

# Stinging Nettles – Lunch is Served!

By Susie Iventosch



Kevin Feinstein conducting a foraging hike in Lafayette



Kevin Feinstein (aka Feral Kevin), co-author of "The Bay Area Forager"

A reader tipped me off to a local foraging expert and naturalist, who leads guided foraging hikes in Lafayette and several other Bay Area locations. Kevin Feinstein, otherwise known as "Feral Kevin," is a self-taught expert on the edible treats Mother Nature nurtures in the wild, from mushrooms and chickweed to wild artichokes, milk thistle, wild mustard and radishes, mallow and miner's lettuce. He says that in a 10 by 10 foot square space, he might find 20 to 30 different types of edible plants!

"I grew up in a mainstream, suburban environment where I didn't eat

a fruit off a tree until I was in my 20s," Feinstein said.

Originally from Tennessee, Feinstein studied film at Florida State University before moving to California 14 years ago.

During his 20s he developed an interest in studying food, gardening, ecology, sustainability, diet and natural health. Now, he spends much of his time giving lectures, leading group hikes and private guided tours, teaching classes and writing books on these subjects. He has written two books:

"The Bay Area Forager," co-authored with Mia Andler, and an eBook enti-

tled "Crash Course in Wild Mushroom Foraging." Both books are available on Feinstein's website: [www.feralkevin.com](http://www.feralkevin.com).

Most of his students are foresting novices, and he says that is lots of fun for him because they don't really know much about the subject.

"I am a cautious, conservative, careful forager," he pointed out. "I wish I would have had someone to teach me, especially when it came to foraging for mushrooms!"

The Lafayette hikes are best done from December through May or June, when there is plenty of moisture and

wild plants thrive. He conducts hikes locally through Sierra Ranch, because hikers are allowed to forage on private land with permission by the owners, whereas foraging may not be allowed on public lands. Feinstein emphasizes that hikers must be pre-registered for these events, which can be done on his website or through Sierra Ranch.

When I asked Feral Kevin if he had a recipe he could share, he admitted that he is not much of a recipe follower, but that he has several in his book. He said that he makes pesto out of his pickings and one of his favorites is stinging nettle pesto. Maybe you are like me, and cringe at the thought of eating those stinging green things, but I did try them last year when I saw them at the farmers' market. I sautéed them with shallots and garlic in a little bit of olive oil, and they were really very good. You can also make soup from this concoction by adding chicken or vegetable broth.

You must use gloves when handling nettles until you either cook them or pulverize them in a food processor. Either method removes the sting. I even read that if you boil the nettle leaves in water, the resulting tea mixture can be applied to the skin to

alleviate the sting from where that very plant may have stung you in the first place!

Feinstein says that nettles are a super-sustainable food, both to find and grow, and they are one of the most nutritious mega-super green foods available. He also likes to serve crunchy thistle stalks with hummus. He says that when trimmed up, they are kind of like celery stalks. Now, I would never have looked at a thistle plant and thought ... food! But, that is true of the beloved artichoke as well, I suppose.

"Foraging connects you to your food and the place you live more than any other activity," Feinstein noted.

Kevin Feinstein  
<http://feralkevin.com>  
 Sienna Ranch  
 3232 Deerhill Road, Lafayette  
 (925) 283-6311, <http://siennaranch.net>

\*For more information on stinging nettles:  
<http://www.motheearthnews.com/natural-health/stinging-nettle-benefits-zmaz81mazkin.aspx?PagelD=2#ArticleContent>  
 \*\*To harvest your own nettles, check with a good source on what leaves to cut in order to reap multiple harvests from your plant.

## Stinging Nettle Pesto

(Makes 1 1/2 to 2 cups)

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups nettles, washed and stems removed (be sure to use tongs or gloves when handling)
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano
- 1/4 pine nuts or walnuts
- 1-2 cloves garlic
- 1-2 teaspoons fresh-squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

### DIRECTIONS

Bring a pot of water to boil and blanch nettles for about 2 minutes. (You can also steam them to remove the sting, or thoroughly pulverize raw leaves in a good quality food processor.) Drain and pat dry to remove excess water. Place nettles in food processor with remaining ingredients. Process until desired consistency. Add more olive oil if necessary to allow for processing.

Use pesto as you normally would for spreads, pastas, dips, etc.

## Sauteed Nettles with Shallots and Garlic

### INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups nettle leaves, stems removed
- 1 large shallot finely diced (can also use onion)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Garnish with grated Parmesan, red pepper flakes, or toasted pine nuts and season to taste with salt and pepper.

### DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil in large sauté pan. Add shallots and garlic and cook until translucent. Add nettles, using tongs, and cook until wilted over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally.

Serve as a side dish, or use as a base for nettle soup, by adding chicken broth. You can also add diced carrots, leeks and potatoes to your soup, either pre-sauteed, or tossed in raw and cooked in the broth. Then you can serve chunky or pureed into a smooth soup.



Mallow seed pod (aka mallow cheesewheel or wild okra)

Susie Iventosch is the author of Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and [www.taxbites.net](http://www.taxbites.net). Susie can be reached at [suziventosch@gmail.com](mailto:suziventosch@gmail.com).

**This recipe can be found on our website:** [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com). If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



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