CHOPPING CLUB: MAY 2020

Hello to our wonderful chopping club. We miss you all so much.
This month, we're sharing some ways of cooking with...

Dandelions

Dandelions are everywhere at the moment. I suppose they are always everywhere, but maybe this year i've noticed them especially. From inside the house they are one of the few signs of spring that i can see from my window, springing up on front steps, between cracks in tiles, and in the gap between front walls and the pavement. I love their ability to make use of any patch of land, however unpromising - and not even land, but the crack in a brick wall or the hollow of a tree stump.

It's probably because i'm not a gardener that i have such positive feelings towards them. The dandelion is the UK's most prolific weed, and will grow just about anywhere it can get its seeds to spread, which is just about everywhere. When you (or the wind) blows a dandelion clock, up to 5,000 seeds can spread up to 200 metres. When established, every gardener knows how deep those long taproots can grow, and how well the plant can withstand mowing and trampling. But a weed is a plant out of place, as the saying goes. And dandelion wasn't always considered a weed here, and isn't considered a weed in many parts of the world.

My three year old is another reason i've been noticing dandelions. He points them out to me whenever we are out. He has been keeping track of them in the park, notices how they're dotted through the grass, and how they are changing (his favourite stage is the puffball seed head of course) and asks if he can eat them. He was incredibly excited when i said, for once, that he could!

All parts of the dandelion are edible, and nutritious, and potentially delicious, and it has also long been valued for its medicinal properties. It is high in vitamin C, K and D - dandelions greens picked in early spring used to be thought of both as a food and a tonic to cure people of diseases they'd picked up over the long winter months.

The many names of dandelions give a clue to some of its characteristics:

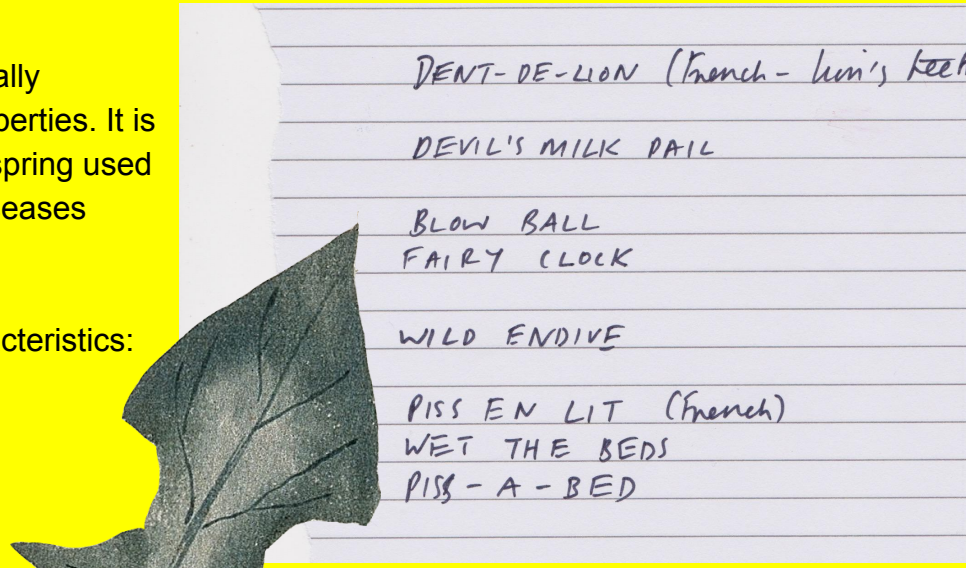
Dent de lion (French – lion's teeth, for it's toothed leaves)

Devil's Milk Pail - for it's milky white latex

Blow ball, Fairy Clock

Wild Endive

Piss-en-lit (French),
Wet the Bed or Piss-a-Bed



Greg say that kids used to tell him that you'd wet yourself if you touched a dandelion. This is not true! But like lots of the tales kids tell it is based in fact - dandelion is a diuretic! Just to warn you….(it has been used medicinally for this purpose)

