



A step-wise guide to harvesting nettle rhizomes.

Notes

Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is a native species and as such, has an important ecological role in our countryside. Nettles provide food and shelter to a wide range of insects and other invertebrates as well as their role in the soil food web which largely goes unseen. The role of nettle beds in corncrake conservation is incredibly important, but the harvesting of nettles for transplanting to corncrake areas should always consider the following:

1. Will removing the nettles from the area of harvest impact other wildlife? To mitigate for this it is always best to only harvest only some of the nettles and leave the rest so they recover and provide for local wildlife.
2. Is there a risk of introducing a pest species to the corncrake area? To mitigate this, we always wash and sort our nettle rhizomes to remove any potential pests or unwanted plants.

Nettle harvesting is hard work, but when done well can yield amazing results for the creation of early cover plots for corncrakes.

Below is a step-wise guide for you to follow.

(Sincerest thanks to Feargal Ó Cuinneagáin the use of his photos and assistance)





Step 1: Select good strong stands of nettles. Nettles with dense stalks are mature and will have strong root networks. Always try and leave some nettle sin an area to grow back and provide much needed food for butterflies and other insects.



Step 2: Dig out the sod using a long spade- the rhizomes are generally quite shallow.





Step 3: Flick the sod over once it's removed from the ground



Step 4: Shake off any excess soil. Banging the sod on the ground helps. Leave some soil on the rhizomes if you don't intend on washing them immediately as it keeps them in good condition. One sod usually covers one square metre when transplanted.





Step 5: The nettle sods should be soaked or well washed to remove any unwanted plants, seeds or pest species such as New Zealand flatworm. Washing the nettles also lightens the weight making it easier to store and transport the rhizomes.



Step 6: The clean rhizomes should be stored in a cool, damp and dark place in a breathable bag until ready for collection and transplanting. Skip bags or other larger bags are ideal but the rhizomes should not dry out.

