

# THE DELIGHTFUL DANDELION



a public information brochure by the  
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## BACKGROUND

The name "dandelion" is taken from the French *dent de lion*, meaning "lion's tooth". The name refers to the jagged leaves of the plant.

Like many Canadians, it is an immigrant and, having crossed the Atlantic, flourished in the temperate zone of the Americas.

Its botanical name is *Taraxacum officinale* and it is a member of the large *Compositae* family. Many people think of it as a single variety but there are, in fact, several varieties, some of them cultivated. And there are other wild plants which are often mistaken for dandelions.

Urban dwellers spend much time muttering about the dandelion as an unwanted weed in the lawn, without ever recognizing its many fine qualities, including its uses.

Other dandelions commonly found are the Fall Dandelion (*Leontodon autumnalis*), and the Dwarf Dandelion; *Cynthia* (*Krigia virginica*).

## LOOKALIKES

Also an immigrant but more common in the United States is the Red-Seeded Dandelion (*Taraxacum erythrospermum*). It is smaller, and has, as its name suggests, reddish-brown seeds.

Another immigrant is the Sow Thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*) which has some resemblance to the dandelion but should not be confused with it because it grows to heights of more than six feet.

The native Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca canadensis*) has very small blossoms on gangly stems and looks like baby dandelions.

Blooming in the fall, the Canada Hawkweed (*Hieracium canadense*) has small yellow blooms closer in appearance to the Sow Thistle than the dandelion, but could still be taken for the latter by uninformed observers.

But no one should mistake the Rattlesnake Weed (*Hieracium venosum*) for a dandelion as the leaves are totally different; still, the yellow heads of the flower confuse some people.

The look-alikes are not edible.

## QUALITIES

The most obvious quality of the dandelion is the bright yellow flower that presents a sunny and **cheerful face** to the world in the spring months.

Not only does that face raise the spirits, it is collected by knowledgeable people for making wine. The **blossom** alone is used in wine-making.

The **leaves** of the dandelion are collected when young and used as a green in salads. They are also good when lightly cooked (like fiddleheads) and served with a meat. For eating either way, the leaves are best used before the flowers appear, and are a piquant addition to a meal.

Less known today is the use of the **roots** as a coffee substitute, but this use was important to the pioneers who, if they could obtain coffee at all, or afford it, made it go further by using dandelion roots. Of course, these had to be dried before being ground.

## RECIPES

Use only dandelions which have been collected from sources away from highways. Wash well.

DANDELION WINE: New Galt Cookbook 1898.

For 1 quart flowers take 2 quarts boiling water and pour over flowers. Let stand overnight, strain the next day, and add 3 pounds sugar to 1 gallon of juice and 2 lemons. Bring the whole to a boil, then put into a barrel or keg and add yeast to work. Keep enough juice to fill up as required. When through working it must be tightly corked.

DANDELION GREENS: Kitchen Encyclopedia 1956.

A favourite dish in the country in springtime, when the dandelion leaves are very young and tender and have scarcely any bitter flavour. Large bowls of leaves are washed, put into a saucepan with scarcely any water and with pepper and salt. When they are boiled, they are pressed, moistened with a piece of butter or a little bacon fat, and served with the liquid thickened with flour.

DANDELION LEAVES IN SALADS:

Pick leaves at their youngest stage before yellow flowers bloom and wash well. Chop with iceberg lettuce and small amounts of romaine. Mix in other ingredients and seasonings. Try with maple syrup as dressing.

DANDELION COFFEE, Alma Friendly, 1974

Wash dandelion roots thoroughly. Dry. Roast in slow oven at least 2 hours or until roots are dark brown and brittle. Break into pieces and grind in regular coffee grinder. Brew as ordinary coffee.

Dandelion coffee's roasting is a matter of taste, and some may prefer a lighter or darker roast-experiment to find desired result. Dandelion coffee may be mixed with regular coffee for brewing or drip.

## **ROLEMODELS**

Apart from their cheerful blooms and general usefulness, the dandelion has other admirable qualities.

It is a tough little creature and will grow anywhere it can lift its face to the sun. Like a scattering of stars, you will find it flourishing in waste spaces where nothing else beautiful can be found. It is tough enough to break obstacles such as concrete or asphalt that impede its growth. Its brightness is often in stark contrast with its background whether the latter is emerging from the sodden grays and browns of late winter, or shrouded by the dusts of mid-summer. Until it goes to seed, its appearance is always fresh and crisp-looking.

And truly wondrous is the exquisite engineering of its seed with its built in mode of transportation in the fine filaments that spread out like a tiny parachute to allow the slightest breath of air to carry a new generation to a new home. Sometimes, these flying seeds travel considerable distances.

