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Urtica pilulifera

ROMAN NETTLE is an annual or biennial. Native to southern Europe it has greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as Burning nettle, *Danadl Belaidd* (Welsh), Devil's apron, *Hurrieq taz-zibeg* (Maltese), *Kopřiva kulkonosná* (Czech), *Pillen-Brennessel* (German), *Přhlava gul'konosná* (Slovak), *Romersk nässla* (Swedish), and *Žihlava* (Slovak); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of slander.

Warning – the spines release a far more virulent juice than that from the stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) or the small nettle (*Urtica urens*).

Pilulifera is derived from Latin *pilula* (pill) and *-fer* (bearing, carrying) components meaning 'bearing little balls' with reference to the fruit.

This is a far more potent species than stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) or small nettle (*Urtica urens*) although less common than the other two, and it is believed to have been introduced to Britain during the Roman occupation of the Island (from 43 BC to 407 AD). Some authorities suggest that the Romans had heard such dreadful descriptions of northern Winters that in anticipation of these they decided that drastic countermeasures would be needed. They brought with them this virulent nettle and flogged themselves with it. (This would not have been as extreme or uncommon as it sounds if reports of other reasons for self-flagellation with Roman nettle are to be believed.)

The nettles are said to have been used for self-flagellation by young ancient Greek women during the Christian festival at Easter as an awesome reminder of Christ's suffering.

Medicinally, it has been used in the past in remedies for curing tumours, ulcers, gangrene and bites from rabid dogs. As flails these nettles were also believed to be a reasonable cure for rheumatism.