



Science  
Societies

# The surprising benefits of eating dandelions

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DOWN TO EARTH



*Dandelions have numerous health benefits. Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock/TATIANA Z.*

This article is part of a series breaking down and explaining recent food and farming research for readers of all backgrounds, including those without formal scientific training.

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Dandelions have remarkable nutritional and medicinal properties, but they haven't been widely eaten or cultivated for many years. Little research has been done on their cultivation and production, so [a recent study](#) in *Agrosystems, Geosciences and Environment* investigated the best ways to farm this supposed weed.

Dandelions have numerous health benefits. They stimulate our natural insulin to fight diabetes, reduce blood cholesterol, and enhance immune response. They can prevent fatty liver disease, protect the pancreas, and don't contain any known toxins. The leaves provide calcium, magnesium, potassium, fibers, vitamins, and fatty acids, and the whole plant is rich in vitamins C and A. Cooked dandelions are low in nitrates, which can be carcinogenic in large doses.

Although young dandelion leaves are consumed in raw salad, they are more often cooked because the boiling process decreases their nitrate levels. They can also be made into teas that are proven to lower stress levels and bloating. Despite research revealing how healthy dandelions are, only a few studies have ever examined how to grow them properly.

Despite their medicinal and nutritional properties, dandelions are not traditionally farmed but rather gathered and harvested in the wild. The study in *Agrosystems, Geosciences and Environment* assesses how well dandelions can be mass produced because researchers want to grow healthier, climate-resistant food crops that can meet customer demand.

Dandelions are easy to grow alongside other crops because they don't significantly compete with most plants for nutrients or sunlight. However, they do compete with grass for space. They can grow in many different conditions, but for edible dandelions, partial or full shade is best to keep the leaves from becoming bitter. Dandelions enjoy loose, fertile soil and tend to grow best in early spring and late summer.

According to research, dandelions grown in the shade are larger and more tender with a milder flavor. It's recommended you pick off the small leaves before eating them because as the leaves develop, the dandelions become more bitter.

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The study found a massive amount of promise from dandelions as a food crop but also pointed out some issues that future studies will need to address. The rate of seed planting doesn't seem to affect productivity, for example, and researchers aren't sure what varieties or breeds would be best for commercial sale yet.

With all these potential issues in mind, dandelions are still showing an enormous amount of promise, and there is much to gain from understanding their health benefits.

The article may change people's view of dandelions. More than a weed, dandelions can be beneficial to our health.

### **Dig deeper**

The original research from *Agrosystems, Geosciences & Environment* can be viewed at:

Basso, E., Pornaro, C., Zanin, G., Giannini, M., & Macolino, S. (2024). Preliminary results of dandelion cultivation under different seeding rates and harvest regimes. *Agrosystems, Geosciences & Environment*, 7, e20521.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/agg2.20521>

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