

# Dandelion Delight

By Kristina Weeks, Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center



**A**pril showers bring May and June flowers. One of the early flowers of spring is the sunny dandelion. They give forth a welcome splash of yellow as they pop up in lawns and through cracks in the sidewalk. Farm fields transform into a marvelous carpet of gold before the grasses grow tall. Let's soak up the dandelion glow. The dandelion gets its name from the French "dent de lion," which translates as "lion's tooth," referring to the jagged tooth-shaped leaves that grow from the root. Each flower also originates from the root and sits upon a long, smooth, hollow stem.

If you look through a magnifying glass at the dandelion, you'll find that one flower is actually made up of hundreds of tiny flowers, called florets. Dandelions belong to the great family Compositae, plants whose flower heads consist of many florets. The daisy and sunflower are also part of this family.

Blooming early in the season, dandelions provide an important source of food for pollen- and nectar-eating insects, such as bees and butterflies. After a long winter eating tree bark, porcupines have been seen to venture out into fields to enjoy a fresh spring meal of dandelions. Cottontail rabbits and white-tailed deer also enjoy dandelions.

Some think of the dandelion as a pesky weed but others cherish dandelions for their source of food, medicine and inspiration. The scientific name for the common dandelion is *Taraxacum officinale*, which originates from Greek words and translates to an official remedy for disorders.

Around the world, the dandelion has long been used medicinally. The roots are used to detoxify the liver and gallbladder. The leaves, acting as a diuretic, are a remedy for the kidney and bladder. The leaves are also used to stimulate appetite and improve digestion. The flowers are rich in beta-carotene and have antioxidant properties.

All plant parts of the dandelion are edible! Nutritionally, it is rich in vitamins A, C, D, K and B complex. The plant is also rich in minerals — iron, magnesium, potassium, zinc, manganese, copper, choline, boron, silicon, and calcium. So, toss some early spring leaves in your salad. The leaves become bitter through the season, so later you will want to boil them to add to meals. Pull up some roots, wash, chop and simmer to make tea. Treat yourself and your family to some homemade Dandelion Fritters.

When harvesting wild edibles, be certain of your plant identification to avoid possible confusion with toxic look-alikes. Don't harvest near roads to avoid possible street run-off contamination and consider if the area may have been treated with pesticides or herbicides. Also, be sure to practice sustainable harvesting techniques, considering the needs of the plant and other animals that feed on them. Try to only gather common plants and always leave some to continue their life cycle. Luckily, the dandelion is abundant for our enjoyment.

While you're out gathering dandelion fare, explore some old folklore. When the flowers go to seed they turn into a fuzzy globe, each seed with its own feathery parachute to carry it in the wind. This is when they are able to predict the weather. With sunny weather, the fuzzy balls extend to their fullest, but if there's any hint of rain they close up like an umbrella.

Blowing the seeds off a dandelion will carry winged messages to those you love. Turn toward the direction of a faraway love and blow once. If all the seeds are blown off, you are loved deeply; if a single feathery seed remains, you are not forgotten; if many seeds remain, there are uncertainties.

Make yourself a brilliant dandelion crown and frolic in the field with the flower fairies. Give a big blow to a fuzzy dandelion and count the number of seeds remaining, as it is said that each represents an hour to tell what time it is in fairyland.

The seeds of the dandelion are a favorite food of the American goldfinch. A little flower fairy told me these birds are yellow because of all the dandelion seeds they eat. The finches are kept busy pulling a seed from the cluster, swiveling it around to snip off the fuzzy end, and then chewing up the seed. Sparrows and other seed-eating birds also like these seeds.

Soak up the glow of dandelions as their sunny faces announce spring. Look for our wild and magical friends who also love dandelions. Savor their gift of nutrition. Delight in the sight of floating parachutes. Invoke the essence of the dandelion to relax and go with the flow of life.

*Second Nature is submitted by the naturalists at Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center in West Brattleboro. Come enjoy the trails open sunrise to sunset. Visit [www.BEEC.org](http://www.BEEC.org) for more information and current events for all ages. BEEC is a member supported non-profit organization.*

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*Photo by Lucia Kloster*



Dandelion Fritters  
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## DANDELION FRITTERS

After you have gathered about 3 cups of dandelion flowering tops, shake them in a strainer to release any insects that may still be there. Cut the stems off as close to the flower as possible. You could leave a piece of the stem on for holding.

### INGREDIENTS

- A little over 3 cups of dandelion flower tops
- 1 cup flour of your choice
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup milk of your choice
- 1 large egg beaten
- Oil for frying
- Salt and pepper to taste

### THE BATTER

- Mix dry ingredients together.
- Add the beaten egg and the milk.
- Combine well.

### FRYING THE FRITTERS

- Heat the oil to the desired frying temperature (350-375 degrees)
- Dip the flower tops into the batter. If the batter doesn't stick, add a generous spoonful to cover the tops. Try to coat both sides.
- Place them into the hot oil flower side down and fry until they become golden brown.
- Place them on a cookie rack or a paper towel to let the excess oil drip off.
- Add a little salt and pepper if desired.
- Enjoy when slightly cooled.

*These fritters are excellent dipped in an aioli sauce.*

### EASY AIOLI DIPPING SAUCE

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1-2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic or 1-2 teaspoons prepared horseradish
- Mix well.