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Laportea canadensis

[Synonyms : *Urtica canadensis*, *Urticastrum divaricatum*]

WOOD NETTLE is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has tiny, greenish flowers. It is also known as Albany hemp, Canada nettle, Canadian woodnettle, Nettle, and Stinging-nettle.

Warning – leaves and stems are covered in stinging hairs consisting of a very sharp, hollow spine. Under pressure this spine can pierce the skin and release juice which can cause irritation and inflammation for up to 24 hours. The juice is dissipated by heat. The plant rarely causes problems for animals.

The inner bark (from root and stems) yields a fibre said to be comparable to that from ramie (*Boehmeria nivea*) and 50 times stronger than similar diameter cotton (*Gossypium*) thread or string.

Canadensis means ‘of or from north-eastern North America or of Canada’.

The fibre was familiar to local North American Indian tribes, including the Menominee and the Meskwaki who used it to make bags. Abnaki Indians made baskets from it, for the Chippewa it provided twine, and some of the latter also used it for sewing.

Wood nettle offered a source of medicine for several North American tribes. It was used to ease fever by the Iroquois and Houma Indians, while the Meskwaki tribe and some of the Chippewa prescribed it for various urinary ailments and fluid retention. In addition records show that the Iroquois also used it to treat tuberculosis and ease childbirth.