

# #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:

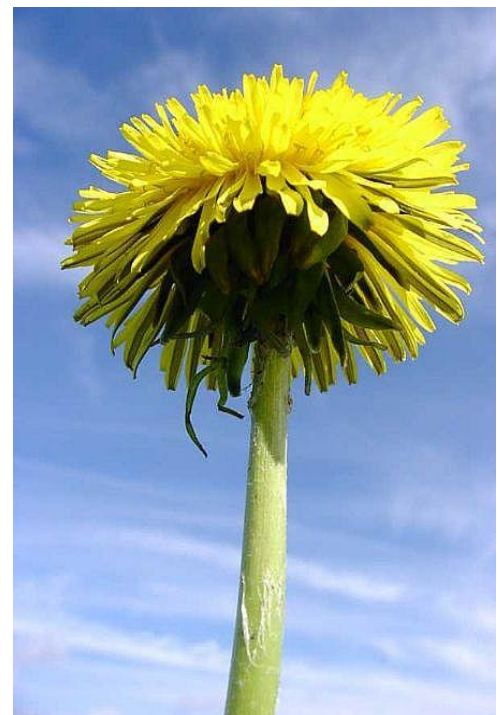
**Read your weeds!** Dandelions often indicate compacted soil, an excess of potassium and a deficiency in calcium. A thick, healthy lawn will better out-compete the dandelions in the growing season. In the early spring, after aeration, thatch removal and a light (1cm) layer of compost, over-seed with 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.

#### 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 them into the garbage. Composting dandelions isn't recommended because some seeds may not fully compost, and could re-grow in your lawn or garden.
5. Use some good digging tools to access the roots and don't require too much bending. Upright weeding tools such as the Weed Hound and hand weeding tools such as the culti-weeder tool 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

## 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.**



Dandelion pickers, like the one above, can be found at your local garden centre.

## History of the Dandelion:

The word Dandelion comes from the French name for the plant called **dents de lion**. This means **teeth of the lion** and refers to the jagged edges of dandelion leaves. The dandelion originated in the temperate and subarctic Eurasia. It was introduced to North America in the mid-1600s when European settlers cultivated it in their gardens for food and medicine. Since then, it has spread across the continent.

## Interesting fact about the Dandelion:

The dandelion blossoms attract certain insects, including honeybees, to feed on the pollen and nectar. Many of these insects are important pollinators of other plants, including crops.

To learn more about the information in this factsheet:

**Website:** [www.plantec.com/dandelions.htm](http://www.plantec.com/dandelions.htm),  
[Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides - Dandelions](http://Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides - Dandelions),  
[www.cobrahead.com](http://www.cobrahead.com)



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