

Dandelion

[En Español \(Spanish Version\)](#)

[What Is Dandelion Used for Today?](#) | [Dosage](#) | [Safety Issues](#) | [Interactions You Should Know About](#) | [References](#)

Taraxacum officinale

Principal Proposed Uses

- None

Other Proposed Uses

- **LEAVES:** [Fluid Retention](#); Nutritional Supplement
- **ROOT:** [Constipation](#); [Detoxification](#); [Liver Support](#)

The common dandelion, enemy of suburban lawns, is an unusually nutritious food. Its leaves contain substantial levels of vitamins A, C, D, and B complex as well as iron, magnesium, zinc, potassium, manganese, copper, choline, calcium, boron, and silicon.

Worldwide, the root of the dandelion has been used for the treatment of a variety of liver and gallbladder problems. Other historical uses of the root and leaves include the treatment of breast diseases, water retention, digestive problems, joint pain, fever, and skin diseases.

The most active constituents in dandelion appear to be eudesmanolide and germacranolide, substances unique to this herb. Other ingredients include taraxol, taraxerol, and taraxasterol, along with stigmasterol, beta-sitosterol, caffeic acid, and p-hydroxyphenylacetic acid.¹

What Is Dandelion Used for Today?

Dandelion leaves are widely recommended as a food supplement for pregnant women because of the many nutrients they contain. The scientific basis for any other potential use of dandelion is scanty.

Dandelion leaves have been found to produce a mild diuretic effect,⁶ which has led to its proposed use for people who suffer from mild [fluid retention](#), such as may occur in premenstrual syndrome (PMS). However, no double-blind, placebo-controlled studies have been reported on the effectiveness of dandelion for this purpose. (For information on double-blind studies, and why they are so important, see [Why Does This Database Rely on Double-blind Studies?](#))

In the folk medicine of many countries, dandelion root is regarded as a "liver tonic," a substance believed to [support the liver](#) in an unspecified way. This led to its use for many illnesses traditionally believed to be caused by a "sluggish" or "congested" liver, including constipation, headaches, eye problems, gout, skin problems, fatigue, and boils. Building on this traditional thinking, some modern naturopathic physicians believe that dandelion can help [detoxify](#) or clean out the liver and gallbladder.² This concept has led to the additional suggestion that dandelion can reduce the side effects of medications processed by the liver, as well as relieve symptoms of diseases in which impaired liver function plays a role. However, while preliminary studies do suggest that dandelion root stimulates the flow of bile,^{3,4,5} there is as yet no meaningful scientific evidence that this observed effect leads to any of the benefits described above.

Dandelion root is also used like other bitter herbs to [improve appetite](#) and treat minor digestive disorders. When

dried and roasted, it is sometimes used as a coffee substitute. Finally, dandelion root is sometimes recommended for mild constipation.

Dosage

A typical dosage of dandelion root is 2 to 8 g, 3 times daily of dried root; 250 mg, 3 to 4 times daily of a 5:1 extract; or 5 to 10 ml, 3 times daily of a 1:5 tincture in 45% alcohol. The leaves may be eaten in salad or cooked.

Safety Issues

Dandelion root and leaves are believed to be quite safe, with no side effects or likely risks other than rare allergic reactions.⁷⁻¹⁰ Dandelion is on the FDA's GRAS (generally recognized as safe) list and approved for use as a food flavoring by the Council of Europe.

However, based on dandelion root's effect on bile secretion, Germany's Commission E has recommended that it not be used at all by individuals with obstruction of the bile ducts or other serious diseases of the gallbladder, and that it be used only under physician supervision by those with gallstones.¹¹

Some references state that dandelion root can cause hyperacidity and thereby increase ulcer pain, but this concern has been disputed.¹²

Because the leaves contain so much potassium, they probably resupply any potassium lost due to dandelion's mild diuretic effect, although this has not been proven.

People with known allergies to related plants, such as chamomile and yarrow, should use dandelion with caution.

There are no known drug interactions with dandelion. However, based on what we know about dandelion root's effects, there might be some risk when combining it with pharmaceutical diuretics or drugs that reduce blood sugar levels. In addition, individuals taking the medication lithium should use herbal diuretics such as dandelion leaf only under the supervision of a physician, as being dehydrated can be dangerous when using this medication.¹³

Safety in young children, pregnant or nursing women, or those with severe liver or kidney disease has not been established.

Interactions You Should Know About

If you are taking:

- Diuretic drugs, lithium, insulin, or oral medications that reduce blood sugar levels: Use dandelion only under doctor's supervision.
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Last reviewed August 2011 by [EBSCO CAM Review Board](#)
Last Updated: 8/1/2011