

Dandelions:

Dandelions are amazing little plants that are packed full of nutrients and healing medicinal compounds.

Dandelion Roots

Dandelion roots provide excellent support for the liver and digestive system. They help mitigate symptoms of nausea caused by poor digestion and help alleviate symptoms of gas, bloating, heartburn, etc. Dandelion roots help promote healthy bile flow in the liver, and because of the traditional American diet, many people struggle with proper bile flow and production.

In 2011 the Journal Of Ethnopharmacology reported the results of several studies that showed dandelion root tea may induce leukemia cells to die. The study goes on to show that the “kill” message the dandelion compounds give to the leukemia cells is not given to healthy cells. This means the chemical compounds in dandelion selectively induce cell death in leukemia cells but not in healthy human cells.

Dandelion root extract has been shown by research to boost immune function and aid the body in fighting off many different types of microbes.

Using Dandelion Roots:

Dig and wash thoroughly.

Chop and use roots as desired, or dry for later use.

For making a tincture with fresh roots, use 80-100 proof alcohol to extract both water and alcohol soluble compounds. Fill a jar 1/2 to 2/3 full of fresh roots and fill the remaining room in the jar with alcohol. Allow the tincture to sit in a cool, dark place for 6 weeks, then strain and use as desired.

To make an infused vinegar, add roots and other herbs as desired to a jar (fill the jar however full you wish based on the flavor you like) then fill the remaining room with the vinegar of your choice. For extra flavor, I suggesting adding a few fresh garlic cloves and some smoked salt or sea salt to the vinegar to improve the flavor. Allow the vinegar to infuse for 2-6 weeks and then strain and enjoy in salad dressings, or any recipes that call for vinegar. You can also take it straight by the dropper or spoonful as a medicine if you wish to avoid alcohol. Vinegar extracts vitamins and minerals much easier than alcohol does, so when you are trying to make a nutritive solution, vinegar is a great choice!

Dandelion Root Tea. You can make dandelion tea out of fresh dandelion roots, or you can dry them and use them later. Another fun option is roasting your dandelion roots, which gives them a more full, robust “coffee-like” flavor. You can roast your roots in the oven on low heat until they are fully dry and develop a caramel golden brown color. Allow the roots to cool fully and store in an airtight container until you wish to use them.

Dandelion Leaves:

Dandelion leaves are much more nutritious and delicious when they are very young and fresh. As they get older they get very bitter, which brings it's own added medicinal benefits, but nutritionally the best option is to use young leaves. They are extremely high in calcium, magnesium, vitamin A, C, K, folate, and potassium among many other nutrients. Dandelion greens have even more beta carotene than carrots do, making them an excellent choice to add to your diet if you wish to support your eye health.

Using Dandelion Leaves:

Harvest and wash the leaves thoroughly to remove any sand or grit.

Dandelion Leaf Vinegar: Use the same process as described above with the roots, but for a more delicious, nutritious vinegar (less medicinal but more nutritious) to use in salad dressings

and recipes. I like to add fresh garlic, onion and smoked sea salt to my dandelion vinegars and many other wild infused vinegars as this boosts the nutrition and flavor even more.

Dandelion Leaf Pesto: Harvest young dandelion greens before they get bitter, clean thoroughly, blend in a blender or food processor with basil, olive oil, spinach, pine nuts, parmesan cheese, sea salt, and whatever else you enjoy in your pesto. It's DELICIOUS!

Dandelion Chimichurri: Chimichurri is a delicious sauce that originated in Argentina, and is typically made with finely chopped parsley leaves, olive oil, lemon juice, balsamic vinegar, garlic, and sea salt. All the ingredients are chopped finely and mixed to make a delicious "paste" or thick leafy sauce that is yummy on bread, steak, salad, and many other dishes. To make dandelion leaf chimichurri, simply harvest the dandelion leaves when they are young and sweet, and substitute some or all of the fresh parsley leaf. You can find many amazing recipes for chimichurri online, so I won't write one here, but dandelion chimichurri is a great way to incorporate more nutritious dandelion into your diet without hardly even realizing it!

Dandelion Broth: Dandelion leaves are a fantastic addition to any vegetable broth. Broths are a phenomenal way to sneak more nutrition into your diet without even noticing. I use broths instead of water when cooking any time that it's possible to get more nutrition into my family's diet. Using broths to cook rice, pasta, potatoes, soups, sauces, etc., is an excellent way to have a more nutrient-rich diet.

To use dandelions in a broth, add the fresh young leaves to a pot of water, and add any other wild plants such as nettles for example, and any vegetable ends or pieces that you have in your fridge, along with an onion and some garlic, and simmer it on low for a few hours, in a covered pan. Strain the broth and use them in place of water in any recipe.

Dandelion Flowers

Dandelion flowers have many very similar nutritional properties to the leaves, but in general, are less nutrient-dense, but have a sweeter and more pleasant flavor as well.