A few tips on Identifying and picking

Dandelions are flowering now, so they're very easy to spot (they flower from March-October). You probably think you can easily recognise a dandelion, but there are actually a range of other flowers called 'false dandelions' from the same family (Asteraceae) which look very similar. **The good news is that the whole family is considered edible and safe**. For more information this is a good resource comparing dandelion to one of its lookalikes: Cats Ear
http://identifythatplant.com/dandelion-and-cats-ear/

For a true dandelion look for:

Toothed hairless leaves - resembling lions teeth
A hollow, leafless stem
Only one bright yellow flower head per stem
Stem and root produce a milky latex

Always pick from an area where you can be sure that no pesticides are being sprayed and that isn't right next to a busy road. Beware also of places which dogs are likely to use as a toilet - around the bases of trees and lamposts best avoided!

For those of you nearby, Laura tells us there are loads in St Mary's Churchyard in Bootle

1. Flowers

Flowers should be freshly picked and washed in plenty of cold water, or just shaken to remove any bugs if you're sure they are from a clean spot (this will keep any pollen on the flower). You'll probably want to carefully remove the green, downward pointing bits from the base of the flower as this can be quite bitter - but depends how sensitive you are to bitterness, really, so have a taste first if you think that sounds very time consuming. Once they're deep fried for example you probably won't notice!

Before opening

Before trimming

After trimming

1. Buds

If you find a young rosette with tightly closed buds, you can pickle them in vinegar salt and sugar to

On-the-move photo of me collecting leaves for a salad for yesterday's dinner

Rachel Pimm saying hello

Hi, we've not met and this is definitely a funny format to do so, but I am a really avid eater of weeds (and clays and salt and mushrooms and other foraged things) and I've been in my garden and local weed-growing spots and cooking along with the recipes and joining you for this Chopping club

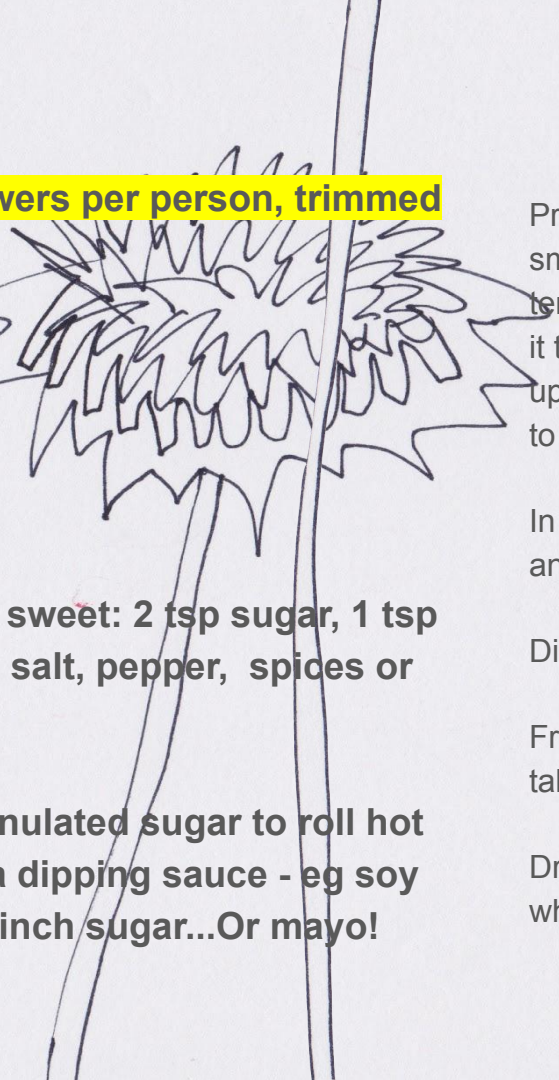
I usually live in London, and my art work is about how plants and minerals are used in the world, making videos and writing. I research using archival books, and I have been checking in the Herbal Medicine books from as far back as the 15th and 16th centuries to find more on the dandelion and its benefits.

I'll say hi in green

Flower Fritters - Video by Greg Herbert

These can be a sweet or savoury snack! This is also a good batter to use for all kinds of vegetables or other edible flowers like elderflower. If you have left over batter, try dipping something else in it Eg. mushrooms, kale, thinly sliced carrots, nettle tops, wild garlic leaves, cleavers, broccoli florets.

