

## ***Carry on Composting & Wild Garlic and Nettle Fritters***

What could be better on a much needed rainy afternoon than foraging for Ramsons (wild garlic) and nettles to make tasty spring-green fritters! Having just harvested four wheelbarrow loads of compost from my compost bin my heart is brimming over in appreciation and awe for the cycles of life and the alchemical processes that happen in darkness. I wanted to find out more about the magicians who do their work in the darkness, recycling our food-waste, wilted plants, flowers and greens from the plot mixed with a little cardboard, to become the nutrients for the seeds and shoots to come.



The following description from *Carry on Composting* describes 3 levels of ‘decomposers’ working away in our compost bins, <http://www.carryoncomposting.com>.

### ***Third Level Decomposers***

These larger creatures, sometimes known as Macro-organisms, physically break down the organic material by **chewing, tearing** and, in some cases, **sucking** it into smaller pieces. Ants, beetles, centipedes, “composting” worms, flies, millipedes, slugs, snails, spiders, and woodlice (sow bugs) are all in this group and can be easily seen by the naked eye. These creatures make up the third level of decomposers who work to produce compost.

### ***Second Level Decomposers***

The second level decomposers e.g. springtails, nematodes, beetle mites, mould mites and protozoa, **eat the organic matter** and the organisms that make up the first level decomposers. These tend to be smaller and the use of a hand lens or stereoscopic microscope is useful to observe them in detail.

### ***First Level Decomposers***

The first level decomposers are the much smaller Microorganisms and they play the major role in the composting process. They use the organic matter in the compost bin or heap as a source of food resulting in its decomposition to the rich brown material we know as compost. We can speed up the natural decomposition process by providing optimum conditions for the soil microorganisms to breakdown more quickly than would occur without our intervention. Many of these bacteria, fungi, and actinomycetes break down the organic material **chemically**, in contrast to the physical action of the macroorganisms. The actual species of composting microorganism in any given heap will vary, depending on the climate, moisture content, Compost pH, temperature and the conditions within the particular part of the heap at the time of collecting the samples for identification and counting. These bacteria, actinomycetes and fungi will be present in massive numbers.

Did you know that there are between:

- 1,000,000 – 1 billion **bacteria** present per gram of compost
- 100,000 – 100 million **actinomycetes** per gram of compost
- 10,000 – 1,000,000 **fungal cells** per gram of compost

Contemplating the creation of compost and the community of creatures involved in this alchemical process is an easy way of remembering that so much happens on our allotments and in the soil that we simply don’t see, either because these processes need darkness, or those doing this mighty work are so tiny they are invisible to our naked eye.

So now with much awe and wonder stirred up here is a recipe for **nettle and wild garlic fritters**:

- 4 hand-fulls of nettle leaves
- 4 hand-fulls of wild garlic leaves
- 2 hand full of 3 cornered leek (optional)
- 2 hand full chopped cabbage
- ½ red onion
- 1 organic free range egg
- Small amount grated goats cheese (optional)
- 1 handful oats
- A sprinkling of spelt flour
- Salt, pepper, and any herbs you would like
- Olive Oil

Chop all the greens and place in a mixing bowl. Add seasoning, herbs, flour, onion and the oats, mix everything together. Add the egg, cheese and stir. The consistency should be sticky and hold together without being too wet. Heat the oil in a frying pan – let it get hot. Place a palm full of the mixture in the pan and flatten to the shape you want. Fry for a couple of minutes each side until fritters begin to brown. Serve and eat whilst hot.

**Stinging Nettles** (*Urtica dioica*) as described in the previous article are a wonderful and abundantly available *super-food* for us humans and many of our relations. Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoise Shell and Comma Butterflies rely on nettles as a food source for their larvae. Ladybirds feed on the aphids that shelter among them and horses get shinier coats and improve in health when fed dried nettles. The humble nettle is full of vitamins C, A, K and minerals calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus and potassium. Leave a small area of your plot for a gathering of nettles to grow. By doing this you are supporting the health of the ecology of your plot and nettles soaked in a bucket of water for a few weeks make a home-grown, natural liquid fertilizer for your vegetables, plants and roses.

**Wild garlic (Ramsons)** are often found hiding out in the woods or other shady areas. They are part of the allium family and have a beautiful white bonnet of a head when they flower.

**Ramsons** are antibacterial, antibiotic and can lower blood pressure. Like nettles they grow in large communities and are rich in Vitamins A, C and B. Wild greens can be stronger in flavour and vitality than greens bought in a shop. If you are not used to eating wild food, start with small amounts and build up through the season.

Whenever you forage or pick wild herbs from your plot always *give thanks* to the plant for the medicine and beauty that it is gifting you with. Only take what you need, always leaving plenty for others to share in the harvest.



**Ally Stott – Plot 77**

For the deep wellbeing of people and planet