

# Appearance of Dandelions Marks the Start of a New Foraging Season



*Dandelions have been used for medicinal purposes for thousands of years.*

by Emily Neal

A familiar weed has recently made its first appearance in my yard: the dandelion. Although they can be a nuisance, dandelions aren't all bad- they are edible and may have medicinal value as well. Dandelions are highly nutritious, delicious, and easy to find. Eating dandelion salad in the spring brings back fond memories for me, and I am excited to try it this year, and maybe some new recipes as well.

Dandelions (scientific name: *Taraxacum officinale*) are one of the first wild edible perennials to show up in spring. They have familiar toothy yellow single flowers and tufty white seed balls and are part of the sunflower family. They are one

of the most common and easily recognizable weeds and can grow just about anywhere- roadsides, driveways, meadows, and gardens, as well as wooded areas. Dandelions are one of the first plants to colonize newly disturbed soil, and can be a persistent pest to homeowners due to their abundance and resilience.

- All of the parts of the dandelion plant can be eaten:
- The roots can be roasted, ground and brewed like coffee.
- The young leaves (before flowers appear) can be eaten in a salad or as a cooked green.
- The mature leaves can be dried and made into tea.
- The flower buds can be boiled or pickled.
- The flowers can be made into fritters, or used as a salad garnish.
- The crown (the white part just below leaves and above the root) can be eaten as a cooked vegetable or made into fritters.

Dandelions have been used for medicinal purposes for thousands of years. The plant is known to be an excellent source of Vitamin A, as well as Vitamin C, Vitamin B1, iron, protein, antioxidants, and calcium. Tea from dandelion roots has been used as a laxative, a diuretic, and as a blood cleanser. It also can be used as a liver tonic and may be able to help rejuvenate a damaged liver. Other parts of the plant have been used to bring down a fever, stimulate lactation in nursing mothers, and decrease congestion. The antioxidants found in the plant may help to prevent cancer. Dandelion sap may be used directly on skin irritations, as it has antimicrobial, anti fungal, and insecticidal properties. Dandelion may be used to help regulate blood sugar levels, treat anemia, jaundice, high blood pressure, and acne, among other medicinal uses. Many health food stores carry dandelion tea and supplements meant to treat some of these conditions. The effectiveness of dandelion for any medicinal use has not been approved by the FDA.



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Despite potential health benefits, dandelions have worn out their welcome by invading people's lawns. Many people choose to use pesticides on their lawn, but while these chemicals are effective, they can also be very dangerous. Exposure to pesticides poses a health risk to children, dogs, and other household pets. Many of these chemicals used can be passed on through breast milk, and have been linked to cancer, leukemia, and miscarriage. Also, pesticide runoff can contaminate groundwater and local streams and rivers, having negative effects on local wildlife. Eating dandelions is an excellent way to get them off our lawns without introducing harmful chemicals to our environment. When harvesting with intent to eradicate, be sure to dig up the large tap root, which will continue to regenerate dandelion leaves and flowers unless it is pulled.

I am interested in trying all of the parts of the dandelion that are edible. So far I only have experience eating young dandelion leaves. I usually have them fresh tossed with oil and vinegar and a bit of salt. This way of eating them is reminiscent of the way my Italian grandmother made dandelion salad when I was young. Although dandelions have a distinct bitter flavor, I remember loving this salad that she prepared every April. In fact, it was a Marathon Day tradition for my family. We would go watch the race (near the eight-mile marker) and then head back to my grandmother's to watch the

finish on television. We always had dandelion greens with chicken soup for lunch as we watched. Now my grandmother is 94. She no longer lives at home and does not pick dandelions. I've stopped going to the Boston Marathon since the experience has changed so much in recent years, and I won't be going this year, either. I will, however, make some more dandelion salad and continue that part of the tradition- possibly this time with some dandelion crown fritters as well.

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