



Ethnobotanical Leaflets



Dancing in Dandelions

By Kelly E. Hertlein

The dandelion is a plant many of us have become familiar with over the years. The golden flower clutches our lawns, highways and byways. Successful strategies for survival have given the dandelion a foothold in our lawns, if not in our hearts. Several individuals have fond remembrances of gathering the flower as a child, and it became the all-American symbol of a "mother's first bouquet." Yet as an adult, the plant is likely to become a distinct target when bending down to weed the front lawn or a pest nestled within one's personal garden.

History of the common Dandelion

A plethora of names have been handed down to the common dandelion. The leaves of the dandelion appear shiny and are without hairs. The margin of each leaf is cut into great jagged teeth, either upright or pointing somewhat backwards. The attachments are somewhat fanciful to the resemblance of the canine teeth of a lion, giving the plant its most familiar name of "Dandelion," (AAE, 1995)

Dandelions, known to the botanist as *Taraxacum officinale*, are classified in the Composite (Compositae) family of flowering plants. The genus name, *Taraxacum* is derived from the Persian word for "bitter herb," (Myer, 1994). Accompanying the golden ruse of the dandelion are the daisies, aster, sunflowers, goldenrod, Joe Pye weed and many other wildflowers.

Several common names, used for descriptive natures have also been given to the dandelion including, pissabed, priest's-crown, telltime, and wet-a-bed (Anonymous. 1999. *Taraxacum officinale*). The most common name is taken from the French term *dent de lion* (the dandelion), which means the "tooth of the lion," in reference to the deeply toothed leaves. "Others insist the golden petals resemble the gilded teeth of the heralded lion. A fifteenth-century surgeon's report claims that the plant is as strong and powerful as a lion's tooth," (Anonymous, 1999, *Taraxacum*).

The French name or terminology for the dandelion has been derived from the specific Latin name *Dens leonis*, "the Greek name for the genus to which Linnaeus assigned it, *Leontodon*, but also in nearly all

the languages of Europe," (Encyclopedia Americana, 1996),

A native of Europe, the dandelion has declined in its held esteem throughout the course of many decades. Once known as the versatile plant, the dandelion was cultivated in colonial gardens by people who saw many endearing qualities in the dandelion and believed the perennial was one of nature's greatest healing aids.

The plant may be dated as far back as 300 D.C., and is known to have grown all across the globe in rich and poor soil, fair and decrepit weather conditions. Speculation is the dandelion may have been eaten by Hebrews on Passover. The suspicion arises because of the plant's familiarity in Egypt and western Asia and its bitter taste. (Anonymous, 1999, Herb Craft).

Long before scientists came to the understanding of why the dandelion was useful, Arabian physicians became acquainted with the dandelion's medicinal value. Since its introduction into the scientific medium, botanists have discovered the dandelion to be "rich in iron and copper as well as vitamins A and C. The dried leaf also contains about four percent potassium, ranking it ahead of both broccoli and spinach in overall nutritional value," (Anonymous, 1999 Herb Craft).

The dandelion as a medical tool was first discovered in the works of an Arabian dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. The plant was recorded under the name of *Taraxacon* and regarded as a "sort of wild Endive." Valued as a medicine in the times, the dandelion is still extensively employed in its uses today. As a medical device and substance, the plant was popularly cultivated in large quantities throughout India as a remedy for liver complaints (Anonymous, 1999 Herb Craft),

The most commonly utilized portion of the dandelion is the root. The root of the plant is perennial and tapering, The root is fleshy and brittle, "externally dark brown, internally white and abounding in an inodorous milky juice of bitter, but not disagreeable taste," (AAE, 1995). Old roots divide at the crown into several heads. In sufficient soil the root of the dandelion may extend to nearly a foot or more and 1/2 inch to an inch in diameter.

Modern Times

When using the Internet or library references to locate information on the dandelion, several categories appear. Modern times have integrated the plant into poetry, symbolic ties, recipes, children's books and wardrobe accessories. Listed as the one of the most essential elements of the wardrobe, Hippy Plus states that the dandelion is a key accessory to any style when used laced into a necklace, bracelet or hair piece, (Anonymous, 1999 Herb Craft).

As time evolves and science becomes more defined and select, the plants of yesteryear begin to dissolve in notoriety as modern medicine and technology advance to produce more effective cures for ailments. The dandelion has been overlooked for several years as to its uses, yet will remain a staple in the way of childhood dreams and the loved fashion of the free for all hippie.

Recipes

--Dandelion Tea--

Infuse 1 OZ. of Dandelion in a pint of boiling water for 10 minutes; decant, sweeten with honey, and drink several glasses in the course of the day. The use of this tea is efficacious in bilious affections, and is also much approved of in the treatment of dropsy.

Or take 2 OZ. of freshly-sliced Dandelion root, and boil in 2 pints of water until it comes to 1 pint-, then add 1 OZ. of compound tincture of Horseradish, Dose, from 2 to 4 OZ. Use in a sluggish state of the liver

Or 1 OZ. Dandelion root, 1 OZ. Black Horehound herb, 1/2 OZ. Sweet Flag root, 1/4 OZ. Mountain Flax. Simmer the whole in 3 pints of water down to 1 1/2 pint, strain and take a wine glassful after meals for biliousness and dizziness.

Medical Uses

--For Gall Stones---

1 OZ. Dandelion root, 1 OZ. Parsley root, 1 OZ. Balm herb, 1/2 OZ. Ginger root, 1/2 OZ. Liquorice root. Place in 2 quarts of water and gently simmer down to 1 quart, strain and take a wine glassful every two hours.

For a young child suffering from jaundice: 1 OZ. Dandelion root, 1/2 oz. Ginger root, 1/2 oz. Caraway seed, 1/2 oz. Cinnamon bark, 1/4 oz, Senna leaves. Gently boil in 3 pints of water down to 1 1/2 pint, strain, dissolve 1/2 lb, sugar in hot liquid, bring to a boil again, skim all impurities that come to the surface when clear, put on one side to cool, and give frequently in teaspoonful doses.

-A Liver and Kidney Mixture---

1 oz, Broom tops, 1/2 oz. Juniper berries, 1/2 oz. Dandelion root, 1 1/2 pint water, Boil in ingredients for 10 minutes, then strain and add small quantity of cayenne, Dose, 1 tablespoonful, three times a day.

-A Medicine for Piles---

1 OZ. Long-leaved Plantain, 1 OZ, Dandelion root, 1/2 oz. Polypody root, 1 OZ. Shepherds Purse. Add 3 pints of water, boil down to half the quantity, strain, and add 1 OZ, of tincture of Rhubarb. Dose, a wine glassful three times a day, Celandine ointment to be applied at same time.

In Derbyshire, the juice of the, stalk is applied to remove warts, (Anonymous, 1999, *Taraxacum*

officinale).

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