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## Dandelion

*Taraxacum officinale*

**Family Name:** Asteraceae

**Common Names:** Dandelion, Blow ball, Lion's Tooth, Cankerwort, Priest's Snout

**Description:** A common perennial herb found in lawns, gardens and waste areas. It has a strong taproot and the leaves form a rosette from the base, are jagged in shape and hairless. Each flower head is found on a single hollow stem and consists of many ray florets, which mature to form the familiar dandelion 'clock' of seeds with a downy parachute attached.

**Parts Used:** root, leaves, flower and sap. The young leaves are eaten as a salad (traditionally a 'spring' salad in Europe, while the inulin rich roots are collected in autumn, dried and used as a coffee substitute).

**Character:** The plant is quiet smooth, cold, soft and moist to touch. It has an earthy, slightly savoury smell, the leaves are bitter but not unpleasantly so and salty, the flower petals have an instant sweet taste.

**Active Constituents:** The root contains sesquiterpene lactones, triterpenes, phenolic acids, inulin, tannins, potassium, calcium, sodium, phosphorus, iron, nickel, cobalt, tin, copper, zinc, vitamins A, B, C and D, choline.

**Actions:** Bitter tonic, choleric, diuretic (leaf), mild laxative, and antirheumatic.

**Nutritional Constituents:** vitamins A, B, C, D, minerals potassium, iron, zinc, copper, calcium, sodium, nickel, cobalt, tin.

**Medicinal Uses:** The action of dandelion is very much via stimulation of the liver and kidney function. Both parts of the herb have activities in both areas though the leaves are stronger for the kidneys excretion and the root for the liver based secretion. As a diuretic it is of great benefit to tissue function because while it increases loss of sodium, it balances electrolytes by increasing the cellular levels of potassium. Because of its high inulin content dandelion tea can be useful for diabetics, also having a beneficial balancing effect on the pancreas. Beneficial to the musculoskeletal system by way of increased excretion of metabolic waste.

**Historical Uses:** "Cleanseth imposthumes and inward ulcers in the urinary passages" and to help those with cachexy - meaning a bad habit of the body. Phthisis and skin diseases such as scurvy, scrofula, eczema and eruptive skin conditions generally. The white latex in the stem has been used to treat warts. Root has been used to make a coffee.

**Precautions:** repeated exposure to the milky latex may cause contact dermatitis.

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