

# Dandelion Monograph

by Mike Coleman



I love dandelion largely because of its ubiquity, its beauty, and its great value as a nutritious and medicinal curer of what ails you<sup>1</sup>. It is one of the first plants that I ever wildcrafted. When I began to learn about it years ago, I was amazed that people considered it an accursed weed that plagued their lawns. The fact that it is so useful, that it is everywhere, and that most people are oblivious to its benefits and even hate it, stands as a testament to the degree to which we have been alienated from the land that we live on. At the same time, it is a gateway back to a deep and meaningful relationship with the land and our co-inhabitants on it right outside the backdoor.

It is the forgotten medicine underfoot. It can't be controlled; it persists in even the most well-manicured lawns. It is community medicine, available almost anywhere. It lends us the magic of a childhood wish cast by a breath, the warmth of waking brew or winter wine, and nurturing greens. Unlike other forms of gold, its commonness does not depreciate its value. It is a wonderful plant that we should all take a few moments to appreciate.

I have mostly used dandelion as a salad green and a coffee substitute. I originally learned about eating dandelions about ten years ago from a book on foraging<sup>2</sup>. I greatly enjoy going into the backyard and picking flower heads or leaves and eating them right there on the spot. There is something beautiful about eating directly from a plant, a sense of connection not captured in any other way.

Eating dandelion has also helped me get a greater appreciation for the bitter taste, often neglected in American cuisine and even conflated with tasting “bad”. I have also been sensitive to caffeine for many years now, but I love the taste of coffee, so I have used roasted dandelion root tea as a delicious substitute.

*Taraxacum officinale* (Asteraceae) is the most commonly discussed species, indicating its long time use as a medicine. Its common name *Dandelion* comes from the French *dent de lion* or lion’s tooth which is in reference to the course teeth on its leaves. Some of its other more colorful common names in English are

blowball

puffball

cankerwort

witch’s gowan

milk witch

priest’s crown

swine’s snout

faceclock

piss-a-bed.

I’m not sure about the origins of all of these, though some are obvious enough like puffball, and piss-a-bed is likely due to its diuretic qualities.<sup>3</sup>

Dandelion is sun loving and likes disturbed soil, but can be found almost anywhere.

Every part of the dandelion is edible, but they can be quite bitter. If you are interested in the leaves and you want to avoid some of the bitterness, it is best to gather them in the spring before the flower buds appear.<sup>1</sup>

The flowers generally bloom in the summer, but bloom time may be delayed by mowing.

If you want dandelion greens later in the season after they have flowered, you can cut them back and allow fresh leaves to grow.

It is very important to not forage for dandelions near any roads or in areas that have been sprayed with pesticides or herbicides, because dandelions have been found to accumulate heavy metals in direct proportion to the ambient levels in the surrounding area.<sup>1</sup> It is best to gather them at least 100 feet from the road (where it has been found that they are far enough away to no longer have elevated levels of heavy metals). If you are worried about this, check your backyard or even grow them from seed or transplant them from a known toxin free source!

If you are more interested in the roots, for example if you want to make a delicious coffee substitute, you will want to unearth them in the winter, after the first freeze, generally October through December. If you wait too long they get woody, however.

Dig them up making sure not to cut them or damage them at all or they will leak their precious latex, or milky sap. Clean them thoroughly. Steam them, and cut them small. Spread them out and let them dry for at least a day. Bake them at 350 degrees until they are the darkness that you prefer in coffee and they smell good to you. Take them out, let them cool and dry for a few minutes; then you are ready to grind. Grind them in a coffee grinder, but don't grind more than a week's worth or so, because the grounds tend to absorb moisture. Store them in an airtight container. You can even roast them again after grinding for a double roast.

You can eat dandelion flowers, leaves, and roots (even the seeds are edible!) in any number of ways from salads to wine to ice cream. They are quite popular in other parts of the world like Europe and Asia, and there are literally thousands of recipes out there. Peter Gail has recipe books if you are interested.