Flower Fritters



Handful dandelion flowers per person, trimmed
1 egg
250ml/ 1 cup any milk
125g/1 cup any flour
1tsp baking powder
Plenty of oil for frying
(you can re-use this)

Add in suggestions: **If sweet: 2 tsp sugar, 1 tsp cinnamon. If savoury : salt, pepper, spices or herbs of choice**

To serve: **If sweet: granulated sugar to roll hot fritters in. If savoury: a dipping sauce - eg soy sauce+ sesame oil + pinch sugar...Or mayo!**

Pre-heat around 5cm oil in a saucepan or wok. If oil starts smoking turn it down, it's too hot. You can check that the temperature is right by test- frying a small blob of batter - you want it to sink down about halfway in the oil and then immediately float up to the top. If it sinks to the bottom your oil is too cold. If it rises to the surface straight away - too hot.

In a bowl, whisk all ingredients except flowers together, including any add ins (see ingredients list)

Dip the flowers in the batter 4-5 at a time

Fry in batches. Fry flower side down, then flip over - it should only take a minute on each side for them to puff up, crispy and golden.

Drain on kitchen paper or a clean tea towel and, if they are sweet, whilst hot, dip in your coating of choice.

Other batters to try:

100g Gram flour + 50 ml water + cumin or fennel seeds + chilli powder

80g Plain flour + 200ml fizzy water. Eat with soy sauce or a dipping sauce made with soy + sugar + vinegar + chilli

The first batch I tried were these fritters deep fried in coconut oil

The second batch, using the same batter but no oil i made these little pancakes and poured maple syrup all over them

2. Leaves

When I was small, I have a very distant memory of being afraid of dandelions, of hiding behind grown up legs when I spotted them in the park. I used to think that the name was some reference to the yellow ‘mane’ of petals, like a cartoon drawing of a lion But the name is actually all about the distinctive leaves which any gardener or keeper of a pristine lawn learns to recognise early on, before the flowers appear.

The leaves are slightly bitter, They are more bitter the older they get, as with most things, so pick early in the spring if you are more sensitive to bitterness. Cooking eases the bitterness, so with older leaves this might be the way to go.

A really nice way to cook them is ‘‘Strascinata’ which is a Roman word for ‘dragged’ referring to a way of dragging bitter greens round a pan full of garlic and chili and other good things.

following a youtube video from a 94 year old who ate these during the great depression

I dressed these with
honey
lemon
mustard
apple cider vinegar
salt
olive oil

After collecting handfuls, I can advise that if the leaves are very small, young and soft and tender, like rocket from a bag, they will taste much sweeter

Dragged around Dandelion Greens

Per Person:

Large handful Dandelion Greens, washed (you can wash in salted water if you like, as this apparently also reduced bitterness

Clove Garlic, finely chopped

Juice and zest of ½ lemon

2 tbps oil

Salt, pepper, chilli flakes

Roughly chop the leaves into about 4cm pieces (or in half)

Boil greens in a large pan of salted water for around 10 mins, until tender

Heat oil in a frying pan. Fry the garlic, lemons zest and chil flakes for a minute, until fragrant and then add the greens. Drag them around the pan for a couple of minutes until wilted and coated in the oil.

Squeeze half a lemon over them and season with salt and pepper.

Particularly good on toast, maybe with an egg (poached or fried) and some grated cheese.

3. Roots

There are lots of recipes for dandelion roots but i haven't tried any yet...let me know if you have!

You can make dandelion root coffee from the roasted roots, and you can also use them as vegetable - but apparently if you're eating them like this they are best in early spring - we'll try it next year

Or instead of uprooting dandelions, you might decide to embrace them, or even cultivate them

Dandelions 'are superb plants for growing in the lawn, able to tolerate regular cutting and constant trampling'

'Try manuring them, and covering the lower parts of the leaves with earth or a cardboard tube to blanch them like chicory. They did this in medieval gardens and produced gigantic plants as a result' (Plants for a Future, Ken Fern)

