

## Urticaceae

### nettle family

Mostly tropical with nearly about 800 species, (*sensu stricto* according to Zomlefer), only four genera reach Nova Scotia. Known for their stinging hairs, all but one of ours is so armed. Plants are generally dioecious, rarely with complete flowers. Petals are absent; calyx is lobed. Stamens 3–5, equal in number to the calyx lobes. Ovary is solitary, in superior position. Fruit is an achene most commonly, enclosed within the calyx. The leaves are opposite or alternate, simple, toothed and with stipules.

#### Key to genera

- A. Plant without stinging hairs. B
  - B. Weak succulent annual, pistillate calyx three-parted. *Pilea*
  - bb. Stout perennial herb, pistillate calyx entire, or 2–4 parted. *Boehmeria*
- aa. Plant with stinging hairs. C
  - C. Leaves opposite. *Urtica*
  - cc. Leaves alternate. *Laportea*

### ***Boehmeria* Jacq.**

Perennial herbs, they have axillary, erect and spicate inflorescences composed of staminate and carpellate flowers. Staminate flowers are four-merous (Calyx and stamens). Pistillate flowers are 2–4 toothed or the calyx is entire and the ovary single-celled. Stinging hairs are absent.

#### ***Boehmeria cylindrica* (L.) Sw.**

**False Nettle; boehméria cylindrique**



This species is a monoecious herb bearing opposite leaves from a tough woody crown. Stems are 50cm–1.3m. Plants tend to be caespitose.

Flowers from July to September.

Understory herb of moist deciduous forests in Nova Scotia. Elsewhere found in swamps.

An Appalachian deciduous forest species, in Nova Scotia it is scattered and locally very abundant on the LaHave R from New Germany to Bridgewater, local on the Annapolis R at Kingston and there's one record from the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. (Blaney, personal communication, 2014).

Ranges from NS to FL, TX and NB, extending to Central and South America.

## ***Laportea* Gaud.**

### **Wood-nettle**

A widespread genus, there are 25 species including trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. Ours is a monoecious species. Leaves are serrate and alternate along the stem. Inflorescence is a cyme, loosely arranged. The staminate flowers have five sepals and stamens, while the pistillate flowers have only 4 sepals. The outer pair of pistillate flowers are reduced in size. Style is adorned with hairs. Fruit is an achene.

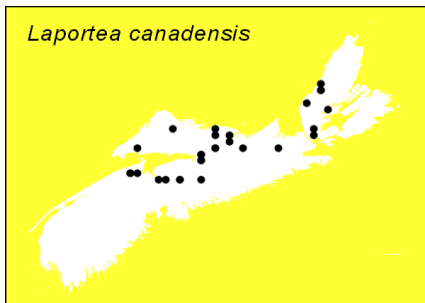
***Laportea canadensis* (L.) Wedd.**  
**Wood-nettle; laportéa du Canada**



*Photo by Eugene Quigley*



*Photo by David Mazerolle*



A robust herb, it reaches nearly 1m in height. Leaves are alternate and oval in outline; their margins are coarsely serrate. Petioles are stipulate and deeply cleft.

Flowers from July to September.

Limited to fertile loam or alluvium in deciduous forests and within floodplains.

Scattered infrequently from Coldbrook, Kings Co. to western Cape Breton. Distinctly northern here.

Elsewhere from St. Pierre & Miquelon to SK, south to FL and LA.

***Pilea* Lindl.**  
**Clearweed**

Mostly tropical, there are 200 species worldwide. Dioecious, the staminate plants are four-merous; pistillate plants are 3-merous. Opposite leaves are merely sparsely pubescent. Stipules are reduced in size.

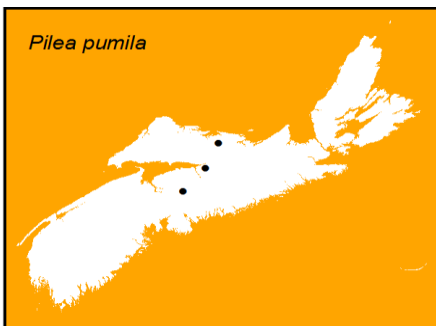
***Pilea pumila* (L.) A. Gray**  
**Dwarf Clearweed; piléa nain**



*Photo by David Mazerolle*



*Photo by David Mazerolle*



A small and compact herbaceous plant, its shining green leaves are on long petiolate. Achenes are pale green and sometimes marked with purple glands.

