

# HERB - Dandelion

by Karen Unruh

Dandelion roots, leaves and flowers all have valuable medicinal uses. Fall/early winter is a good time to dig roots. Plants are not focussing energy on leaves or flowers and roots are receiving good plant energy and nutrition. Early February is still a good time as the new green leaves will just be starting. I am sure you have a few *Taraxacum officinale* or dandelions growing in the 'unattended garden' -- a place left natural for the birds and insects to scavenge. *Taraxacum officinale* can be identified from other dandelion-like plants in two ways: 1. it has no central stalk and no branching characteristics as all the leaves grow directly off the root crown in a rosette configuration, and 2. the leaf surfaces are not spiny or fuzzy. As I plan to use the roots of the plant, I often clip off the attention-getting flower heads (so that garden observers, like husbands, do not get negatively excited about "all those dandelions!") and the plant then sends more energy to the roots.

The dandelion is a tonic herbal, which means that it medicinally benefits nearly every body system, especially the liver, spleen, pancreas, gall bladder and kidneys. The root is especially recognized for its benefits to the liver. In herbal language, it is a chologogue as it cleanses and tones the liver, assisting the liver rid the body of toxins. The root also contains inulin (not *insulin*) which helps the body regulate blood sugar. The root is also considered one of the most effective diuretics, toning the kidneys and aiding proper water elimination while maintaining appropriate potassium levels. All three uses are pretty important in this day and age.

So thank the plants for giving their energy and nutrients to you; take your digging fork and dig out the whole plants. Of course if you don't get all the root, there will be another plant for next year. Discard the tops in the compost in the fall and winter -- spring is the time for using the greens and flowers. Shake off the soil and pop the roots in a bucket of water. When you get them to the kitchen sink, clean them with a soft brush -- the roots are brown on the outside and creamy white inside. Rinse and drain before chopping them into 1/4-inch coins. Scissors are good for this job. Place in a baking pan in a warm place -- I have a spot on the back of my stove top which is always warm and let them dry for a day or two, until they are thoroughly dry.

I have a Vita Mix to grind the dried roots to a fine powder which I store in a jar, ready to be added to baking recipes, about a tablespoon per recipe. A coffee grinder dedicated to herbs also works. Try my Dandelion Root Chocolate Chip Cookies (on Page 5) and your liver, pancreas and kidneys will thank you!

Now, as spring approaches, the new leaves and flowers of the *Taraxacum officinale* offer a rich source of easily absorbed minerals and vitamins -- Vitamin A, B, C, and E as well as organic sodium, potassium, and magnesium salts. Cleansing the blood and tissues, dandelion is useful for treating skin diseases and rheumatism. So we can pick the leaves and add them to salads and steamed veggies. To make sure I get a few leaves a day, when I am working in the garden I

make it a point to pick and eat 5 leaves right there in the garden. And if you are wondering what to do with the flowers, pick a handful, steep in a cup of boiling water, strain out the blossom pieces, add honey and enjoy. It helps to ease the pain of body cramps and stiffness. Herbs prepared as a tea are called infusions. Using wine as the herbal solvent, a handful of flowers are added to two cups of white wine, let sit a couple of weeks but do shake the mixture frequently, strain and then enjoy to relax the muscles. Herbal wines are a method of herbal preparations and the dosage is 2 – 4 ounces daily.

I checked the West Coast Seeds catalogue for seeds and see listed Italian Dandelion, *Catalogna frastagliata*, which is actually chicory, not dandelion. However the medicinal qualities are very similar to *Taraxacum officinale*. The leaves are similar but the flowers are blue, seen often along roadsides in nature.

Meanwhile I am going settle in with a cup of Dandelion Blend coffee substitute and one of my cookies – cleansing away the toxins in a most pleasant way.

## Dandelion Root Chocolate Chip Cookies

~Organic ingredients help to keep out the toxins! ~

Mix well in a mixing bowl:

- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup sucanat or raw sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Add to bowl and mix well:

- 1 1/2 cups flour--spelt is nice.
- 1 teaspoon stevia
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon powdered dandelion root

Stir in:

- 1 1/2 cups rolled oats
- 1/4 cup sunflower seeds
- 1/4 cup flax seeds
- 1/4 cup sesame seeds
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 2/3 cup chocolate chips

Spoon the dough by tablespoons onto a lightly oiled baking sheet,

Bake at 350°F for 8-10 minutes. Enjoy!