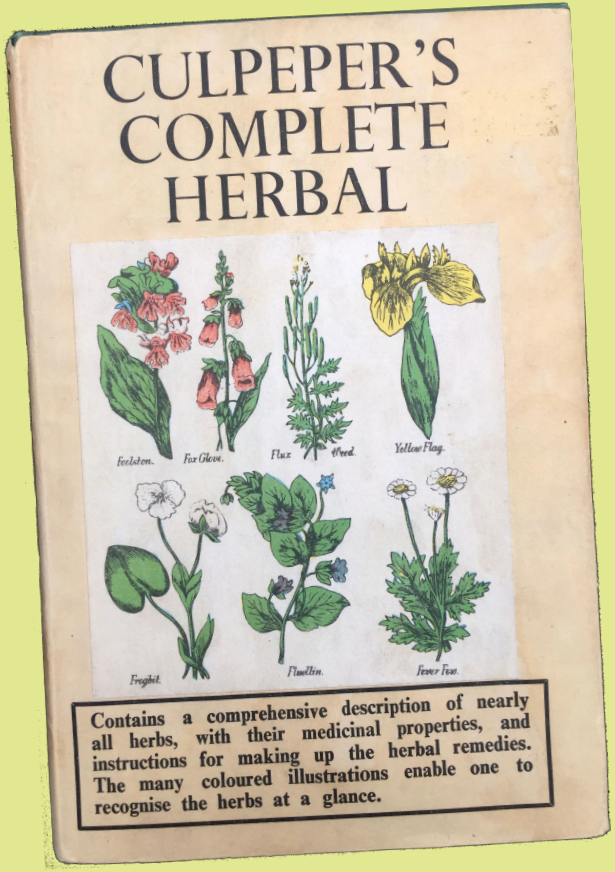
It takes around 15 (young unbudded) fully dug up cleaned and cut tap roots that have not yet flowered to make 1 cup of coffee, so it's a big job, but it's similar in taste, less bitter and not caffeinated, so great for kids- Boil the roasted roots with spices like chai

Dandelions in History and Herbal Medicine books

Medicine picked from physic gardens, and prepared to a recipe in a pharmacopoeia by apothecaries.

From
Culpeper's Herbal
1563

'A comprehensive
Description
of nearly
All Herbs
With their
Medicinal Properties
And
Directions for
Compounding the
Medicines
Extracted
From them



DANDELION.—(*Leontodon Taraxacum.*)

1. *Common.* 2. *Rough.* 3. *Branchy.*

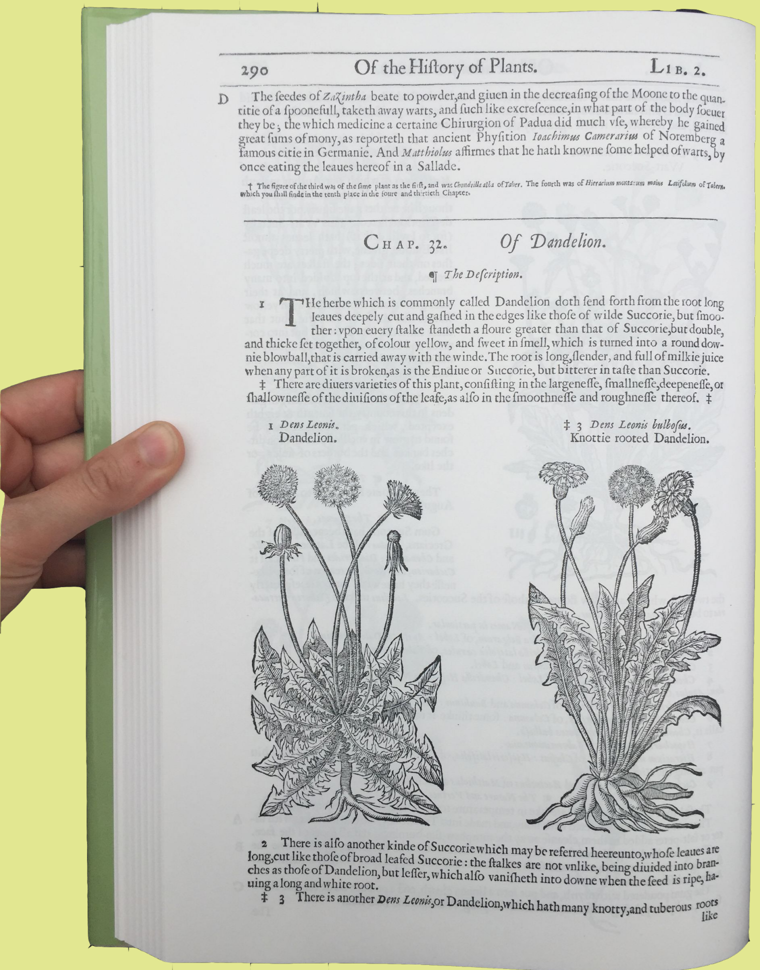
VULGARLY called Piss-a-Beds.

