

Dandelion

TARAXACUM OFFICINALE



HABITAT

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

PARTS USED

Leaves, roots, flowers and flower buds.

Dandelions have had a long use in herbal medicine but most readers will know of its human consumption from dandelion and burdock beer, or sometimes home-made wine made from the yellow flowers [which are delicately sweet before they fully open though the plant overall is bitter to the taste]. Its roots have been used for making a magenta dye, the flowers in Middle Eastern baking, while the Russians used a related dandelion to produce rubber in WW2.

The name dandelion is a corruption of the French name for the plant '*dents de lion*' referring to the jagged leaves. Linnaeus called it *leontodon* after the Greek meaning 'lion's tooth', and it is sometimes referred to as *dens leonis* in older herbals. Technically, dandelion belongs to the Compositae, is a perennial growing up to about 30 to 40 cm tall, and flowers between March and October. It has long taproots, a rosette of basal leaves, hollow flower stem often tinged with red, and flowers composed of over 200 florets. Grows almost anywhere but prefers nitrogen-rich soils.

Dandelion contains vitamins B and C, provitamin 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. Dandelion roots have been used as a coffee substitute when dried [the roots shrink considerably], then chopped and roasted.

[Taken from 'The *Essential* Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook' by Johnny Jumbalaya.]

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 TRYING 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.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Essential* Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook'.]

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.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Essential* Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook'.]

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