

Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

Look for Dandelion anywhere the soil is warm, even in partially shaded areas.

Dandelion is a hardy perennial that can grow to a height of nearly 12 inches. Its common name derives from the French '*dent de lion*', (lion's tooth) which refers to the deeply toothed, green leaves. Grooves in the leaves act as funnels, channeling rain to the plant's deep taproot which can regenerate foliage even if cut completely off at the ground. The dark brown roots are fleshy and brittle, and the whole plant contains a milky fluid known as latex.



From low-growing leaf rosettes, hollow stalks rise to be topped by bright yellow flower heads. The flowers open with the sun in the morning and close in the evening or during gloomy weather. Dandelions thrive best in full sun but don't care much about ideal soil conditions and can be found in a wide variety of disturbed sites such as lawns, paths, waste ground, pastures, and along the edges of roads. In more temperate areas, they bloom almost continuously. The seeds develop on the ends of lightweight, feathery spikes that are borne by the wind and can travel remarkable distances. A single plant typically produces as many as 2000 seeds.



While many people think of the dandelion as a pesky weed, it is chock full of vitamins A, B, C, and D and minerals such as iron, potassium, and zinc. All parts of the plant are edible; Dandelion leaves are used to add flavor to salads, sandwiches, and teas. The roots are used in some coffee substitutes, and the flowers are used to make wines and beer.

Dandelion has been used for centuries in traditional medicine practices all over the world. The root is a favorite among traditional herbalists as it supports the healthy functioning of the liver, kidneys, spleen, and gallbladder and is considered to be a reliable detoxifying agent. Native Americans boiled dandelion in water and took it to treat kidney disease, swelling, skin problems, heartburn, and upset stomach. In traditional Chinese medicine, dandelion has been used to treat stomach problems, appendicitis, and breast problems, such as inflammation or lack of milk flow. In Europe, dandelion has been used in remedies for fever, boils, eye problems, diabetes, and diarrhea.

Dandelion blooms March through November.