



Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 116

Dandelion

History

The dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*, meaning “medical”) is used for general detoxification and belongs to the *Asteraceae* family. There are about 100 species of dandelion, which is also referred to as lion’s tooth because of its leaf’s shape.

The dandelion originated in Europe and was brought to North America for its medicinal and nutritional benefits. Once this species became abundant in northern areas, it interfered with crops and developed into a weedy species.

Description

The dandelion is a hardy, tap-rooted herbaceous perennial that can grow to be 12 inches tall. It has deep, irregular, lobe-shaped, green leaves that are tooth-like with a smooth or softly hairy leaf surface.

Vibrant, bright-yellow flowers are borne singly on long, smooth, hollow stalks that exude a white, milky substance when broken. These bright-yellow flowers grow abundantly during daylight but close in the evening or in gloomy weather because they are sensitive to light. The flowers mature into white globes of fine filaments bearing seeds that are distributed by wind.

Appearance

Dandelions develop strong taproots that penetrate the soil from 6 to 18 inches deep and produce a crown near the top of the root, forming new growth.

The leaf margin is deeply serrated and grows from 2 to 14 inches long and from ½ to 3 inches wide, forming a rosette at the base of the plant. The flowering stalk grows 12 inches

high and develops 100 to 300 yellow ray flowers on the head, forming a puffball appearance.

During the fall, this weedy species produces its seeds, first displaying them in a cotton-ball stage. These seeds, ⅓ inch long and with five to eight ribs, germinate rapidly in moist soil.

Cycle

Dandelions are hardy perennials that grow best in sunny, moist areas; however, some mature plants can survive in dry, shady conditions. The flowers can produce seeds year round.

A dandelion’s leaf grows horizontally, cutting off sunlight to vegetation beneath it. This plant thrives on light, causing rapid seed germination. After the seedling stage, flowering can occur throughout the plant’s life cycle. After several growing seasons, dandelions develop thick crowns 6 to 10 inches across.

Uses

Dandelion is considered a weed; however, the leaves can be eaten cooked or raw in soups and salads. The flower is an ingredient for wine when it’s added to citrus fruit, and the root is used as a cleansing tonic and as a substitute for coffee when ground.

The plants’ leaves and roots are used medicinally as a diuretic to help with kidney and liver disorders and urinary organs. The white sap of a dandelion is used externally to remove warts and heal wounds.

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