

Dandelions

My Taraxacum is acting up. No, not back pain. No, not some horrible form of foot fungus. Worse. Taraxacum is the scientific names for dandelions.

Along with mosquitoes, property taxes, and the Stanley Cup Playoffs, dandelions are a sure sign that summer has finally come to the prairies.

Now my grandchildren think that dandelions are beautiful. They 'ooh!' and 'aah' from the backseat as we drive past roadways bordered with millions of these bright yellow flowers. They sacrifice valuable playtime at our local playground to pick bouquets of dandelions for their doting grandma. They complain at the injustice of some people having bountiful crops of bright yellow flowers while poor old grandpa has to struggle along with his pitiful display of tulips (or 'TWOLOOPS' in my grandson's parlance). Where they see beauty, I see a noxious weed and an arch nemesis to beautiful lawns everywhere.

Where did dandelions come from? According to popular legend, they were brought to North America by settlers on the Mayflower around 1620 along with such other European bequests such as smallpox, horses, gunpowder, whisky, taxes and spandex.

Why are they called dandelions? It is derived from an English corruption of the French *dent de lion* meaning ' lion's tooth ', referring to the coarsely toothed leaves. Other less well known but perhaps more appropriate names include ' blowball ', 'cankerwort', ' witches gowan ', swine's snout ', ' pee – a- bed ', and (my personal favourite) ' damned yellow flower from hell'.

Why do some people dislike them? They can ruin the perfection of a lush, green, billiard table perfect lawn. They spread like crazy. They turn into unsightly puffballs. They are a visible symbol that the host family is antisocial and won't respect our widely held street dream of agrarian perfection. In fact, there are stories that the last resident on 42nd avenue with a significant dandelion problem woke up one night to find a cross burning on his lawn surrounded by a bunch of people in Bermuda shorts with pillow cases over their heads.

What to do? Options to get rid of these pesty dandelions are few. The traditional use of pesticides is falling out of favour. More and more municipalities (157 at last count) are banning chemical control of dandelions. (I must confess that in the deepest and darkest reaches of my garden shed, I have a plentiful supply of Killex and, like any respectable middle eastern dictator, am not afraid to use it if pushed too far.) Other options include digging them up (a near impossibility as a failure to remove even the teeniest, microscopic bit of root will simply cause the weed to grow back only stronger and harder than ever) or applying a homemade 'natural' pesticide such as a mix of vinegar, dog pee and *cabernet sauvignon* (which is difficult to collect in large quantities because I like drinking wine and tends to kill a wide circle of otherwise healthy lawn upon initial application). The sad truth is that it is almost impossible to eradicate dandelions which are slowly taking over our planet. Dandelions are developing earlier each spring due to global warming. Chris Hadfield, our Canadian leader of the space

station, is said to have reported that the predominant colors of our planet are now blue and yellow.

Many people are now throwing up their hands and looking for opportunities to make peace and coexist with this aggressive weed. For example, dandelions are said to possess great diuretic properties and that children playing with dandelions have been known to wet the bed the following night just by absorbing some of the compounds through the skin. When eaten, dandelions can be surprisingly good for you. Half a cup of leaves has more calcium than a glass of milk. They're also a an excellent source of iron, vitamin A, potassium and vitamin C and munching on dandelions is a good method of preventing scurvy. You can also make dandelion wine and use dandelions to repel mosquitoes (they can't stand living with ugly lawns either) and get rid of warts (I will leave that to your imagination).

So there you have it. I am going to raise the white flag of surrender and let the genus *Taraxacum* make a glorious yellow banquet of my front lawn. My grandchildren will be thrilled and my neighbours will soon come round after I begin curing their warts, eliminating their fluid retention problems, and generally restoring their good health with plentiful infusions of dandelion wine.

Who knows? Enough dandelion wine and my weed infested and puffball dominated lawn might start to look pretty good. Dandelions rule!