Descrip.—It is well known to have many long and deep gashed leaves lying on the ground round about the heads of the roots; the ends of each gash or jag, on both sides looking downwards towards the roots; the middle rib being white, which being broken yieldeth abundance of bitter milk, but the root much more; from among the leaves, which always abide green, arise many slender, weak, naked foot-stalks, every one of them bearing at the top one large yellow flower, consisting of many rows of yellow leaves, broad at the points, and nicked in with deep spots of yellow in the middle, which growing ripe,

Government and Virtues.—It is under the dominion of Jupiter. It is of an opening and cleansing quality, and therefore very effectual for the obstructions of the liver, gall, and spleen, and the diseases that arise from them, as the jaundice and hypochondriac; it openeth the passages of the urine both in young and old; powerfully cleanseth imposthumes and inward ulcers in the urinary passages, and by its drying and temperate quality doth afterwards heal them; for which purpose the decoction of the roots or leaves in white wine, or the leaves chopped as pot herbs with a few alisanders, and boiled in their broth, are very effectual. And whoever is drawing towards a consumption, or an evil disposition of the whole body called cachexia, by the use hereof for some time together shall find a wonderful help. It helpeth also to procure rest and sleep to bodies distempered by the heat of ague fits, or otherwise: the distilled water is effectual to drink in pestilenial fevers, and to wash the sores.

Dandelions in History and Herbal Medicine books

From Gerard's Herbal, written in 1554



290 Of the Hiſtory of Plants. LIB. 2.

D The ſeedes of *Zazintha* beate to powder, and giuen in the decreaſing of the Moone to the quantitie of a ſpoonefull, taketh away warts, and ſuch like excreſcence, in what part of the body ſoeuer they be; the which medicine a certaine Chirurgion of Padua did much vſe, whereby he gained great ſums of mony, as reporteth that ancient Phyſition *Ioachimus Camerarius* of Noremberg a famous citie in Germanie. And *Matthiolus* affirmes that he hath knowne ſome helped of warts, by once eating the leaues hereof in a Sallade.

† The figure of the third was of the ſame plant as the firſt, and was *Chondrilla alba* of *Taber.* The fourth was of *Hieracium montanum maius Latifolium* of *Tabern.* which you ſhall finde in the tenth place in the foure and thirtieth Chapter.

CHAP. 32. *Of Dandelion.*

¶ *The Deſcription.*

1 THe herbe which is commonly called Dandelion doth ſend forth from the root long leaues deepely cut and gaſhed in the edges like thoſe of wilde Succorie, but ſmoother: vpon euery ſtalke ſtandeth a floure greater than that of Succorie, but double, and thicke ſet together, of colour yellow, and ſweet in ſmell, which is turned into a round downie blowball, that is carried away with the winde. The root is long, ſlender, and full of milkie juice when any part of it is broken, as is the Endiue or Succorie, but bitterer in taſte than Succorie.

