

Is our attitude to dandelion fundamentally sane - or have we been unwittingly seduced into a consensual "negative baptism" that has demonized one of the most powerful plant allies in our midst?

Let's begin by looking for clues in dandelion's botanical name. Dandelion's species name, 'officinale' means 'used in the [apothecary's] workshop.' This indicates that dandelion has long been used medicinally. Dandelion's genus name 'Taraxacum' is derived from the Greek, 'taraxis', meaning 'disorder,' and 'akos', meaning 'remedy.' Our predecessors named very few plants with such esteem. Yes, dandelion it transpires, not only has a history of medicinal use going back to ancient times, it has been a defining personality at the very heart of local materia medicas, in temperate zones, the world over. And continues to be. It is only in North America that the thread

"DANDELION HAS AN ASTONISHING RANGE OF HEALTH BENEFITS."

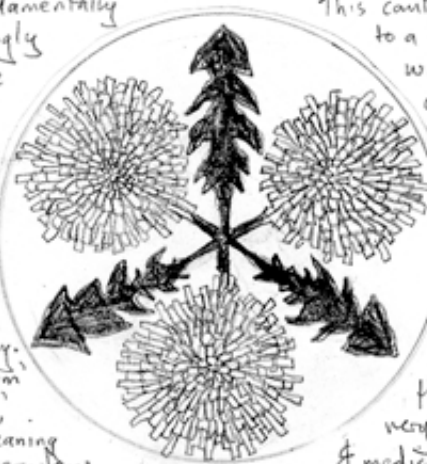
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of folk wisdom around its use has been so definitively lost. And so, contemporary herbalists everywhere continue to rate dandelion as one of the superstars of the plant kingdom. Gregory Tilford: "Dandelion is one of the most complete plant foods on earth. All the vital nutrients are conveniently contained in a single source, in quantities that the body can easily process and fully absorb." It is difficult to say in which capacity dandelion is better known or valued, as food or medicine. Check out the following pages for more details.

### GARDENING WITH DANDELION!

So, let's assume you're persuaded to incorporate dandelion into your dietary regimen. What are the implications for your relationship with your garden? The English permaculture designer Patrick Whitefield: "Harvesting becomes weeding when a plant grows faster than we can eat it, and becomes harvesting again when our appetite catches up with the plant's growth."

What Patrick reflects to note and what has surprised me greatly as I have begun making dandelion a centerpiece of my own dietary regimen, is that it is not difficult to over-harvest dandelion & force it out of the garden. Historically, we have already seen the consequences of this kind of imbalance. Overzealous harvesting of dandelion in the British Isles in the 1950's drove the plant close to disappearance there, and prompted the founding of a 'Save Our Dandelions' Society.



This cautionary & significant history alerts us to a key dimension of nurturing a healthy, working, sustainable relationship with dandelion - or any other plant. Namely, the vital role of a balanced, mutually supportive dance of plant & human ecologies.

As it happens, this concern plays directly to the strengths of home & community-based healthcare. One of the central contributions of herbalism to our understanding of the foundations of health, is that our very proximity to the source of our food & medicine, & the quality of our relationship with these allies, has a direct bearing on their applicability & 'healing power.' We live in context and the dandelion that works best for us is from the healthiest dandelion community right under our feet.

### FROM WAR TO PEACE...

Now that we are making the perspective shift from being at war with a weed, to consciously stewarding a wild plant, what next? How easy does dandelion want this dance of mutual self-interest to be? Well, wouldn't you know, the very same plant characteristics which prompt such blind antagonism to 'dandelion as weed' are precisely those qualities which make it so valuable to us as 'med food.'

What makes dandelion maybe the world's most widespread plant is due in part to its ability to bend with the environment.

"IN MANY CULTURES, DANDELION IS REFERRED TO AS ONE OF THE GREAT SOIL DOCTORS."

Here we have a perennial food plant, hardy in all but the very harshest climates, able to tolerate all soils, in full sun to shade. It produces seeds without fertilization & also reproduces readily from root segments. What this adds up to is a year-round source of food & medicine that is very easy to grow.

Often overlooked is the fact that dandelions wouldn't be so commonplace but for the fact that the soil loves them. In many cultures, dandelion is referred to as one of the great soil doctors. It creates drainage channels, aerates compacted soils, draws up nutrients from deep in the soil, and attracts earthworms. It is an all-season food for scores of pollinators. Children love it.

Simply put, unlike many plants which require a great deal of horticultural experience to co-steward successfully over the long-term, dandelion extends a remarkably welcoming embrace. One of the most powerful plants on earth, it is also a most forgiving Teacher.