



## Why do nettles sting? And do dock leaves really help?



The nettle's sting is an adaptation to provide protection from predators. The sting causes any predator that may eat the plant or uproot it to stay clear.

### How do Dock leaves help?

Dock leaves don't just relieve stings – they're also a food plant for the small copper butterfly! They are characterised by their large oval leaves that have rounded tips, some of the stems and leaves may have a reddish hue.

There are a few theories as to why dock leaves appear to help nettle stings. The most plausible are:

- the cooling sensation of the sap evaporating from the affected skin can relieve some of the stinging sensation
- It could be merely a placebo effect. The belief that dock leaves help nettle sting is such a wide and popular opinion – maybe it works because people believe it works!

Whichever of these is true, if you are stung by a nettle, it's definitely worth grabbing the nearest dock leaf and giving it a try!

## Helicopter seeds: which trees do they come from?

In the UK you can find four different trees which produce 'helicopter seeds': field maple, ash, sycamore, and Norway maple.

The term was coined based on the way the seeds spiral through the air as they fall from the tree. Other nicknames for these winged seeds include spinning jenny, whirligig, whirlybird and wing-nut. In the botanical world they are known as samaras.



### Why are helicopter seeds important?

- Carried on the wind by their papery wings, the seeds can travel further than if they fell straight to the ground. This means the new seeds have more space to grow and a better chance of developing into a new tree.
- They are a valuable food source for wildlife, including small mammals and birds like the bullfinch.
- These seeds are important to science too. In 2011, New Scientist reported that helicopter seeds like ash had inspired an attempt to build a single bladed helicopter! Some model helicopters now fly on a single blade, although they don't spin through the air like the seeds.

## Interesting Deer facts



- On rare occasions deer have been known to eat the eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds. It's thought this may take place when deer are unable to source all the nutrients they need from their normal diet.
- The term stag only refers to male red and sika deer. Males of all other species are known as bucks. Female red and sika deer are called hinds, while females of all other species are known as does.
- There are more than 30 species of deer across the world. The moose (*Alces alces*) is the largest and the smallest is the northern pudu (*Pudu mephistophiles*), which is little larger than a domestic cat.
- The reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) is the only species where both males and females have antlers. There are no truly wild reindeer in the UK, but a free-roaming herd is kept in Scotland's Cairngorm mountains.