

# Dandelions

While many people think dandelions are a pesky weed, it is chock full of vitamins A, B, C, and D, as well as minerals, such as iron, potassium, and zinc. 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.

Dandelions are more nutritious than most of the vegetables in your garden. They were named after lions because their lion-toothed leaves healed so many ailments, great and small: baldness, dandruff, toothache, sores, fevers, rotting gums, weakness, lethargy and depression. Not until the twentieth century was the underlying cause of many of these symptoms realized: vitamin deficiencies. In eras when vitamin pills were unknown, vitamin deficiencies killed millions. In its time, "scurvy" was as dreaded a word as AIDS is today. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture reveal how dandelions probably helped alleviate many ailments: They have more vitamin A than spinach, more vitamin C than tomatoes, and are a powerhouse of iron, calcium and potassium.

In the past, dandelion roots and leaves were used to treat liver problems. Native Americans also boiled dandelion in water and took it to treat kidney disease, swelling, skin problems, heartburn, and upset stomach. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), dandelion has been used to treat stomach problems, appendicitis, and breast problems, such as inflammation or lack of milk flow. In Europe, dandelion was used in remedies for fever, boils, eye problems, diabetes, and diarrhea.

Dandelion leaves act as a diuretic, increasing the amount of urine your body makes. The leaves are used to stimulate the appetite and help digestion. Dandelion flower has antioxidant properties. Dandelion may also help improve the immune system. Herbalists use dandelion root to detoxify the liver and gallbladder, and dandelion leaves to help kidney function.

Chopped dandelion root can be combined with myrrh to make a poultice for boils and abscesses, with honeysuckle flowers to make a tea to be drunk to treat boils and abscesses, with skullcap and/or chrysanthemum flowers to make a tea to be drunk to treat sore eyes, or with heal-all to treat hard phlegm in bronchitis. It can also be administered in capsule or extract form for convenience.

Dandelions are good for your lawn. Their wide-spreading roots loosen hard-packed soil, aerate the earth and help reduce erosion. The deep taproot pulls nutrients such as calcium from deep in the soil and makes them available to other plants. Dandelions actually fertilize the grass.

While in flower for most of the year, the dandelion's peak flowering time is from late March to May, when many bees and other pollinators emerge from hibernation. Each flower in fact consists of up to 100 florets, each one packed with nectar and pollen. This early, easily available source of food is a lifesaver for pollinators in spring. Bumblebees, solitary bees and honeybees all visit dandelions for food, along with hoverflies, beetles, and butterflies such as the peacock and holly blue. Goldfinches and house sparrows eat the seed. Yet most of us gardeners miss out on the spectacle of watching wildlife feast on our dandelions, because we wage such a war against them as weeds.

This year, embrace the yellow, it's a beautiful sight to see your yard a buzz with life and beautiful flowers. **Let them grow!**

**Albertans For Food Safety**