

Articles About Dandelions

Watershed Ways

Nine things to like about dandelions By Lynn Jones

Spring 2002

<http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/wwdandelions.htm>

You can eat them. In fact they are very nutritious and some say delicious also. Many studies show dandelions to be rich in vitamins C, D and B-complex and minerals such as magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, potassium and manganese.

Dandelions have the highest Vitamin A content of all greens and according to a USDA food composition bulletin, dandelions rank in the top four green vegetables in overall nutritional value. The greens are said to be best when young, before the flower buds appear on the plant. There are all kinds of ways to eat them but the most common are sautéed or added raw to a salad. I have to confess I've not yet tried them yet, but I plan to soon. There is a wealth of information on harvesting and cooking dandelions at the Goosefoot Acres website (www.edibleweeds.com) including ways of making the older, more bitter greens quite palatable.

Dandelions have many medicinal properties and a long history of use as medicine. In fact the Latin name for dandelion, "Taraxacum officinal" means "official remedy for disorders". For over a century, *taraxacum officinale* was regarded as an official drug in the United States, and the dried root remains listed in the U.S. pharmacopoeia. Its primary pharmacological activities relate to digestion, liver function and diuresis. High in insulin, the plant has demonstrated experimental hypoglycemic activity in several animal studies. Dandelion also appears in the Pharmacopeias of Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union and is one of the top six herbs in the Chinese herbal medicine chest.

Dandelions provide food for pollinating insects. The dandelion apparently ranks high among honey-producing plants and dandelions are the main food source for at least 93 different kinds of insects. Because of this, they attract beneficial insects like ladybugs (which are beneficial because they love to eat aphids).

They improve the soil where they grow. Dandelions bring up minerals from the hard pan beneath the soil. Their long tap roots go down two to three feet into the ground. When the plants die, they leave behind tunnels that allow air, water and earthworms to penetrate. Decomposing dandelions provide mineral-rich composted matter to the soil.

Dandelions can be used to make organic dyes; flowers provide a rich yellow and the entire plant produces a rich magenta.

They can be used as a beauty aid. European women have for centuries used dandelion in the form of a strong infusion to invigorate the skin, to help lighten their freckles, and as a refreshing addition to an herbal bath.

You can make a tasty coffee-substitute from them. Roasted and ground dandelion root makes a good caffeine-free "backwoods coffee".