

# Dandelion

*TARAXACUM OFFICINALE*



## HABITAT

Grassland, banks, wasteland, roads and waysides, gardens.

## PARTS USED

Leaves, roots, flowers and flower buds.

Most readers will know of dandelion for human consumption from that old classic drink 'dandelion and burdock beer'. The plant gets its name from a corruption of the French name for the plant '*dents de lion*' (lion's teeth) which referred to the jagged leaves.

Perennial dandelion is a member of the *Compositae*, and the flower stalks can grow up to about 30 to 40 cm tall. Although most botany books will tell you that the plant flowers between March and October dandelion does sometimes flower outside that time frame if the conditions are warm enough. Dandelion has long taproots (which can be used to make a good coffee substitute), and grows almost anywhere but prefers nitrogen-rich soils.

Dandelion contains vitamins B and C, pro-vitamin A, and the bitter constituents taraxacin and taraxacerin which are what make the tongue curl. The leaves are strongly diuretic and mildly laxative, and have been used in herbal and dandelion beer. For these reasons readers with a medical condition should seek medical advice before consuming dandelion. One other possible contra-indication is that the plant - especially the flower stalks - contains a milky latex-like sap which can irritate some sensitive skins.

[Parts taken from 'The Essential Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook' - ISBN 0 9544158 1 7]

Consumption of wild plants is at the reader's discretion and own risk. For personal safety do not eat wild plants if you have a medical condition, during pregnancy, or feed to minors.

WHEN USING ONE OF THE WILD PLANTS LISTED FOR THE FIRST TIME, TRY TASTING JUST A SMALL AMOUNT OF THE PREPARED PLANT TO CHECK YOUR TOLERANCE. IF YOU HAVE ANY BAD OR ALLERGIC REACTIONS AVOID ANY FURTHER CONSUMPTION. NEVER PUT ANY PLANT INTO YOUR MOUTH UNLESS ABSOLUTELY 100% CERTAIN OF ITS IDENTIFICATION AND EDIBILITY.

## DANDELION & MUSHROOM SALAD

Mushrooms - sliced or small whole  
Dandelion leaf - finely chopped  
Mayonnaise  
Sour cream  
Salt and pepper

A simple salad using a small amount of raw dandelion leaf to provide little packets of bitterness against the creamy dressing. Use a good mayonnaise rather than a vinegar-based salad cream.

- Put the mushrooms and about a tablespoon of chopped leaves in a bowl.
- Mix mayonnaise and sour cream in a 1:2 ratio [or your preferred taste].
- Season then add to the contents of the bowl and mix thoroughly so that the mushrooms are well coated.

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## DANDELION & ORANGE CURRY

2 handfuls dandelion leaves / roots  
1 small onion  
Cumin, turmeric and chilli powders - pinches  
Butter or oil  
1 orange  
Water or stock  
Yoghurt [or cream]  
Salt and pepper

This is one of the author's favourite recipes in the book. Somehow the sweetness of the orange complements that hint of bitterness left in the dandelion leaves after their preparation.

- Place the dandelion leaves and stripped roots in a bowl and pour boiling water over. Allow to steep for about 5 minutes. Discard the water and repeat. Check taste and repeat one final time if still too bitter.
- Drain and set aside.
- Meanwhile... Slice the onion and lightly fry along with pinches of the spices. Set aside.
- Peel and segment the orange keeping back a few segments to be added in the latter stages of cooking. Squeeze out any juice left in the pithy remains to add to the curry.
- Put the pan back on a medium heat and stir in the bulk of the orange segments and juice.
- Add a little extra stock or water [about ½ cup]
- Simmer for a few minutes then add the dandelion, stirring the mixture gently.
- Cook for another couple of minutes then stir in a good dollop of plain yoghurt and add the remaining orange segments.
- Remove from the heat, season, and allow flavours to infuse.
- Serve with rice or potatoes.

### VARIATIONS & ALTERNATIVES

In the absence of yoghurt try a spot of cream - as happened in the case with the original preparation of this recipe. The curry can be thickened through the addition of potato or some other flour based thickener.

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