

# DANDELIONS ARE NOT ALL BAD

by Lyn Chimera

At the November meeting of the WNY Hosta Society there was a very interesting speaker, Jack Kowiak. His topic was “Amazing Backyard Plants”. One of the plants he discussed was the dandelion. It’s not surprising to know dandelions are first on the list of plants people dislike. However, there are many amazing uses for this much maligned weed. It is truly an example of the saying, “The difference between a weed and a flower is a state of mind”.

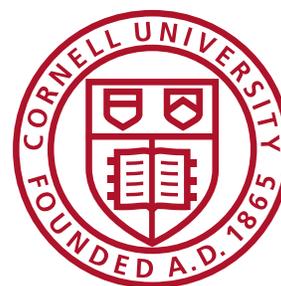
Many of us are aware of the nutritional value of dandelions as they are loaded with nutrients and minerals. It’s one of the most nutrient rich plants you can eat. Dandelions are more beneficial than spinach or kale and have been used in herbal medicines for centuries. Books have been written about its medicinal properties. The taste is slightly bitter like arugula. If you harvest your own, it’s best to do in early spring as they get more bitter with age. The greens you buy are bred for better flavor so might be a good way to go.

Did you know rubber can be made from the milky sap in the dandelion stems? According to Mr. Kowiak, dandelions helped win WWII by providing rubber for the tires of military vehicles. When rubber from rubber trees became scarce scientists looked for substitutes and discovered the lowly dandelion (especially the Russian variety) produced an excellent rubber. The Allies used this rubber to keep their armies running. Currently companies are looking to the dandelion again as a fungus is attacking many of the rubber trees in Southeast Asia. Dandelions are also showing promise as a natural source of ethanol.

According to Mr. Kowiak, Dandelions provide up to 90% of the food source for bees in early spring. They can also be used to forecast the weather. If rain is coming and the plant has gone to seed, the head will close around the fluffy seed ball to protect it and it will not re-open until the weather has cleared. In England its known as “clock flower” because children use it to tell when it’s time to go home for dinner. Blowing on the seed heads tells the time. It takes 1 blow to remove seeds at 1:00, 2 at 2:00, 3 at 3:00 and 4 at 4:00 when it’s time to go home. Well, it’s a lovely story! ■



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