle is found in the UK and Ireland.

## Timing of Common nettle growth stages and treatment application

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Growth stages: approximate – weather and altitude dependent</b>	Germination			■	■	■							
	Seedling plant growth			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Maturity (maximum height)						■	■	■	■			
	Flowering						■	■					
	Seed production								■	■	■	■	
	Die back (dormancy)	■	■								■	■	■
<b>Treatment application – physical</b>	Cultural and physical	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Biological (grazing)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Treatment application – chemical</b>	Selective (e.g. 2,4-D amine, triclopyr, aminopyralid)		■	■	■	■							
	Non-selective, non-residual (glyphosate)		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
	Non-selective, residual (e.g. flazasulfuron, iodosulfuron)		■	■	■	■	■						
<b>Treatment notes</b>	<p>Eradication using any control method is unlikely due to an extensive below ground rhizome and persistent seedbank; however, effective long-term control and management is possible.</p> <p>Glyphosate-based herbicides are effective for control throughout the growing season. However, to achieve sustainable long-term control and management (reduce herbicide and labour requirements and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions), target application between May and August to poison the rhizome system and minimise regrowth in subsequent growing seasons.</p> <p>Use selective herbicides to control larger plants (reduce flowering and seed production) and kill seedlings early in the growing season, this has the advantage of retaining the grass sward.</p> <p>Use a spray shield for herbicide spot treatments to minimise spray drift.</p> <p>In industrial areas integrate residuals into management programmes to kill seedlings and reduce treatment frequency, labour requirements and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with treatment later in the growing season, and in subsequent growing seasons.</p> <p>Physical control methods such as mowing can be used to reduce population density and improve access, though there are higher labour requirements and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with these treatments.</p>												

## Acknowledgements

## Image acknowledgements

Map courtesy of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (© BSBI 2021)

## References

1. Grime et al. *Castlepoint Press* (2007)
2. Rose Warne (2016)
3. Stace *C&M Floristics* (2019)

