



## Introduction

The scientific name *Taraxacum officinalis* comes from the Greek word for disorder and remedy. For the Ancient Greeks, whatever illness you had, the dandelion would cure it.

The English and Spanish/Catalan names **Diente de León/Dent de Lleó** are similar to the French **dent de lion**, which means lion's tooth. People from different countries saw a resemblance between the dandelion's lobed leaf and a lion's tooth.

In Malta it is called **tfief** and the word is derived from the Arabic **tafaaf**, meaning sundown, the time before sunset. This might be related to the fact that the dandelion flowers open in the morning and close up at night.

The Swedish name **maskros** (wormrose) comes from the fact that there are often fin-ribbed larvae— "worms" – in the flower.



## Food and drink

Dandelions have been consumed by humans from different cultures for food and as an herb for much of recorded history.

In the UK, Spain and Sweden the leaves are added to salads or cooked if too bitter. In the UK leaves are also used to make a tea, whilst in the UK and Sweden, wine is made from the flowers.

Dandelion roots are baked and ground to make a coffee substitute, known as chicory. In Malta, chicory is brewed with coffee and cloves to enhance the taste.

### Funders and partner organisations

#### Green Recovery Challenge Fund



The National Lottery  
Heritage Fund

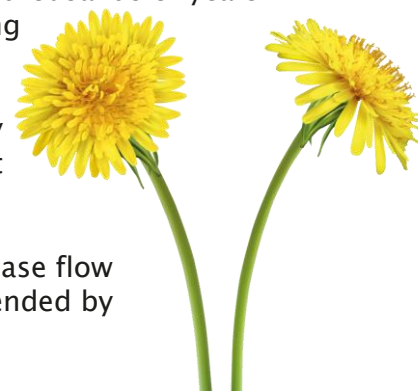


## Traditional medicine

The dandelion has been used as a cure all in the herbalist's cabinet for thousands of years. The Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had great faith in its healing properties.

An old Swedish advice against warts is to lubricate them with the milky juice from dandelions. Squeezed juice was washed on the face to get soft and fine skin and to remove pimples.

Decoctions of leaves and root have been considered a diuretic (to increase flow of urine) in Sweden and in Malta. In Malta, the plant was also recommended by herbalists as a way to clean the bowels.



## Folklore



In Spain, the dandelion is a symbol of hope as can be seen in the proverb: *'Be like the dandelions, every time they fall apart, they start over.'*

In Sweden, the plant was hung up as protection against witches and trolls. And if you succeed in blowing off all the seeds with a single puff, you could make a wish.

In the UK dandelions were once believed to have the ability to indicate time and direction. It was said that one could tell the time by the number of breaths it took to blow the seeds from the stem. It has also been called the "rustic oracle," as its flowers open at around 5 am and

close at around 8 pm, serving as a clock for shepherds in the field. It can also hint at weather conditions, as the flowers fold up when the sky is cloudy. Blowing on the seeds will tell you where your lover waits for you by the direction the seeds blow.

In Malta, children used to call the seeds **nanniet** (grandmothers) because of their white hair. During the Second World War they started calling them parachutes, a familiar sight at that time. Nowadays most children simply call them wishes.

## Dandelions are good for wildlife!

Dandelions like any other wildflower, provide a lot of benefits to nature, even when there's not a flower present. Their wide-spreading roots loosen hard-packed soil, aerate the earth and help reduce erosion. The deep taproot pulls nutrients such as calcium from deep in the soil and makes them available to other plants, while holding on to carbon that would otherwise be released into the air. While most think they're a lawn killer, dandelions actually fertilize the grass.

Many small animals feed on the dandelion's leaves, flowers and seeds. Unlike many popular cultivated plants, dandelions help to support declining bee populations. Cultivated plants often have defective nectar-producing organs. Flowers with multiple petals will also block pollinator entry to the insects. This means the commercially grown flower is less likely to be able to reproduce and thrive. However, planting wildflowers allows you to create an eco-friendly area that will attract birds, bees, butterflies and insects. All will help to improve the health of your garden and keep it looking fresh.



## Bringing wildflowers closer to home

**Plant flowers native to your area.** Installing native plants not only supports pollinators and other species—they're easier to grow, too, because they're already adapted to your climate and don't require loads of fertilizer or pesticide.

**Aim for a diverse mix of flowers.** One of the mistakes people often make when they plant flowers for wildlife is they buy plants that bloom all at once. In a healthy grassland, plants grow throughout the season. Plan what to grow over the course of a year, and you'll be rewarded with a burst of colours and scents that unfold over the span of several months.

**Size does not matter.** Not everyone owns big plots of land. All you need is a pot, a window box, or another small space to plant wildflowers.

**Pay attention to the environment.** No matter where you decide to plant, make it a habit to visit regularly and watch what's happening. Which plants are thriving? Which ones are having trouble? What insects and birds do you notice? What do the flowers smell like?