

DANDELIONS

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I never thought I would ever buy dandelion seeds but these were different; plants with red leaves and golden flowers. They sounded great. I only got twelve seeds; sowed and planted out six and three of them got nobbled by molluscs, straightaway! Who would have thought that 'weeds' were also prone to predatory, marauding molluscs?

The dandelion is a much underrated herb. Every part of the plant is edible; as a coffee, a tea, and as saladings. If it were introduced to gardeners now as a novel plant, it would actively be encouraged to grow and freely propagate itself (which it does readily). I'm actively encouraging any chance seedlings of dandelions to grow in any of my pots on the deck so that I can easily harvest them as salad greens.

Culpeper said in his Complete Herbal that it is, 'vulgarly called piss-a-beds', which is due, no doubt, to its diuretic properties. As a diuretic it is still superior to many drugs produced by the pharmaceutical industry today, and the dried leaves are rich in potassium.

In *A Dictionary of English Plant Names* by James Britten (1886), I could not find it under *Taraxacum officinale* (the current Latin name for dandelion) but I did find 'pissabed', along with its older Latin name of *Leontodon taraxacum* L. Other dialect/vernacular names include bitter-wort, Irish daisy, fortune teller, one o'clocks (my mother used this name), priest's crown, swine's snout and lion's teeth (the leaves are serrated and look like lion's teeth, hence *dandelion*, from the French *dent de lion*).

My parents used to eagerly await St. George's Day (April 23rd), as that was considered to be the time when the dandelions were at their peak of flowering. All those lovely golden flowers we had collected were then made into a beautiful, tasty and very potent home-made wine. (Truly an amber nectar!)

Dandelions have genuine therapeutic properties and today they are as useful as they were centuries ago. But, as Culpeper said, don't give dandelions to children near bedtime, for obvious reasons; the clue is in the vulgar vernacular name!

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