

Dandelions from Another Perspective

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For many, May marks the start of the outdoor gardening season and the time to get their lawns in shape for the coming summer. Of course, along with this comes the ongoing and seemingly never-ending battle to keep the weeds at bay. This is especially true for the much maligned dandelion. While we may tend to view dandelions as a persistent threat to our lawns, they do have some redeeming qualities of which we should not lose sight.

One book which provides some interesting information about dandelions from a health and nutrition perspective is “Nutraceuticals: The Complete Encyclopedia of Supplements, Herbs, Vitamins, and Healing Foods”. It is the official guide of the American Nutraceutical Association and claims to bring a new look to an ancient art.

Nutraceuticals are foods which have both nutritional and medical or therapeutic functions. The link between diet and health is definitely not new. Hippocrates, who is regarded as the “father of Western medicine”, recognized this nearly 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece. Today, our analytical capabilities are allowing us to learn more about the benefits of certain foods in our diet and understand how they function. Dandelions are no exception.

Even the origin of the name “dandelion” itself is interesting. Due to their shape with jagged indentations, the leaves resemble the tooth of a lion, which in Old French was “dent de lion”. The plant was originally brought to North America from Europe by the early settlers who cultivated it, eating its greens and roasting its roots to make a coffee-like beverage.

The “Nutraceuticals Encyclopedia” devotes three pages to the use and functions of dandelions. The sap of the dandelion, with its distinctively bitter flavour, can apparently be applied to the skin to soothe bee stings and blisters, as well as removing warts, moles, pimples, calluses, and sores.

It is said that the sap, leaves, and root extracts can be taken internally to aid in digestion and treat a wide variety of medical ailments (which we will not go into here). There is even a claim that these extracts can help prevent the build-up of plaque on teeth.

From a nutritional perspective, dandelions are a source of anti-oxidants and vitamins (Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and Vitamin B complexes) along with a number of minerals, including calcium, iron, silicon, magnesium, and zinc. All of these can be obtained from eating the young tender leaves in salads or as cooked greens. Dandelion tonics or teas

may be prepared by extracting nutrients from the dried roots or leaves with boiling water. As with all foods having functional properties, care must be taken to consume them in moderation. Where there may be potential health issues, they should not be consumed without the advice of a healthcare professional.

Even though you may not be enamoured by the presence of those bright yellow flowers in your nice green lawn, dandelions have their positive attributes, although they may be a bit difficult to find at times. As with most things it is simply a matter of your perspective on the situation.



The humble dandelion has many interesting benefits