

DANDELION

Taraxacum officinale



Biology:

The Dandelion is an herbaceous perennial growing from a thick, unbranching tap root. The deeply toothed leaves are basal, meaning they don't grow up on stems, but emerge from the crown of the plant at ground level. The bright yellow flowers (do you really need a description?) grow on hollow stalks that may hug the ground or reach as high as 70 cm. The flower head is actually a tightly packed mass of many tiny florets (individual flowers), typical of the entire family of plants, the Asteracea. Each petal represents a single flower. The plants have a milky latex that oozes out if leaves or stems are broken.

Life Cycle:

Dandelions grow from seeds and do not spread asexually from stolons or runner; they have a single tap root. However, they can and do reproduce asexually by seed. They are capable of producing viable seed without need of cross-fertilization, a process known as "apomixis". The resulting progeny, also capable of apomixis, are basically clones of the parent plant. Most of the seed production in Dandelions is due to this process. In other words, how many Dandelions does it

take to cover your entire lawn? Only one, given a little time.

Dandelions tend to flower most abundantly in spring, but can re-flower in the fall, too. Flowers open in the morning and tend to close up at night. After a couple of days in flower they close, and the seeds develop inside the closed head. The seeds, technically a fruit called a "cypsela" are produced on the flower stalk with each seed representing one of the florets in the flower head. Each has a pappus, a set of feathery bristles that act as a sail or parachute ensuring distribution of the seed by the wind. (*What kid doesn't know that?*) As the seeds mature the flower stalk elongates greatly, raising the fluffy seed head up into the breeze.

When a seed germinates it produces a rosette of tiny leaves close to the ground surface and concentrates on growing a deep tap root. By the time you see a dandelion plant it is well established, which is why it seems you can never get rid of all the Dandelions in your lawn. There's always a new generation in the waiting. Individual plants can grow for 5-10 years and reach a considerable size, up to 50 cm across.

Control:

Don't cut your grass so short! Never cut grass shorter than 5 cm and don't cut more than 1/3 of the blade length at a time. When you scalp your grass you let more light in for Dandelions to grow.

Don't use fertilizers. Dandelions and other weeds are better at sucking up fertilizers than the grass. Encourage plants like clovers to grow in the lawn providing natural sources of nitrogen fertilizer.

Chemical:

- 2,4D
- Express
- Express PRO
- Florasulam (PrePass)