

# Dandelion Fun!

## Teacher Resource Sheet

Are dandelions in season where you live? We all recognize those bright yellow blooms in early spring. Some call them weeds, but dandelions may surprise you. There are lots of uses for dandelions. Let's learn more!

### All About Dandelions:

There are several types of dandelion. Two are native to North America: the **Rocky Mountain dandelion** (*Taraxacum scopulorum*) and the **alpine or horned dandelion** (*Taraxacum ceratophorum*).

It is the **common dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinale*) that grows in such abundance. The common name "dandelion" comes from the French "dent de lion" which means tooth of the lion.

Common dandelions are native to Europe and Asia. Early settlers brought seeds to North America as a food source. Very soon, they spread across the continent. In fact, these dandelions now grow all over the world, except for Antarctica. Dandelion flowers produce between 54 and 177 seeds per head and a single plant can produce over 5,000 seeds in a year. Dandelions thrive in any open soil - that is, soil that is not covered with other plants. Those little seeds are good at germinating and can grow in harsh conditions - even in the tiniest crack in a sidewalk. The secret to their spread is that they produce many seeds and their seeds can fly!

When the yellow flowers mature, they change into fluffy white balls of seeds. Each seed is attached to a set of fine bristles called **pappus**. These pappus deflect the wind and create a vortex or ring of air underneath that causes them to lift. These seeds can travel long distances - many kilometers in fact.

### Dandelion Class Activities:

- Do an experiment with fluff balls: How far do the seeds fly when the air is still? How far do they fly when it's breezy?
- Which part of the dandelion reminds you of a lion's tooth?  
(See *additional student handout with illustration*)



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## Dandelion Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever blown on a fluff ball of dandelion seeds? Why do you think the dandelions seeds are fluffy?
- What do the seeds with the bristles remind you of? A helicopter? A parachute?
- What is a weed? Why do some people call dandelions weeds? Do you think dandelion is a weed?
- Can you think of other ways to use dandelions?
- Did you know they are edible?! Yes, the root, leaves, stem and flowers are all safe to eat raw - but they are bitter!

## So, Who Else Would Eat Dandelions?

*You could even have your class guess this list!*

### **Bees!**

Dandelion pollen is an important food source for bees because they are one of the first flowers to bloom in spring, just as bees are waking up and hungry. In Europe, certain moths and butterflies feed on dandelions too.



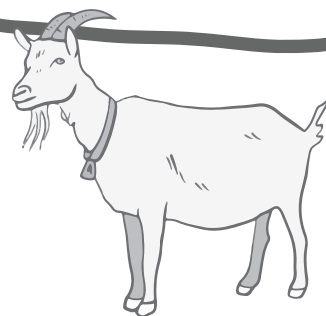
Dandelions are nutritious for **people** too.

One cup of chopped, raw dandelion greens (about 55g) has 25 calories, 1.5g protein, 0.4g of fat, 5.1g of carbohydrates, 1.9g fiber, and 0.4g sugar. Dandelion greens are an excellent source of vitamin A, folate, vitamin K, and vitamin C, and a good source of calcium and potassium. Once dandelions were established in Canada, Indigenous people quickly adopted dandelions as a source of food and medicine.

Animals like

**sheep, goats and even grizzly bears**

eat dandelions, just to name just a few. Here's a link to a video of a grizzly snacking on dandelion:  
<https://youtu.be/uWK1osi45tY>



# Dandelion Fun! *Teacher Resource Sheet*

## **Harvesting Dandelions:**

Dandelions grow everywhere, but you'll probably find them on lawns, parks or even in your school yard. ***Make sure that the place you harvest dandelions is pesticide and chemical free.*** Avoid harvesting along the side of a road to avoid pollution - and not at a dog park either.

You can collect the leaves or the flowers or both depending on how you want to use them. Early spring is the best time to harvest dandelions when they are young and tender. Dandelions that grow in shady areas tend to be less bitter.

- Collect the leaves by pinching them at the base of the plant, or simply pulling them. Choose the young tender leaves.
- Collect the flowers by pinching them off the stem. You may find that your fingers feel sticky from the milky sap in the hollow stem of the dandelion. The sap might even turn a dark colour on your fingers. No worries. Just wash it off with soap and warm water.
- Place your harvest in a large bowl of clean water and swish to get rid of any soil or insects (like ants) from the leaves or flowers. Drain the in a colander. Now you are ready for some recipes.
- Remember to put any parts of the leaves or flowers you don't use in the compost or worm bin.



