

# Playful springboards: DANDELION

## Facts and Folklore

Dandelions are delightful golden wonders for children and young people to discover. They are sometimes called “fairy clocks” because their flowers open and close with changing light levels: the flowers open in the morning and tend to close up at night.

Having flowered and then been pollinated, dandelion heads close and seeds start to develop inside the closed-up head. The seeds are the fruit with each seed having a **pappus**, a set of feathery bristles that help it float away on the wind.

Most young people and children know that you can ‘tell the time’ with these seed heads.

When the dandelion flower turns to seeds, it’s a great opportunity to tune into playing with the wind as a method of seed dispersal.

Children can pretend telling the time using a dandelion clock. Having asked the clock what the time is, the child then begin to blow away the seeds, counting each breath, once the seeds have all gone that is the time.

Dandelions can predict the future!  
The number of seeds remaining after blowing away the seeds in one big breath predicts the number of children you will have...

*Pappus*

## Poem

**The Dandelion**  
by Janet L. Niehaus

I picked a faded dandelion  
And blew it in the air  
Its tiny little parachutes  
Went floating everywhere. They caught the wind  
And danced awhile  
Bending to and fro  
In splendid ballerina style. Finally as the wind grew still  
They floated back to earth  
And bedded in the dark warm soil  
To start their new rebirth. When next summer comes  
And dandelions are everywhere  
I’ll pick another faded flower  
And blow it in the air



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## Recipes

### SAVOURY IDEAS

Include well washed young dandelion leaves in salads.

Replace spinach with young dandelion leaves in meals such as omelettes.



### DANDELION FAIRY CAKES

After collecting a couple of handfuls of flowers, remove all the yellow petals and discard all the green parts as these are bitter. Wash thoroughly. Add the clean flower petals to any sponge cake recipe to add a golden colour and bake according to your recipe.

Once cooled, add frostings and for fun, find edible flowers for the topping- for example, violets, nasturtiums or roses.

### DANDELION BISCUITS

#### Ingredients

170g plain flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ½ teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon dried herbs such as rosemary, marjoram, thyme, basil or chive, 45g cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces, half a pint of milk, ½ cup dandelion flowers – pulled off the base

#### Method

Preheat the oven to 450°F / 230°C. Mix all the ingredients together. Do not overwork the mixture as the batter should be moist and sticky but not smooth.

Use a spoon to place scoops of the mixture onto a greased and lined baking tray, 5cms apart.

Bake until the bottom is browned and the edges are just starting to brown, which will take around 12 minutes.

### DANDELION TEA

Collect fresh flowers and leaves and store them in a glass jar, until you are ready to make the tea.

Pour simmering water over a handful of flowers and leaves.

Let the tea infuse until it's cool enough to drink, then strain.

Dandelions are thought to be a good tonic and can act to relieve sluggish digestion. While it can be helpful for some digestive issues, use caution if you have ulcers or chronic health issues and consult a medical professional before using.

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## Games

### PLAYING WITH THE WIND

Play 'Air Pooh Sticks' – pick a dandelion head and throw it into the air. Whose seed head will fly the furthest?

Dandelion seed heads are characterised by the way they behave in the wind. These games involve interacting and playing with the wind, for example trying to catch floating seed heads. Make the game competitive by pointing out a seed head and racing to be the first to grab it. In spring, chase blossom flowers and in autumn, catch falling leaves.

Folklore has it that luck is given to those who catch a leaf.

### References

Maudsley, M, *Playing on the Wildside*, 2009  
Playwork Partnerships

'Pappus' is one way that seeds are dispersed but there are other means of seed dispersal by the wind and this can prompt many opportunities for crafting things that fly.

There are lots of ideas on the web but an easy one idea is to create a 'helicopter' from a strip of paper 2-3cm wide with a tear/cut on opposite sides at either end allowing the paper to be slotted together into fish shape.

Launch with a stick which should fall out in mid-air and allow the helicopter to spin to the ground. Finding good launching points can also add to the success and the fun.

### WINDY DAY MINDFULNESS

Watching the wind blow clouds across the sky can stimulate and mesmerise children's minds and be used to initiate thought games such as: timing cloud movements, guessing which way the wind is blowing, spotting unusual formations and interpreting what they might represent or resemble.

It can also be very relaxing watching clouds and help support young people's wellbeing.



Pappus



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## creative arts

### DANDELION FLUTES

Dandelion flutes are sometimes called dandelion horns, and they provide a playful way to explore how sound travels by vibrations.

Pick the dandelion and remove the flower head, then blow down the stalk to make a sound. Split the stalk in two from the bottom and notice how the notes played change depending on how long the split is.

### DANDELION ART

The golden colour of dandelion flower heads, and their proliferation makes them ideal for outdoor art projects with nature.

For inspiration, explore the work of nature and ephemeral artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Christo, Patrick Dougherty and Agnes Denes.

### HAPA ZOME

The high water content in the leaves and flowers of dandelions make them ideal for Hapa Zome art. Place the plant onto one half of a piece of cotton fabric.

Fold the fabric over the flower. Firmly 'bash' the fabric with a smooth stone or a small hammer, until the plant dyes begin to show through. On unfolding the fabric, a dandelion print appears!

### DANDELION PLAYDOUGH

#### Ingredients:

A handful of dandelion flowers with the green stalk removed, 235ml boiling water, 120g of flour, 40g of salt, 2tbsp vegetable oil, 1-2 tbsp of cream of tartar.

#### Method

Mix the hot water and dandelions in a blender until pulped. Add the oil, salt, cream of tartar and the flour. You will need to mix the dough with your hands. If it is too sticky, add more flour.

After that it is ready to use as a dough to make creations.

