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Dandelion

■ by Thomas Schorr-Kon, Trackways

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is a wonderful plant and one that is often misidentified. As we see it a lot we think we are very familiar with it, yet we have most probably never really looked at it properly. Do you know what shape the stamens are, for example? There are also many species that look very similar to the dandelion most of which are relatively safe to eat, so even if we get our identification wrong we are unlikely to come to any harm.

Even so, I recommend that the next time you are out you take a good look at a dandelion. One of the main identifying features is the 'tooth' shapes running down the sides of the leaves. This is where the name, Dandelion, or in French 'Dent de lion', meaning 'lion's tooth', comes from. The flower also, with its yellow ruff, could be seen as the lion's mane.



early part of the year. The stem is particularly cleansing so a couple of them eaten daily will give a cleansing boost to your system. The bitter taste is one that we have bred out of the main foods we eat, yet it stimulates bile production and is thus good for the liver. We may need several attempts at eating some wild foods so that our palate can adjust. So don't give up on the first try!



At this time of year it is a good idea to do some internal spring-cleaning. Nature has a way of providing what we need at the time of year that we need it. We will see Dandelions springing up in the lawn and grassy places in the



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When plants are turned in to medicine by the medical establishment, one aspect that is seldom taken into account is the complexity and wisdom inherent in the plants themselves. The Dandelion provides a clear example of this, as one of the main actions is as a diuretic and what we find in many chemically produced diuretics is that they can leach potassium from the kidneys. The Dandelion on the other hand is rich in potassium and so replaces potassium as the kidneys are cleansed. This illustrates how we often find nature providing balancing qualities within medicinal plants that can be overlooked when only specific chemistry is extracted for medical purposes.

As you may know, all parts of the dandelion are edible - the leaf, flower, root and even the stem. A handful of leaves with hot water poured on them make a good general tonic. The Dandelion is diuretic, lymph- and blood-cleansing. The leaves are rich in vitamin A and are good in salad.

The root, roasted slowly in the oven for an hour and a half, makes a good coffee substitute. It can also be eaten as a vegetable if boiled first to remove some of the bitterness and then gently roasted. The unroasted root boiled up and drunk is very good for the liver and is used in cases of jaundice; it can also aid in recovery from hepatitis A. The Dandelion has a bitter taste and this quality stimulates the liver. I don't recommend cooking the leaves with other spring greens because the bitter taste can pervade other less bitter spring leaves. The flower can be eaten raw, steamed, or dipped in batter and fried. Also we can eat the flowers just before they open, either raw or cooked, a bit like a cross between peas and miniature Brussels sprouts.