Herb Of The Month

December 1, 2000 By Michael Onstott

Dandelion

Part: Whole plant (root, leaves, flowers)
Forms: Fresh and dried leaves and root, liquid
extract, powder and capsules
Uses: Detoxifier; helps treat liver problems, suppressed appetite, stomach pains, urinary tract infections, water retention and skin eruptions
Daily Dose: Half standard bundle of fresh greens (eaten); 15 drops liquid;
one capsule; or 4 to 6 grams dried herb (as tea, 2 to 3 times)
MONTHLY Cost: $12 to $20 (fresh), $6 to $18 (liquid or capsules),
$12 to $26 (dried leaves or root)
Warning: In cases of gallbladder inflammation, gallstones or blockage of the bile ducts or intestinal tract, consult a physician before taking.

To lawn-owners, dandelion may be merely a pesky spring weed, but this is one scrappy plant with a dual purpose: culinary and medicinal. Its bitter, jagged-toothed leaves and pretty yellow flowers—all of which promote the excretion of water and salts from the kidney and bladder—are rich in potassium and other minerals as well as vitamins A and C, making the herb one of the few diuretics (urine inducers) that don't deplete potassium. Studies show that dandelion root's natural chemicals stimulate appetite and digestion, ease stomach aches, and help the liver eliminate toxins from the blood (it's often combined with milk thistle and other herbs as a liver tonic). Because of its diuretic and detoxifying effects, dandelion is also used to treat such skin eruptions as acne and eczema. Adding fresh leaves (preferably organic) to salads, enjoying them steamed or drinking the herbal root tea (a nice caffeine-free coffee substitute) are the dandiest ways to consume dandelion for its many benefits. So, next time you're thinking "detox," possibly after the culinary excesses of the winter holidays, consider putting together a "mess o' greens"—dandelion, that is.

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