

# bepesticidefree

## *problem pests: Dandelions!*

### What exactly is it?

Dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*) are a deeply tap-rooted perennial and are the most common complaint amongst gardeners. Dandelions are very common due to Saskatchewan's cool and arid climate. Windy conditions help transport dandelion seeds from place to place, making the spread of dandelions difficult to control.

### How to Deal with it:

#### *Preventative Controls:*

**Read your weeds!** Dandelions often indicate compacted soil, an excess of potassium and a deficiency in calcium. A thick, healthy lawn will better out-compete the dandelions in the growing season. In the early spring, after aeration, thatch removal and a light (1cm) layer of compost, over-seed with grass seed that is suited to your local conditions. Do this annually to help your lawn win the fight against weeds.

**Create a barrier!** When gardening, apply a plastic liner under your soil to prevent weeds from cropping up. These liners can be purchased at your local garden centres or you can simply use a large black garbage bag.



Upright weeding tools such as the **Weed Hound** on the far left and hand weeding tools such as the **culfi-weeder tool** (below) can be found at home and garden centres in Saskatoon, SK.



#### *How to Identify Dandelions*

##### **Leaves:**

- dark green, long, spear shaped
- grows from the root and circles the stem
- 5 to 25cm in length

##### **Roots:**

- tap root system with a long thick central root

##### **Stems:**

- short, hollow, dark greenish-brown
- lined with a milky white substance

##### **Flowers:**

- thick and round
- bright yellow to orange in colour
- 2 to 5 cm in diameter
- goes to seed – puffy white attachment

#### *Mechanical Controls:*

Sometimes you just have to give it some elbow grease. Digging is key since dandelions have a simple yet deep tap root system.

1. Weed early in the spring. If you get them when they first pop up, the roots will not be very extensive and you can get them before they spread too far. **Extract the whole root.**
2. Be consistent. Don't let the roots take over- you will have to dig throughout the season.
3. Regularly mow, rake or pick the heads off (before they go to seed) of your dandelions throughout the season to prevent maturation and distribution of weed seeds.
4. Be sure to discard the roots in a bucket and throw into the garbage. This plant can take root everywhere and the compost may miss it in the decomposing process, which means you will plant it all over again.
5. Use some good digging tools to access the roots and don't require too much bending. A few that are commercially available are pictured on the left:

## Organic Controls:

There are many pesticide-free alternatives that can be used to combat those pesky yellow blooms.

1. Maintain a **healthy, enriched soil!** Most weeds enjoy a poor soil with slightly acidic conditions so keeping your soil healthy will make your gardens less appealing to the weeds. Furthermore, the fluffy soil will make rooting more difficult for them and pulling out easier for you!
2. Pour **boiling water** over the affected areas to kill the plant then remove the dead plant so that it does not re-bloom.
3. Spot treat with a 5-10% solution of **vinegar**. You can put this solution in a spray bottle or pour it directly on the plant. For an added kick, you can heat up the vinegar before application. Be careful not to over-use this as the vinegar can also damage the surrounding grass.
4. **Sheet mulching:** If dandelions are covering a large area in your yard, you can cover the plants to prevent the photosynthetic process needed to sustain the plant. You can do this with a large sheet of black plastic, cardboard or old carpet placed over the area full of dandelions. This will slowly kill the dandelions, making manual removal easier.
5. **Corn Gluten Meal (CGM)** is a protein produced from the by-product from the corn milling process that can be found at most garden centres. When spread over a lawn or garden area, CGM will suppress germination. It will **not** kill existing dandelion plants, but it will stop the seeds that it has spread for next year. Since dandelions are an annual plant, with consistent application of CGM, they should be under control in two to four growing seasons. It is very important to apply CGM 4-6 weeks before weeds germinate in the spring. **Do not spread CGM directly after over-seeding your lawn or you will kill your grass seeds.**
6. If the above solutions do not work, you can always try a **weed burner torch** or a blowtorch to burn them away. **USE WITH CAUTION AND WEAR PROTECTIVE GEAR – MASK, GLOVES, ETC.**



## If you can't beat 'em, eat 'em!!

Pull the dandelions leaves when they're young and eat them in a salad or use the flowers to make dandelion wine. Make sure they haven't been treated with chemicals! The following is a basic dandelion wine recipe. You can find many more delicious recipes at <http://fooddownunder.com/cgi-bin/search.cgi?q=dandelion>.

### Dandelion Wine

#### Ingredients:

- 4 qt Dandelion blossoms
- 4 qt Boiling water
- 6 x Oranges
- 4 x Lemons
- 2 x Yeast cakes
- 4 lb Sugar



Scald the blossoms in the boiling water & let stand overnight. The next morning, strain, add the pulp & juice of 6 oranges, the juice of 4 lemons, the yeast & the sugar. Let ferment for 4 days, then strain & bottle. Serve in small glasses at room temperature.



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