

# Dandelion – *Taraxacum officinale* agg.

The Dandelion, so common throughout the British Isles, is named *Taraxacum officinale*, a species name that is suggestive of its roots' use in herbal medicine and the edibility of the leaves. They make an excellent salad leaf, tasty and nutritious, early in the year before most folk's lettuces are ready. The roots have been used in various ways, valued for their bitter taste and the flowers used in wine-making.

Dandelions produce copious nectar and pollen and are an important food source, particularly early in the year, for honeybees, bumblebees both short and long-tongued, and many species of solitary bees. Despite the plant's investment in attracting insects, the flowers often produce seeds asexually or apomictically, without pollination, the seeds being genetically identical to their parent. This leads to a problematic taxonomy of our Dandelions, forming a 'complex' consisting of around 200 microspecies, typically treated as a species aggregate, denoted as *Taraxacum officinale* agg. In Southern Europe the flowers are more often pollinated and the sexually produced seeds showing genetic variation.



A perennial, the dandelion has a deep tap-root, allowing access to moisture and nutrients less available to many other herbaceous species. Although flowering throughout much of the year from March to October, the flowers have a burst of abundance in late April or early May. Some say St George's Day, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, is the day to collect flower-heads for wine.

Lincolnshire artist, May Jones, has captured the sequence of bud to flower to clock of seeds blown away in her paintings.