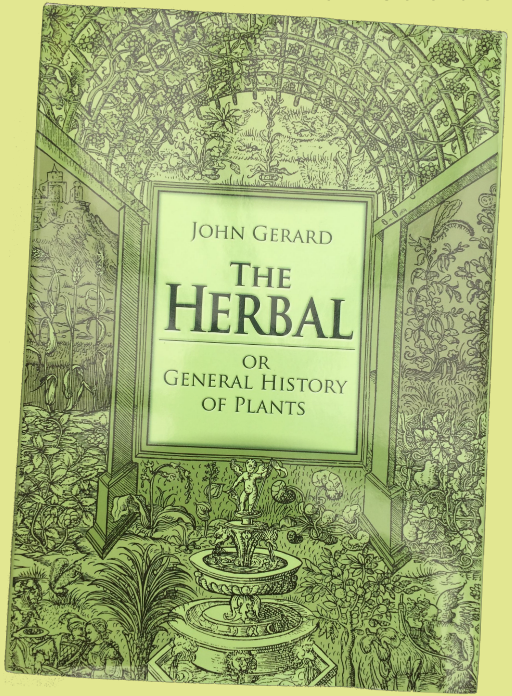
‡ There are diuers varieties of this plant, conſiſting in the largeneſſe, ſmallneſſe, deepeneſſe, or ſhallowneſſe of the diuiſions of the leafe, as alſo in the ſmoothneſſe and roughneſſe thereof. ‡

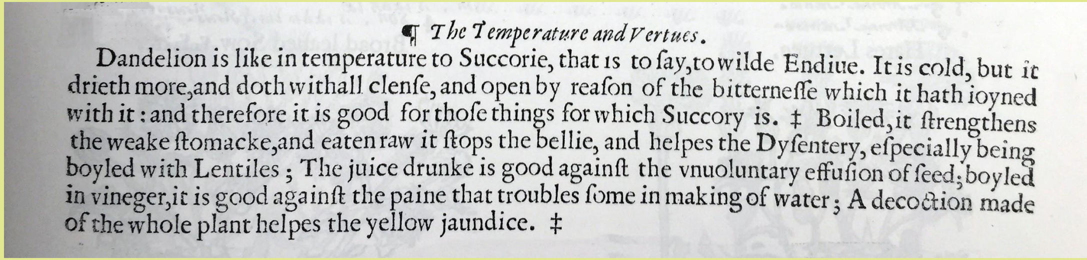
1 *Dens Leonis.* Dandelion.

‡ 3 *Dens Leonis bulboſus.* Knottie rooted Dandelion.

2 There is alſo another kinde of Succorie which may be referred heereunto, whoſe leaues are long, cut like thoſe of broad leafed Succorie: the ſtalkes are not vnlike, being diuided into branches as thoſe of Dandelion, but leſſer, which alſo vaniſheth into downe when the ſeed is ripe, hauing a long and white root.

‡ 3 There is another *Dens Leonis*, or Dandelion, which hath many knotty, and tuberous roots like





¶ *The Temperature and Vertues.*

Dandelion is like in temperature to Succorie, that is to ſay, to wilde Endiue. It is cold, but it drieth more, and doth withall clenſe, and open by reaſon of the bitterneſſe which it hath ioyned with it: and therefore it is good for thoſe things for which Succory is. ‡ Boiled, it ſtrengthens the weake ſtomacke, and eaten raw it ſtops the bellie, and helpes the Dyſentery, eſpecially being boyled with Lentiles; The juice drunke is good againſt the vnuoluntary effuſion of ſeed; boyled in vineger, it is good againſt the paine that troubles ſome in making of water; A decoction made of the whole plant helpes the yellow jaundice. ‡

Other uses

Infuse flowers in oil, agitate regularly

Joint & muscle massage oil

Body Balm

Chopping Club May 2020 facebook comment thread

these look so good, like doughnuts!

honey is next and also, if anyone sees flowers that are still tiny buds, if you pop them in vinegar and salt and sugar, you can make capers!

we're trying with banana in the batter instead of egg. will report the findings x

also I love nasturtium flowers too much I think to not see them bloom, but I literally cannot keep up with the dandelions they are non stop

Any leaf suggestions - my 1978 copy of the Self sufficient gardener bu John Seymour says they are "better tasting and more nutrient rich than spinach"

you have to be a bit selective about which leaves make a good raw salad but the ones that ou don't choose can definitely be cooked up in literally anything. If its like spinach or rocket, no reason why it can't be a raw green sauce or a pesto, or in soups, stews..

ooo they both sound really tasty! i had some in a wrap with hoisin sauce, cucumber and spring onion also very nice!

Also basically what was once our lawn is full of them

they are quite bitter but that's kind of nice once coated in oil and garlic!