# Dandelion Fun! Recipes

## **Dandelion Greens Salad:**

Dandelion leaves can taste bitter. Be sure to harvest dandelions that grow in shade because they are less bitter. This recipe uses 1-part dandelion leaves to 2-parts sweet greens, microgreens or salad greens which are sweeter to dilute the bitter taste. If you still find it too bitter, use a higher proportion of sweet greens. The toppings are either salty or sweet which helps to balance the flavour of dandelion. The oil in the salad dressing also helps to mask bitterness. The flowers are not bitter at all and make a festive garnish.

## **Ingredients:**

- 2 cups young dandelion leaves, washed and chopped
- 4 cups pea shoot or sunflower microgreens, or salad greens such as romaine, buttercrunch or red sails. (Use one or a combination. Not arugula mizuna endive radicchio kale)
- Petals from two dandelion flowers
- Salad dressing
- Toppings – choose a few from the list
  - 2 Tablespoons of dried fruit like raisins, blueberries, sweetened cranberries or cherries
  - 2 Tablespoons of chopped cooked bacon or bacon bits, salted nuts pecan cashew sunflower seeds pumpkins
  - 12 cherry tomatoes or segments from one Mandarin orange
  - Toasted sourdough croutons

## **Step by step instructions:**

- 1.** Prepare your salad dressing.
- 2.** Wash and dry dandelion greens and other greens. Spin in a salad spinner to dry. Place in a large salad bowl.
- 3.** Top with two or more of the salad toppings.
- 4.** Garnish the salad with the dandelion flower petals.
- 5.** Dress the salad with approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of dressing.
- 6.** Toss the salad, serve and enjoy.

# Dandelion Fun! Recipes

## Dandelion Cookies:

(adapted from: *The Dandelion Celebration: A Guide to Unexpected Cuisine* by Dr. Peter A. Gail, Goosefoot publications, 1994, ISBN 10: 1879863510 ISBN 13: 9781879863514)

**Yield: Makes approx. 16-20 cookies**

**Time: 15 mins prep; 15 mins baking, 30 mins total**

## Ingredients:

- 1/2 Cup oil
- 1/2 Cup honey
- 2 Eggs
- 1 Teaspoon Vanilla
- 1 Cup unbleached flour
- 1 Cup dry oatmeal
- 1/2 Cup dandelion flower petals

## Step by step instructions:

1.

Wash the dandelion flowers thoroughly. Hold flowers by the tip with the fingers of one hand and pinch the green flower base very hard with the other. This will release the yellow flower petals from the base. Shake the yellow petals into a bowl and then into a measuring cup.

2.

Preheat oven to 375°F.

3.

In a large bowl, blend oil and honey and beat in the two eggs and vanilla.

4.

Stir in flour, oatmeal and dandelion flowers.

5.

Drop the batter by teaspoonfuls onto a lightly oiled cookie sheet and bake for 10-15 minutes.

# Dandelion Fun! Recipes

## Traditional Scandinavian Dandelion Syrup:

(retrieved & adapted from: <https://thenerdyfarmwife.com/traditional-scandinavian-dandelion-green-apple-syrup-recipe/> )

**Yield: 3 -4 Cups**

### Ingredients:

- Yellow petals from about 50 dandelion flowers
- 500 grams of chopped and peeled green apples (about 3 apples)
- Optional: 1 stalk of chopped rhubarb
- 1 Litre of water (1 quart)
- 2 1/2 Cups (500 grams) sugar
- Juice of 1 lemon

### Step by step instructions:

1.

Wash the dandelion flowers thoroughly. Hold flowers by the tip with the fingers of one hand and pinch the green flower base very hard with the other. This will release the yellow flower petals from the base. Shake the yellow petals into a bowl.

2.

Put the apples, dandelion flowers, rhubarb, juice of lemon and water in a pot. Bring to a slow boil, then turn down the heat and simmer for half an hour. Allow to cool.

3.

Strain the contents of the pot into a colander lined with cheesecloth. The juice will be clear and yellow. (Once cool, the leftover mash can be placed in the compost or worm bin.)

4.

Pour the strained juice back into the pot and bring it to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer the juice until it thickens. Stir frequently. Be careful not to let it boil for too long: it must not change color. Pour the syrup into scalded jars. Keeps in the fridge for several weeks.

*To serve, try it with yogurt or topped on pancakes.*

# **Dandelion Fun!** *Student Handout*

Which part of the dandelion reminds you of a lion's tooth?