In addition to being incorporated into meals, dandelion roots and leaves can be decocted, infused, tinctured, or extracted in vinegar.<sup>4</sup> If tincturing fresh: 1:2

(75A:25W); Dried root: 1:5 (50A:50W). You can make teas with fresh or dried root or leaves.<sup>5</sup>

Dandelions are energetically cooling and drying.

The leaves are bitter and a bit salty; the roots are bitter and sweet.

The leaves are diuretic, alterative, nutritive, and digestive stimulants.

The roots are hepatoprotective, diuretic, nutritive, alterative, choleric, cholagogue, and mildly laxative.<sup>4</sup>

Dandelion has a seemingly endless number of medicinal uses. To list some of the main ones, they can:

- Treat and prevent liver diseases like hepatitis, jaundice, and cirrhosis
- Purify and detoxify blood
- Treat kidney stones
- Be used as a diuretic (and unlike most pharmaceutical diuretics, it replenishes potassium)
- Improve digestive function, reducing acid indigestion, gas, and treating both diarrhea and constipation
- Lower blood pressure
- Treat hypoglycemia
- Prevent anemia
- Lower cholesterol
- Help control diabetes
- Treat acne
- Treat and prevent some cancers<sup>1,7</sup>
- Treat warts<sup>6</sup>, skin infections, and boils<sup>1</sup>
- Boost immunity
- Treat ulcers<sup>7</sup>
- Treat PMS related water retention<sup>1</sup>

Dandelion roots have a lot of inulin, a prebiotic to support your gut microbiome.

It is one of the richest sources of lecithin, which can treat cirrhosis of the liver.

It has sesquiterpene lactones which are thought to be anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer<sup>7</sup>, as well as antifungal.

They are also the reason dandelions are bitter, which helps with digestion and liver, gall bladder, and spleen health.

The triterpenes and taraxasterol also support the liver and gall bladder. It has TOF-CFr which might act against cancer cells as well as increase resistance to viruses and protozoa. It has a lot of pectin, which is an anti-diarrheal, and can help you detoxify heavy metals. It also has estrogen mimics apigenin, luteolin, and coumestrol which are good for the female reproductive system. It has gallic acid, which is anti-bacterial and anti-diarrheal, and linoleic and linolenic acids which are essential fatty acids that decrease chronic inflammation, regulate the menstrual cycle, and blood pressure, and prevent platelet aggregation. It also contains choline which supports memory.<sup>1</sup>

On top of all this Dandelions are loaded with nutrients. They rank higher in overall nutritional value than both broccoli and spinach. They are a great source of vitamin A, potassium, iron, vitamin C, phosphorus, calcium, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin D, and fiber. They are also rich in the micronutrients copper, cobalt, zinc, boron, and molybdenum.<sup>1</sup>

A common herbal pair for supporting liver health is a dandelion root-burdock root tincture, with equal parts of each. Take half a teaspoon to one teaspoon three times a day.<sup>6</sup>

Dandelion coffee can be mixed with chicory for a delicious and nutritious cup. As greens they can be eaten with nettles and purslane, or mixed into your favorite salad. You can also add them to a nutritive tea blend.

Dandelion is not toxic (as long as you get it away from polluted areas) so you can't really overdose on it.<sup>1</sup>

It does have oxalates, however.

So if you have kidney stones it would be best to avoid eating it; though infusions of it will have negligible amounts.

It is also not recommended for people with gallstones because it is a cholagogue, which means it stimulates the gallbladder and bile production.

If you suffer from heartburn it could make it worse because it stimulates gastric juices. People who are taking lithium should not take dandelion because it disallows it from being removed from the blood, so it can accumulate.

If you are taking drugs to increase potassium, dandelion may increase it too much.<sup>8</sup> Always consult your doctor about taking dandelion if you are on any medications.

If you are a heavy sleeper it can be a problem if you take it before bed.

If you are a light sleeper, you can use it as a natural alarm clock!<sup>1</sup>

Some people are allergic to the latex—the milky sap found in the roots and stems—so be careful with that.

Also be careful if you know you have allergies to plants in the Asteraceae family.

#### Works Cited

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