

The Dandelion

Courtesy of Robbie Murphy



English Name: Common Dandelion
Scientific Name: *Taraxacum officinale*
Irish Name: Caisearbhán coiteann

Dandelions are the most familiar of Ireland's wild flowers. There are lots in flower during the spring but they can be found in bloom at almost any time of the year. The Dandelion is perennial (coming back year after year) and has a deep tap root. As a plant, it forms large rosettes of leaves, each cut into pointed lobes like a shark's teeth. The plant produces single yellow flowers, about 20-40 mm across, with strap-shaped ray florets, on a single, long stem. The stem itself is hollow, leafless and often reddish in colour. The florets are sometimes reddish or brownish beneath. To many gardeners, dandelions are considered a weed, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder!

A Mass of Flowers

FACT FILE:

Habitat: Grassland and disturbed or cultivated ground.
Colour: Golden-yellow.
Height: 5-40 cm.
Uses: For medicinal purposes and for food. Also food for bees.

Dandelions are composite flowers. Composite means to be made up of many parts. In the Dandelion's case, each of the strap-shaped rays (or petals) is an individual floret and in the centre are individual disc florets, all coming together to make up a flowerhead. Dandelions are in the same family as daisies, which are also composite flowers.

The dandelion, which is made up of many individual florets, is a typical composite flower.



Seedhead & Clock!

Most of us have picked up a dandelion seedhead to blow the seeds in the wind. The seedhead is a stunning creation. Each little floret produces a 1-seeded fruit, with a feathery parachute of silky hairs. This parachute helps the wind carry the seed in the hope of finding a suitable place to grow. There is an old wives' tale that blowing on the seedhead can help you tell the time. The amount of blows it takes to blow off all the seeds is the hour of the day!



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