Using Dandelion Flower Buds: Dandelion flower buds, in their tight ball stage, before they open can be harvested and pickled like capers. Simply harvest your dandelion buds when they are small and tight, rinse them, fill a jar 3/4 way with buds, then pour a hot pickle brine over the top (vinegar, salt, garlic, or whatever you like in a usual pickle brine) and seal with a hot lid. Enjoy these "dandelion capers" on salads, soups, etc.

Using Fully Developed Dandelion Flowers: If you remove the green part at the base of the dandelion flower, that takes away the most bitter part and leaves behind a much milder and sweeter tasting flower. These flowers can be dipped in a tempura type batter and fried lightly and eaten like fried squash blossoms as a nutritious side dish.

Skin Care: Dandelion flowers also make an excellent healing oil for the skin. You can harvest the flowers in full bloom, dry them fully on a rack with plenty of air circulation and out of direct sunlight which degrades the medicinal compounds. Once fully dried, dandelion flowers get fluffy and puffy almost like they suddenly went to seed. This is normal, and it doesn't mean you harvested the flowers too late.

To make an infused oil to use on the skin, in salves, soaps, etc., fill a jar (do not pack the blossoms in, just fill gently) with fully dried dandelion flowers, and then top the jar off with an oil of your choice. Extra virgin olive oil pairs very well with dandelion flowers, or jojoba can also be a great choice as well. Seal the jar, and allow it to infuse in a warm place out of direct sunlight for 6 weeks. After the 6 weeks, strain and press the oil through a fine cloth to remove all the plant bits, then bottle and use as needed for skincare.

Side note: If you use a food-grade oil, you can also use infused dandelion oil for cooking, which can be a great way to get more nutrients into your diet.

I am a HUGE fan of infused foods. I almost never cook a dish that doesn't have either an infused honey, vinegar, salt, or oil in it. It is a very easy way to add extra nutrition to any dish!

Other Wild Medicines To Harvest Now Or Soon: (depending on where you live)

Burdock Root:

Properties: Excellent tonic for the liver, detoxifies the blood, helps balance blood sugar levels, excellent for skin conditions and eruptions when used both internally and externally.

Things to make with Burdock Root

Tea
Tincture
Glycerite
Broths
Infused Vinegar
Infused Oil

Teasel Root: The meaning of the word teasel, is "to restore what is broken"

Properties: Teasel root is excellent at repairing tissue in the body, increasing bone mass, helps detoxify the liver, helps treat Lyme disease by drawing out the Lyme spirochetes that "hide" in deep tissues of the body where the immune system cannot attack or recognize them. Teasel draws bacteria and viruses out of the tissue and into the bloodstream and lymph system so the body or other herbs or medications can effectively treat the disease. Teasel helps improve memory, helps fatigue, helps reduce pain, is very helpful for treating candida overgrowth as it draws the candida out of the tissue and allows probiotics and other allies to help balance overgrowth and kill excess candida in the body. It also acts as an amazing prebiotic and helps encourage the growth of healthy bacteria in the gut. Teasel is amazing for many skin conditions, particularly those linked to poor liver and kidney function. Because of its tissue repairing propensities, it is an EXCELLENT tonic for athletes trying to recover from strenuous workouts or sports injuries. It is an excellent immune tonic as well and helps the body draw out and identify foreign intruders of many kinds.

Things to make with Teasel root:

Tea
Tincture
Infused Vinegar
Broth

Poplar Buds:

Properties: Decongestant that is excellent topically for chest congestion particularly, very soothing for deep tissue and bone pain, excellent for sunburn, frostbite, allergies, acne, and inflammation of all types.

Things to make with Poplar Buds:

Infused Oil
Infused Honey
Witch Hazel Infusion
Tincture

Tea

Elderflowers:

Properties: Diuretic, diaphoretic, anti-inflammatory, helps balance blood sugar, has been shown to kill MERSA, full of bioflavonoids like quercetin, isoquercitrin, and anthocyanins, helps sinusitis, influenza, swine flu, and is safe for use on most children and infants, as well as pets.

Things to make with elderflowers:

Tinctures

Glycerites

Teas

Elixirs

Syrups

Nettles:

Properties: Anti-histamine, anti-inflammatory, extremely nutrient-dense food, excellent for treating anemia, eases gout, may soothe arthritis pain, and the list goes on.

Things to make with nettles:

Cooked Greens

Tea

Glycerite

Tincture

Infused Vinegar (one of my FAVORITES which I use all the time)

Broths

Hawthorn Leaf And Flower

Properties: Helps improve cardiovascular function, helps regulate blood pressure, aids the body in regulating irregular heartbeat, improves the amount of blood pumped out of the heart during contractions, lowers cholesterol, anti-parasitic (specifically tapeworm), beneficial for digestive issues, and menstrual issues which are often connected to the heart and blood. Strengthens the heart muscle and energetically supports the heart as well.

Things to make with Hawthorn leaf and flower:

Teas

Tinctures

Glycerites

Syrups

Infused Vinegar

Other great medicinals to look for and harvest in the upcoming spring months:

Pineberries

Pine pollen

Horsetail

Cleavers

Mullein

Yarrow Leaves

Plantain

Fireweed Leaves