Flowers from July to October.

Usually grows in cool shady habitats as found on forested slopes of maple-beech, in the centre of the Province.

So far only known from West Branch, Pictou Co.; Little River, near Brookfield, Halifax Co.; and along the Herbert River, Hants Co. at Woodville.

Ranges from NS to ON, south to FL and TX.

## ***Urtica* L.**

### **Nettles**

Nettles include 25 species of erect herbaceous plants, usually branching. Inflorescence is terminal, although some flower clusters may arise from the upper leaf axils. Sepals and stamens number four. Stinging hollow hairs cover the stems and leaves which may pierce the skin of unsuspecting trampers. The uric acid within may cause an allergic reaction on sensitive skin.

#### Key to species

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| A. Annual, 10–50cm tall; inflorescence mainly pistillate; petioles only slightly shorter than leaf blades; mature achenes triangular, 1.5–2.5mm long.            | <i>Urtica urens</i> |
| aa. Perennial to 2 m in height; inflorescence either staminate or pistillate; petioles much shorter than the blades; mature achenes lens-shaped, 1.0–1.5mm long. | <i>U. dioica</i>    |

### ***Urtica dioica* L.**

#### **Stinging Nettles**



(*ssp. dioica*) Photo by David Mazerolle

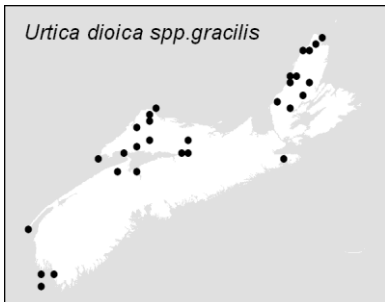
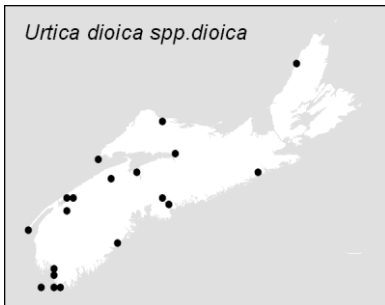
Coarsely hirsute, this tall nettle has its leaves lanceolate or ovate. Staminate flower clusters contain greenish-yellow flowers, each having four stamens and four sepals. Cluster length exceeds that of the petioles. Pistillate flower clusters are shorter.

Two subspecies are recognized.

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| Monoecious, only lightly pubescent; leaves lanceolate and merely round at the base. | <i>ssp. gracilis</i> |
| Dioecious, densely pubescent; leaves cordate or ovate.                              | <i>ssp. dioica</i>   |



*ssp. gracilis* Photo by Sean Blaney



*ssp. dioica* is covered in stinging hairs, including its more compact leaves. It often has a sprawling habit, with weaker stems than the native subspecies. Tiny axillary leaves may be present. Flowers throughout the growing season. Mostly found in waste places about ports and towns, where soil is moderately organic.

Scattered throughout NS. NF to southwestern ON, south to FL and OK; Eurasia. Widely adventive.

*ssp. gracilis* (Ait.) Selander has most of the hypodermic hairs on the underside of its lanceolate leaves and on the stems. Staminate flowers appear earlier than the pistillate ones, during June and July. Pistillate flowers mature later.

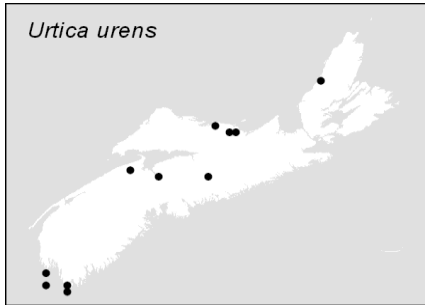
Frequents native habitats streamsides, moist forest edges or meadows in organic shady soils.

Ranging across the continent to AK, south to CA, TX and NC.

Although mature plants can cause skin problems, the newly-emerged plants are often eaten as a potherb and delicious beverages and soups may be prepared.

***Urtica urens* L.**

**Burning Nettle; ortie brûlante**



A dwarf species its branches are usually erect and simple. Dark green leaves are ovate and serrate. Tiny flowers are clustered in the leaf axils.

Summer flowering from June to September. Less frequently seen than the preceding nettles.

Introduced around settlements near the coast. Most often seen on offshore islands in the western part of NS: Candlewax and Seal Islands, Yarmouth Co. and Cape Sable Island, Shelburne Co.

Widely scattered across Canada and US. Native to Europe.