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To Grow a Great Garden, Start With Amazing Seeds!

Growing Instructions: Dandelions

Dandelions can be sown outdoors four to six weeks before the last frost. Sow seed directly, and once they've sprouted above the soil, thin so they are 6 to 8 inches apart. Dandelions readily reseed themselves, but often in places where you'd rather they didn't grow.

Growing Dandelions

Dandelions prefer full sun but will clearly grow in just about any light. As we all know, it doesn't really matter what type of soil they have, whether the drainage is adequate, or anything else for that matter, because these plants are incredibly resilient and tolerant of poor conditions. Add liberal amounts of compost to areas you're sowing if you plan on harvesting the roots.

Harvesting Dandelions

A few weeks before harvesting the leaves, cover the plants with a dark, opaque fabric to block out most of the light, which will blanch the leaves, reducing the bitterness. The youngest leaves are the least bitter and most flavorful. Tender leaves can be picked throughout the growing season.

If you are harvesting the blossoms, pick the flowers when they are bright yellow and young. Use them fresh, making sure to remove all of the stem. To prevent the flowers from closing after cutting, place them in a bowl of cold water, taking them out just before eating or serving them.

The roots can be harvested at any time. Chop the dried roots into pieces 2 inches long and roast at 300° F for about 10 minutes. Grind the roasted pieces, adding a quarter teaspoon to your coffee or hot chocolate for a new flavor.

Tips for Growing Dandelions

Dandelions can be added to your herb garden, or they can be grown in a block or row in your vegetable garden. Dandelions can also be directly sown into containers for harvest closer to the kitchen.

The greens are high in calcium, iron, and potassium, and very low in calories. Every part of the plant can be used, clearly they're easy to grow, and they're even attractive. All you have to do is get past the negative associations with them. If you're willing to try something new in your garden, make it dandelions.

The leaves are delicious in salads and are a fine substitute for spinach. They also work beautifully in fresh vegetable dishes. The flavor of bacon is the perfect complement to dandelion leaves, and many soups and casseroles benefit from their addition.

The crowns are a delicacy when deep fried, and the roots can be used as a coffee substitute after being roasted and ground.

The flowers have many uses, including for wine, fresh in salads and deep-fried in butter, and the young buds are high in protein. Unopened flower buds are tender and tasty, and they offer a crunch in green salads.