

Common Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)



Common Dandelions Blooming in a Field

--- and the street of the city is pure gold. Revelation 21:21b (NRSV)

Ordinary and Extraordinary Views

In the book of Revelation the streets of heaven are poetically described as made of pure gold transparent as glass. Often we think of eternity as in the future rather than as a part of our daily lives. NOW is part of eternity. God is with us and in love has created great beauty to enjoy. We can gaze in awe at a meadow covered with dandelions and see a carpet of gold.

If you are a teacher or a parent who has been presented with a golden bouquet of dandelions by a delighted child, then you have been given the gift of seeing the ordinary in an extraordinary way. Nearly all of us can look again and again at the very ordinary dandelion and learn something new and different with each experience.

Heavenly Father,
Help me today to see beauty and wonder in the very ordinary things and very familiar people in my life. Let me not take them for granted. Help me see them not as "weeds or enemies", but as part of your intricate and marvelous universe. Help me to approach the ordinary things and people in my environment through the eyes of a little child looking at some of their beauty for the first time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Things to Think About and Do

Plants and Animals

- Sit in a dandelion patch and count the number and different kinds of insects that come to the plants.
- Watch to see what kinds of birds come to eat dandelion seeds.
- Dig a large dandelion plant. What kinds of animals are found nearby under the plant? (Example: Earth worms) How does this compare to the animal life that is found farther away from the leaves of the plant? Why might these animals choose to live there?

Look Closely and Think About What You See

- Use a hand lens to examine the various parts of the plant. Look for the small barbs on the seeds that help them dig into the ground. Look at the parachute part of the seed. In many plants with such seeds the parachute is directly attached to the seed, but in the dandelion a small stalk extends from the seed to the parachute.
- Take close-up photos of single dandelion flowers, insects on blossoms, or a field of dandelions. Paint or draw pictures and have an art show. What new ways can you discover for appreciating the beauty of the plant?
- Pour water on a rosette of dandelion leaves. Look to see which directions the water runs. What difference might this make for the plant?
- Look for all the places where you can see yellow like the yellow of dandelions.
- Notice and record the times when the blossoms on a plant open and close. Is it the same time each day? Are there some that remain closed while others open? Why?
- Trace the edge of a dandelion leaf on paper with a pencil. Does the shape remind you of the jaw or molar teeth of a lion?

Taste and Smell

- Smell dandelion blossoms. Compare the smell of this plant to that of others blooming at the same time.
- Compare the taste of a young dandelion leaf to the taste of a mature leaf.
- Have a dandelion wild food tasting party. Include items such as root coffee, flower wine, blossom muffins, flower fritters, bread and butter sandwiches with dandelion leaves, wilted greens, bud omelets, noodles made with greens, and boiled and seasoned greens. Be sure you are using young leaves that appear before the plants flower and become bitter. Collect plants only from areas free from pesticides or lead from motor vehicles.

Texture

- Notice that the sap is milky but makes a brown stain on hands that is hard to remove.

Play With Plants

- Play with dandelion seed heads. How many puffs does it take to get all of the seeds off of one flower head?

- Make a chain of the stems of dandelions. Make each one by inserting the narrower part of the hollow stem into the larger part. Notice that each stem is wider at the bottom than close to the flower.
- Make a braid of dandelion flowers and stems. Use it like a necklace.

Other Uses

- Experiment with using various parts of the dandelion as a source for natural dyes.
- Go to a health food store or health food section of a large grocery store. Examine some of the herbal products to see if they include dandelions as part of their ingredients.

Environmental Concerns

- Have a debate between people who defend the many uses and beauty of dandelions and those who want to eradicate every dandelion plant in sight by using herbicides or who would never eat food unless it came from the grocery store.
- Role play or use puppets to play the parts of persons in the following situations:
 - Owner of a lawn who wants all lawns in the neighborhood to be dandelion free.
 - Owner of a lawn with dandelions who hesitates to use herbicides.
 - Sales representative of a "Will Kill" lawn service who is promoting weed free lawns.
 - Person who would like to collect dandelions or other wild edibles in a poison free setting.
 - Member of a church council or property committee who would like the church grounds to be environmentally safe or "green" and another member who wants the property to be weed free because of neighborhood responses and ease of upkeep.
 - Store owner or clerk selling lawn care products and garden herbicides

After the dramatization think about and discuss where you are on a continuum of environmental values..

- Look at the labels of herbicides used to kill dandelions or other broad-leafed plants. What birds, insects, and mammals need and use these plants? What effect will widespread use of the chemicals have on animal populations?
- Try using different kinds of tools for digging dandelions from unwanted places. What tools work best in different places?
- Use Internet search engines to locate new recipes and information, or to get the latest Environmental Protection Agency figures on herbicide use.