

Pasta with Nettles, Sorrel, and Lemon

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Stinging nettles taste a little like spinach. Since cleaning them without stinging yourself presents a challenge, I cook them by boiling them in a big pot of water, stirring frequently when I first put them in and hoping that whatever dirt isn't meant to end up in my body sinks to the bottom of the pot. Look for nettles at farmer's markets and gourmet food stores in the spring.

This is not your typical pasta dish; it's light, more like a hot pasta salad, with bright, herby flavors. If you want something a little more substantial, by all means, add butter or cream. Goat cheese or feta would also work well here.

TIME: 40 minutes

MAKES: 2 to 4 servings

1/4 pound fresh stinging nettles
1/2 pound (8 ounces) pasta, such as broken lasagna noodles, cavatappi, or rotini
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 pound fresh ricotta cheese, plus some for garnishing the pasta
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
1 tablespoon each chopped fresh mint, parsley, and chives (or some combination)
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 small handful fresh sorrel leaves, torn into bite-sized pieces and washed
1/2 cup toasted walnuts

Bring two large pots of salted water to a boil, one for the nettles and one for the pasta.

When the water boils in one of the pots, carefully add the nettles, stirring as you add them to rid them of any unwanted particles, and cook for 5 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer them to a colander (so that any dirt stays in the pot), and let them drain for a few minutes over the sink.

Add the pasta to the pot of clean water, and cook according to package directions, until al dente.

Meanwhile, gently press most of the water out of the hot nettles, transfer them to a food processor, and puree. Add the olive oil, and process until completely smooth. Add the ricotta, lemon zest and juice, and herbs, and process briefly, just so the ingredients are blended. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Scoop out about a cup of the pasta-cooking water and set it aside. Drain the pasta, return it to the pot, and toss it with the nettle-ricotta mixture and the fresh sorrel, adding the reserved pasta water to loosen the sauce, if necessary. Stir in the walnuts, and serve immediately, topped with the extra ricotta.