



Dandelions

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I remember, as a child, my mother going to the lawn in the spring & digging up Dandelions to have as Dandelion greens for dinner. I also remember making chains of the Dandelion flower stems. Often, in the spring, we would come upon groups of people in fields gathering Dandelion flowers for wine.

I was surprised to learn all parts of the plant are edible. As my Mother knew, the leaves were best eaten in the spring when they were less bitter. The rest was new to me. The buds can be used in salads or preserved in vinegar & used like capers. And of course the Dandelion flowers are well known for the making of Dandelion wine. Not only can the roots be roasted to make “coffee”, but they can also be cooked and eaten as a root vegetable.

Dandelion is a very nutritious food which contains much that is good for us. It is very high in Vitamin A, also contains Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2 and Vitamin C, also very high in potassium and a good source of many other minerals. Inulin, a polysaccharide, can benefit metabolism & is potentially helpful in managing diabetes. Choline, an essential nutrient grouped within the Vitamin B complex, affects the gall bladder & intestines. It can act as a laxative and has a role in liver function. Wikipedia claims that Dandelion root is registered as a drug in Canada, sold as a diuretic. This effect is so potent that it has affected its name. It is also called “pisenlit” in French, or in English it is “pissabeds”. “The plant is used internally in the treatment of gall bladder and urinary disorders, gall stones, jaundice, cirrhosis, dyspepsia with constipation, oedema associated with high blood pressure and heart weakness, chronic skin and joint complaints, gout, eczema and acne. The plant has an antibacterial action, inhibiting the growth of Staphylococcus aureus, Pneumococci, Meningococci, Bacillus dysenteriae, B. typhi, C. diphtheriae, Proteus etc.. The latex contained in the plant sap can be used to remove corns, warts and verrucae. The latex has a specific action on inflammations of the gall bladder and is also believed to remove stones in the liver. A tea made from the leaves is laxative.”

While the Dandelion is native to Europe and Asia, it has now spread through the Northern Hemisphere as well as in Australia and New Zealand. It will grow in almost any soil type, and although it prefers moist soil, it is definitely drought resistant as evidenced

last summer. Although it prefers sunny spots, it is also tolerant of shade. Due to its deep strong taproots, Dandelion can be useful in farming to break up hard pan soil. Dandelion is a valuable bee plant and is also feed for caterpillars of many butterfly & moth species.

Deeply serrated leaves grow in a basal rosette formation. It is from this shape of leaf that they get their name “dent de lion” or “tooth of the lion”. Flower buds develop at the centre of this rosette.

It is the flower that has captured my imagination more than anything. “They vibrate with the rhythm of the day, opening in the morning sun and closing in the afternoon or during a rainstorm. In bad weather, They prefer staying closed rather than not opening and not finding the sun. Finally, even the so-called crude stem pays attention to neighbouring plants, adjusting its height to theirs.” After the blooms have faded, the calyx closes around the flower, the stem grows longer and bends to the ground. It seems to disappear. When the Dandelion seeds have matured another amazing series of events occurs, it takes on weather predicting abilities. “The dandelion is an excellent barometer, one of the commonest and most reliable. It is when the blooms have seeded and are in the fluffy, feathery condition that its weather forecasting facilities come to the fore. In fine weather the ball extends to the full, but when rain approaches, it shuts like an umbrella. If the weather is inclined to be showery it keeps shut all the time, only opening when the danger from the wet is past. When the Dandelion seeds have drifted away on their parachutes, carried away by the breeze, the parachute drops off when the seed strikes an obstacle. The seed drops to the ground where they germinate. The parachute then loses its feathered structure & takes on a fuzzy appearance, often called “Dandelion snow”.

In spite of its many beneficial properties, the Dandelion is an unwanted weed under most circumstances. To successfully control the spread of Dandelions, it is necessary to understand its life cycle, growth patterns & especially the period of germination. Dandelion seeds spread and germinate mostly in May and June and this is the best time to prevent germination of new seedlings. Corn Gluten, if applied properly, over several years can prevent the seeds from forming new plants. Cutting frequently to remove the flowers before they form seeds will also help. Not cutting your lawn too short (3 inches minimum) and making sure there are no bare spots for seeds to take hold are also good strategies to follow. A healthy, vigourously growing turf is your best ally if you wish to control dandelions.

Established dandelion plants are most vulnerable in the fall which is a good time to dig them out. In my home garden, I prefer the manual method to rid my garden of weeds. I find if I keep my plants healthy & use lots of mulch I don't have much trouble with weeds and the ones I do get are easy to remove.

Now, when my grandson brings me a bouquet of those pretty yellow flowers he has picked for me I will think of all of the wondrous benefits of this lowly weed. I have gathered several recipes for Dandelion salads, greens, roots, teas and flowers so that my family can enjoy the healthy benefits of this food. Its medicinal benefits are amazing, especially its use as a diuretic. I will be watching in the spring for its fresh leaves

growing to harvest for salads, as I dig the root out of the grass as my Mother did to control this weed.

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