

Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

We seem to have a love/hate relationship with this perennial weed that belongs in the *Asteraceae* (Sunflower) family. It is probably the most common lawn weed found in Washington. It also is a weed problem in ornamental plantings, meadows, pastures and alfalfa, but it has value as a medicinal herb as well as a forage plant for livestock, especially cattle and sheep.

Children love this weed, but as we get older it becomes a battle to keep the bright yellow flowers out of the lawn in order to have a lush, weed free, green carpet of lawn.

As a child, the first signs of spring were the bright yellow flowers in the lawn that made a great bouquet for mom. Removing the flower and root portion of the plant and hooking the hollow stems together made really cool necklaces and bracelets for dress up. Most of all, who can forget the hours of fun just sitting in the lawn blowing on the little seed parachutes to see how far they would go? There are also some adults that love this weed, especially when it comes to making homemade Dandelion Wine!

Dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*, was native to Europe but now can be found throughout the northern temperate zones. It is also known by several common names. Some of these names are: blowball, cankerwort, clock flower, dandelion herb, fairy clock, fortune teller, irish daisy, lion's teeth, lion's tooth, milk gowan, mongoloid dandelion, monk's head, priest's crown, puffball, swines snout, white endive, wild endive, witch gowan, witches' milk and yellow flower earth nail. Wow, and I thought it was just called the common dandelion! You have to respect this weed for its survival strategies and its ability to bloom almost year around in some areas. It has the ability to reproduce by new shoots from the root crowns and by seeds. The plant can also regrow from its large, fleshy, deep taproot that can reach several feet into the soil.



The single unbranched, leafless, hollow flower stalks grow from a rosette of deeply lobed and toothless basal leaves. The entire plant has a milky juice that has a bitter taste. The daisy-like flower heads are bright yellow, maturing into white "puffball" or "parachute" structures called pappus that have the ability to scatter seeds everywhere with the help of a little wind. The flower head will close up at night and during inclement weather conditions. The height of the plant is variable depending on growing conditions, for example, shorter in a turf situation and taller in an uncut pasture situation.

The entire dandelion plant is edible and has been used as a medicinal plant since Roman times. The dandelion was commonly used in Native American, Arabian, Chinese and European medicine for a multitude of ailments. Several countries actually cultivate this plant for its medicinal properties. The leaves or greens can be added to salads when they are tender in the spring. The dried leaves can be used as an ingredient in many drinks including a fermented drink called Dandelion Beer.

The dandelion flowers are used to make Dandelion Wine, which tastes similar to sherry and supposedly is an excellent tonic. The flowers also make a pretty addition to salads as a garnish. The taproot can be roasted to make Dandelion Coffee. Dandelion roots have medicinal properties when they are dried and also from the juice.



Most people consider the dandelion a problem weed and want to get rid of it. This can be done very successfully by cultivation, either rototilling or hoeing to eliminate the plants, but be sure to get all of the plant including the deep taproot or it will grow right back. There are several dandelion tools on the market that will “pop” the plant right out of the ground. These tools seem to work best if the soil is moist not dry. I have found that right after a rain works best for a little dandelion stroll to remove the dandelions from the lawn.

There are several weed and feed products on the market that are for lawn weed control including dandelions. I am not sold on them. Why treat your entire lawn when you only have a few dandelions that can easily be removed by a dandelion patrol around your property? These products can also damage desirable vegetation if they are not applied properly.

There are several herbicides labeled for dandelions in landscape, turf and bare ground areas. Glyphosate (Roundup) should only be used as a spot treatment in landscape and bare ground areas. Triclopyr can be used in turf areas and must be applied by a licensed professional. Apply any herbicide according to label directions.

Be aware that even if you control the dandelions on your property, if your neighbors, especially those down wind from you, do not control their dandelions you will continue to have them in your landscape. Having said that, can you live with a few dandelions and possibly get ready to make a batch of Dandelion Wine, Dandelion Beer, or Dandelion Coffee?

RESOURCES:

Hortsense—<http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense>

Weeds of the West; 9th Edition, 2000

WSU publication EB0607, [Lawn Weed Control For Homeowners](#)

University of California, Agriculture & Natural Resources, UC IPM Online

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/WEEDS/dandelion.html>

Botanical.com

<http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/d/andel08.html>

Medline Plus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/print/druginfo/natural/patient-dandelion.html>