

Edible Dandelion**The Edible Dandelion***Ben Kruser The Leader, April 1992*

People experienced in wild foods will tell you there is a difference between "edible" plants and "eatable" plants. The dandelion is quite eatable and very nutritious to boot.

The material here is taken from *Edible Garden Weeds of Canada*, written by Szczawinski and Turner for the National Museums of Canada, *Edible Wild Plants of Canada* book series. The other books in this series are *Wild Coffee and Tea Substitutes of Canada*, *Edible Wild Flowers and Nuts of Canada* and *Wild Green Vegetables of Canada*. We thank the Canadian Museum of Nature for permission to reprint this material.

The Common Dandelion (Aster or Composite family) is also known by the names Blowball, Lion's Tooth, Yellow Gowan, Priest's Crown, Wet-a-bed, and Pissenlit.

How to Recognize: Dandelion is a well-known weed all over the world. It is a perennial with a long, thick, brown-skinned tap root, a basal rosette of bright-green sharply lobed leaves, and several to many golden-yellow flower heads on individual stalks. The hollow stems, when broken, discharge a white, milky juice. Children everywhere love the round, fluffy seedheads, from which small parachuted seeds are dislodged with the slightest breath. Do not confuse the common dandelion with the taller, coarser cat's-ear dandelion, or spotted cat's ear (*Hypochaeris radicata* L.), which is hairy and very bitter.

Where to Find: Dandelion is a common weed of field, roadside, lawn, and garden. A native of Europe, it is now widespread in North America and most of the world. Its favourite habitats are moist, grassy places and recently disturbed sites. It occurs from sea-level to sub-alpine elevations. The golden blooms are truly beautiful, their bright hue adding a cheering splash of colour to roadsides and meadows during spring and early summer.

How to Use: You may be surprised to learn that dandelion is a well-known green vegetable in many parts of the world. It is grown commercially in France and is often compared to endive in flavour. The leaves should be harvested in early spring while they are still young and tender; the older leaves are decidedly bitter and tough.

You can use the leaves in salads or cook them as a potherb. To remove the bitterness, change the water once or twice in cooking. As with chicory, the leaves may be blanched by covering them during their rapid growth and then used in salads. In our opinion, though, the best salad is made from cold cooked leaves that are chilled thoroughly, chopped, and served with a favourite dressing.

Adam's Winter Salad

1 L young dandelion leaves, washed (4 cups)

30 mL lemon juice (2 tbsp)
30 mL sunflower oil (2 tbsp)
salt, pepper to taste
dash of garlic salt (optional)

Tear leaves into bite-size pieces. Place in a bowl and add lemon juice, sunflower oil, seasonings, and garlic salt if desired. Chill for one hour, and serve with meat, shrimp, or crab. Serves 4.

For winter use, dandelion leaves can be salted and fermented like sauerkraut. Dandelion roots can also be eaten after being cooked in a couple of changes of water. Try them hot with salt, butter, and lemon juice or yoghurt, or cold as a salad ingredient.

They can be dug in spring or fall. As in Jerusalem artichokes, their carbohydrate is in the form of a complex sugar known as inulin. They are put to best use, however, not as a vegetable but as a beverage. Dried, roasted and ground, they make a most acceptable coffee substitute, with neither the caffeine nor the high price tag.

The flowers can be made into an excellent wine, and the whole plants can be brewed as a beer. To obtain a good recipe for this last beverage, we refer the reader to Audrey Wynne Halfield's excellent book *How to Enjoy Your Weeds*.

Many people on this continent are prejudiced against dandelions, both as a flower and as a vegetable. They are not only one of the most beautiful springtime flowers, but are more nutritious than many of our prized vegetables. The greens are high in iron, calcium phosphorus, and potassium, and are one of the best sources of copper known. They are also high in vitamin A. Why not give them a try? Simply harvest them from your own front lawn.

Dandelions in Sour Cream:

Gather 1 L (4 c) young, tender leaves.

Cover with water, bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 10 minutes, covered. Drain. (Those who do not relish the bitter taste should change the water once or twice.) Chill and serve with butter and sour cream. Bacon or ham fried with onion may be added over top. Serves 4.

Dandelion Coffee: Dig dandelion roots in spring or fall, cut into small pieces, and roast them at 120 C (250 F) for about 2 hours, until they are brown dry, and brittle. Grind into a powder in a coffee grinder or blender. Use about 25 mL (1 1/2 tbsp) per 250 mL (1 cup), and steep in a teapot or percolate. It is a good idea to experiment with greater or lesser amounts until you arrive at the strength you most enjoy.

More for Your Interest

Dandelion is considered an excellent pasture feed, said to increase the milk flow of dairy cattle and improve the quality of their milk. Blooming early in the spring, it is also a valuable bee plant, furnishing both nectar for a bright, golden honey and pollen at a

Edible Dandelion

time when bees require a rich food for brood-rearing. Thus, the dandelion truly helps to give us a land flowing with milk and honey.

A tea made from dandelion roots or leaves is supposedly good for liver disorders and weak digestion, and for helping to combat anemia. It has also been traditionally valued for its healing effect on skin eruptions and eczema, and as a mild laxative. Dandelion greens have the reputation of stimulating the kidneys - hence the name wet-a-bed and its French equivalent, pissenlit. The more conventional name, dandelion, is a corruption of the French "dent de lion", meaning "lion's tooth", referring to the plant's coarsely toothed leaf edges.

=====