

A HOME & GARDEN *Guide*



Submitted photo/Delaware State University

What appears as the dandelion's flower is actually many tiny flowers surrounded by leafy bracts.

November gardening jobs

- Make certain that climbing roses are securely attached to their supports.
- Use small stakes or markers where you've planted bulbs or late-starting plants in the perennial garden to avoid disturbing them when you begin spring soil preparation.
- Apply protective mulches on the perennial garden after the ground has frozen an inch or two.
- Cover strawberries 2 inches deep with hay or straw.
- Bring garden furniture under cover if you have not already done so.
- Destroy breeding places for pests and disease.

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Dandelion versatile, edible weed

By Lou Calabrese
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The first eight years of my life were spent on a small, narrow street in South Philadelphia; there wasn't a plant or even a blade of grass on Greenwich Street, or for blocks around for that matter. Our family moved to the western suburb of Upper Darby in 1950 and to my delight, we had a grass lawn.

My dad took lots of pride in caring for it each weekend and it was my job to dig out the unwanted dandelions. Of course, my dad and I considered them worthless weeds at the time (although I did enjoy blowing the seed balls and watching them sail away) but that was about to change.

My Italian maternal grandmother came to live with us and I noticed that she would quietly, using a small knife, cut the young, tender dandelion leaves from our lawn, gather them in her apron and bring them to our kitchen. After washing them, she proceeded to make a salad with them, using oil, vinegar, salt and

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pepper. I asked my dad if the dandelions were good to eat and he agreed with my grandmother and I began to eat "gegutti" as my grandmom called it, apparently a local slang word she used while living in the province of Basilicata in southern Italy.

Much wiser now, I've learned that a weed is basically an unwanted plant, a plant that takes over at the expense of other desired plants, or a plant that is growing in an undesirable location. For those who prefer a "golf course-like" lawn, dandelions are weeds; but there is another side to dandelions, a beneficial one.

According to the USDA, dandelion leaves, served uncooked, contain 280 percent of an adult's daily requirement of beta carotene as well as more than half the requirement of Vitamin C, besides being rich in potassium. The white sap from the stem and root is an herbal topical treatment

for warts; the entire plant has been used as a diuretic and liver stimulant.

A word of caution: some people may have a skin reaction from dandelions, and dandelions on lawns treated with chemicals should be avoided.

In addition, dandelions are good for the soil. Their long roots aerate the soil and accumulate minerals, which are absorbed by the soil when the plant dies. The flower also attracts beneficial ladybugs, which devour harmful aphids.

The scientific name for the dandelion is *Taraxacum officinale*, which means "official remedy for disorders;" the word dandelion comes from the French phrase, "dent de lion" meaning lion's tooth, referring to the serrated edges of the leaf. What appears as the flower is actually many tiny yellow flowers surrounded by leafy bracts and produced on a stalk arising from the base of the plant.

The preferred method of re-

moving dandelions is by physically pulling them out using a knife or a rod-like hand tool with a "V" shape tip, removing as much of the "root" (underground stem) as possible. If herbicides are desired, the least toxic (such as corn gluten meal—a pre-emergent product which prevents seeds from sprouting), should be used.

So, my grandmom from the old country knew all along that dandelions were a nutritious food and my dad and I, who thought they were weeds, were only too happy to have her pick them and serve them with our family meal.

Editor's note: Mr. Calabrese is a volunteer at Delaware State University's Claude E. Phillips Herbarium, Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identification, location, and uses. Call 857-6452 to arrange a tour of the herbarium or for more information about this article.