

Meet a Plant: Dandelion

Get to know this common plant that grows in many places!

Dandelions are herbs that first grew in Eurasia. Where plants first grow is often referred to as their native location. Europeans brought dandelions with them as they traveled and colonized the world and dandelions now grow in many temperate regions. A temperate region is an area with a mild climate.

Dandelions belong to the *Asteraceae* family, the same family as lettuce, artichokes, daisies, and chamomile. A plant family is a group of plants that are related to each other. **What do *Asteraceae* family plants have in common?** Plants in this family have compound flowers. A compound flower has clusters of tiny florets that look like one larger flower. A dandelion can contain up to 200 florets on a single flower head.



Dandelions have a circle of toothed leaves around the base of the plant and bright yellow flowers. The word dandelion comes from the French "*dent de lion*" meaning lion's tooth because of the jagged shape of the leaves. In China, it is called "*Pu Gong Ying*" or earth nail because it has a long tap root. A tap root grows very deep into the soil.



Where do dandelions grow?

They are commonly found in lawns, in the grass strips on roadsides, on the banks of waterways and just about anywhere. They are usually considered a weed.

- Can you find dandelions near you?
- Where are they growing?
- Do they have flowers? Seed heads?
- Do you have a special name for the seed heads?

- Do you ever blow on them? Why?
- Can you find their jagged leaves?
- If you find a dandelion, try pulling it up by its roots. Was it easy or hard? Why?

LIFE CYCLE OF A DANDELION

Dandelions can bloom for extended periods of time but are most visible in May and June. The florets develop from the center, blooming into a circular flower head. After flowering for a couple of days, the flower head closes and the seeds develop inside the closed head. As the seeds form, the flower stalk extends higher so that it can reach the breeze. The seeds have bristles that function like a parachute and float on the wind.

On average, a single dandelion plant can produce 10 flower heads. Each flower head has 150-200 florets, and each floret produces 1 seed. That means that a single plant can produce up to 2000 seeds!

A 2003 study at the University of Regensburg in Germany found that 99.5 per cent of dandelion seeds land within 10 meters of their parent plant. That's because the seed 'parachute' falls at about 30cm per second and dandelions only grow about 30cm high. So that gives each seed just one second of flight time to be blown sideways by the wind to its new home. Source: <https://www.sciencefocus.com/nature/how-far-can-dandelion-seeds-travel/>



Check out this amazing video!

TIME LAPSE DANDELION FLOWER TO SEED HEAD

It was filmed continuously for one month and documents the dandelion life cycle:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ_QqtXoyQw



PEOPLE

There is evidence that Persian pharmacists used dandelions for medicinal purposes as early as 900 CE.

When European colonists came to North America, they brought dandelions with them as an essential ingredient for cooking and medicines.

Dandelions are also used in traditional Chinese medicine.

Even though dandelions can be used for food or medicine, today most people consider them weeds.



POLLINATORS

Dandelions are in peak bloom in the early spring, when pollinators come out of hibernation. Bumblebees, solitary bees, honeybees, hoverflies, beetles and butterflies all use dandelions for food. Dandelions can supply both nectar and pollen for pollinators. However, dandelions do not rely on insects to be pollinated.



DANDELION POEM By Laura E. Richards



“Pretty seeds, what makes you fly,
Now here, now there, now low, now high?”
“’Tis the wind lifts me!
’Tis the wind drifts me
Tosses me in merry play
Here and there and every way.”

How would you describe dandelion seeds?

PAINING WITH DANDELIONS

What you need:

- Dandelion flowers
- Different colors of paint (water colors or tempera)
- Small paper plates or small cups
- Paper to paint on
- Newspaper or plastic table cloth to catch spills



What to do:

1. Collect dandelions flowers from your backyard, a field, on the edge of a sidewalk or wherever you can find them
2. When collecting try to get enough stem so you have something to hold on to when you paint
3. Prepare a painting station. Place newspaper or plastic table cloth on table or floor
4. Set out your paints. It might be helpful to put a little bit of paint on a small paper plate or in a small cup to make it easy to dip the flower
5. Lay out paper to paint on
6. Dip the flower of the dandelion in the paint and press or brush onto the paper



Want to try and make paint from dandelions?

DANDELION PAINT

What you need:

- Dandelion flowers
- Water
- Something to boil water in like a pot
- Spoon
- Cup
- Paint brush and paper
- A place to work



What to do:

1. Collect at least 4 to 5 dandelion flowers, rip off the petals, and put them in the cup
2. Squish petals down with a spoon
3. Boil enough water to completely cover the petals
4. Pour the boiling water over the petals until the water covers the petals
5. Let sit for 20 mins
6. Now you're ready to use your paint!
7. Set up a painting station and begin

Ask an adult to help you boil water.

Try This!

- Use other flowers as paint brushes
- Crush up leaves and rub them on paper as a paint
- Use petals from other flowers to make different color paints
- Make a wreath or crown from dandelions
- Write a poem about dandelions or other flowers
- Color the dandelion below
- What else can you learn about dandelions?

