



**WATERCRESS**  
*(Nasturtium officinale)*

This fast-growing aquatic and semi-aquatic perennial plant is native to a wide-ranging area extending from Europe to Central Asia. It is one of the oldest known leafy vegetables consumed by humans. Rich in potassium, iodine, iron and sulphur, it is a good source of vitamin C. Watercress is an excellent peppery addition to salads and sandwiches and makes for an easy, colorful and edible garnish. My personal favorite use for it is on an egg salad sandwich, crust left on. More haute is Potage Cressonnière, an elegant and easy thick French soup, made with potatoes and watercress.



**FENNEL**  
*(Foeniculum vulgare)*

One of the primary ingredients in absinthe, fennel has a long history of culinary and medicinal uses. Cooks love it, and deer love to chomp the sweet, herbaceous stalks, too. When rubbed, the feathery leaves smell strongly of licorice. The wild bulb—if you can call it that—is smaller, flatter and sharper tasting than those cultivated on the farm. Once the plant blooms in late summer/early fall, the flowers can be collected for the highly prized and potent fennel pollen, incredible on grilled fish and pastas. Later in the year, the seeds can be collected and dried for seasoning meats or freshening your breath. The dried seeds may be eaten as a digestive. Fennel is considered an invasive plant, brought over from England, and is believed to be indigenous to the shores of the Mediterranean.



**MINER'S LETTUCE**  
*(Claytonia perfoliata)*

Also known as “winter purslane,” this green may just be growing in your back yard! It is native to California and named for the Gold Rush Miners who ate it to get their vitamin C, thus warding off scurvy. The little saucer-shaped leaves grow rampant during the winter and longer in cool, damp conditions. This plant can be eaten raw in salads or prepared like spinach. California Indians would place the leaves near red ant hills so that when the ants crawled over the leaves, leaving behind a residue of formic acid, the result would be a kind of natural “vinaigrette.” Yum! You can also make a tea from the leaves for use as a laxative. If you can't find it in a neighbor's yard or on the side of the road, you might ask Annabelle at Star Route Farms—it grows wild out on the farm in Bolinas.

**Shed's Easy Watercress  
(Wild or Cultivated) Soup**

We love this soup because it can be served cold or hot depending on the weather outside.

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 25 minutes

Yields 6 servings

3 Tablespoons butter (unsalted)

2 cups Yukon Gold or red-skinned “new” potatoes, peeled and roughly chopped

1 ½ cups leeks, well rinsed and sliced into ¼ inch thick rounds

3 cups chicken stock (may substitute vegetable stock)

1 ¼ cups half & half (optional)

2 bunches watercress, stems removed and roughly chopped (reserve enough whole stems for garnish)

sea salt and ground pepper to taste

Melt the butter in a large sauté pan, without letting it brown. Add the leeks, a pinch of salt and pepper, and sauté for 5 minutes. Add potatoes and chicken stock, bring to a boil, then turn down the heat and continue to cook for 20 minutes, or until potatoes are soft.

Turn off the heat, then add the chopped watercress. Caution: Overcooking watercress will dull its bright green color. Allow soup to cool, then puree in batches in a blender or food processor. If desired, add the half & half. Additional salt and pepper may be needed, to taste. If serving warm, reheat the soup gently before serving. If serving cold, refrigerate before serving. Garnish with a few whole watercress stems and perhaps a bit of finely chopped red pepper for color.

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