COMMON DANDELION
(Taraxacum officinale)

SEEDLING DESCRIPTION
Common dandelion seedlings emerge in early spring in lawns, pastures, gardens, and waste areas. The stem below the seed leaves (hypocotyl) is smooth, light green to white, and so short as to be barely noticeable. It does not elongate and seems to disappear as the plant matures.

Seed leaves (cotyledons) are oval or spoon-shaped, about ½ inch (5 mm) long, and yellow-green. The lower surface is slightly paler than the upper surface, and the margins are perfectly smooth.

The first true leaf is round to oval and about ¼ inch (1 cm) long. Margins have a few very small teeth that point back toward the base of the leaf. The midvein is prominent on the lower surface. Later leaves are more elongated and soon assume the toothed margins and rosette arrangement typical of the mature plant.

1. True seedlings showing cotyledons.
2. Young plant emerged from a rootstock; note absence of seed leaves.
3. Leaves become more toothed as the plant matures.
4. Composite flower head.
5. Mature seed head.
6. A healthy stand of dandelion.
main stem never elongates, they form a rosette at the soil surface. The leaves are divided into toothlike lobes that point back toward the base.

Dandelions flower in spring and fall, when day length is less than twelve hours, or in summer if there is sufficient shade. Most plants have several flower heads, each one carried separately on a long, bare, hollow stem (scape) that secretes a thick white juice when broken. Each flower head is a bright yellow tuft that appears as a single flower measuring 1/2 to 1 1/2 inch (2 to 4 cm) across. One dandelion flower head may have 100 to 300 "petals," and each one is actually a complete flower. This type of flower—a compact mass of many petalike flowers—is called a "composite." While bees find the flowers a favorite source of food, these insects do not pollinate common dandelion. Rather, the seeds develop apomictically—without being fertilized. In fact, most of the pollen grains are infertile.

The flower bud develops on a short stem near the ground for about one week. Then the stem quickly elongates, lifting the bud above the leaves. The flower opens early in the morning and closes the same evening. The stem droops and the closed head rests near the ground for several days while the seeds mature. The stem straightens again and the flower reopens as the familiar fluffy white ball of "parachutes." These are actually individual seeds, each with an attached cluster of hairs called a "pappus." The pappus breaks off easily and, with the seed still attached, is carried away by the breeze.

Common dandelion also propagates by its fleshy taproot. When the taproot is broken, each remaining piece can send up from two to five new shoots.

Common dandelion can survive in almost any climate and at elevations ranging from sea level to 12,000 feet.

SIMILAR SPECIES
Spotted catsear (Hypochaeris radicata), also called false dandelion, is a common lawn weed in the northwestern United States.

growth. However, it is very difficult to get the whole root, especially if the plants are large or the ground is dry, and any portion left in the ground can sprout at least one new plant. Mowing the flower heads as soon as they open helps reduce seed formation.

If the problem is too pervasive to control by mechanical means, proper chemical treatment provides effective control. In lawns, the best choice for chemical control is 2,4-D, unless other weeds present are resistant to this herbicide. This is often true when dandelions are a problem in turf, in which case either MCPP or Dicamba may be used. Plants should not be watered for twenty-four hours before or after treatment. The herbicide 2,4-D may also be used in non-legume pastures. Directions for time of application and grazing restrictions should be followed closely.

In small grain crops, MCPA and/or 2,4-D are recommended. Roundup may be applied in the fall or spring during a fallow period. In soybeans and perennial legume crops, metribuzin (Sencor or Lexone) may be used.

Hexazinone (Velpar) is recommended for perennial legume crops such as alfalfa and the clovers, but it is not approved for soybeans. For specific recommendations, consult your county Extension agent or the most recent Weed Control Manual and Herbicide Guide, available through Meister Publishing Company, 37841 Euclid Avenue, Willoughby, Ohio 44094. Follow label instructions for all herbicides and observe restrictions on grazing and harvesting procedures.

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