



# DANDELION

## TARAXACUM OFFICINALE

### Why is it a weed?

It is a competitor for water and nutrients in pastures. It causes significant yield losses in many other crops.

### Where is it found?

All across New Zealand.

### Is it toxic?

May be slightly to horses (as with many of these weeds the greater the dose the greater the effect!).

### Alternative uses?

It has many culinary uses and is sometimes used as a herbal medicine.



and India. It's a tenacious little weed.

The dandelion is considered a nuisance pest in many places and a noxious pest in sensitive areas. It is an aggressive coloniser, with a single plant spreading rapidly across a paddock or block and competing with desirable plants for moisture and nutrients. In particular, it is a real nuisance in sensitive crops like plantain and lucerne where it is really tricky to control.

### Control

Controlling dandelion can be tricky depending on the crop it is in. It has a deep tap root which needs to be fully removed if you're digging it out.

In pastures it is hard to spray it out without damaging the clover. Products like MCPA work well but will take out cover too so be careful. In fodder crops and orchards you do need to be careful with product selection so be sure to seek advice before spraying.

Well, that's me for another month. As always if you have any questions, thoughts, accolades or monetary gifts, please don't hesitate to drop me a line. Cheers. ■



MILTON MUNRO

**M**y love affair with plants began with my first school science fair project. I was studying dandelions and, in particular, their potential use as a treatment for warts. Long story short, my tincture didn't work very well but it did spark something inside me and every science fair project from then on revolved around plants, which lead to studying plant science at university and finally a career as a plant scientist. Seems I owe that humble little dandelion a favour and what greater honour is there than being the topic of this column!

The common dandelion is a weed found all through New Zealand and nearly everywhere else in the world. It's native to Europe and Asia, but the dandelion has effectively colonised most of America, Southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand

### Uses

It is not all doom and gloom for the dandelion as it does have some useful characteristics. It is highly regarded as a herbal medicine and it also has a number of culinary uses. It is commonly used (maybe not in New Zealand) as a salad green (the flavour is described as slightly bitter), the flowers are used to make dandelion wine, and the roots can even be used as a coffee substitute. Not bad for a noxious weed.

### Identification

Dandelions can be slightly tricky to distinguish from some other similar looking weeds in the paddock, including catsear, hawksbeard and hawkbit (great names aren't they). Dandelions will grow from a flat rosette of deeply lobed leaves but unlike the above impersonators, there will be no hairs on the leaves.

It produces a fleshy stem with the distinctive yellow flower on top, one flower per stem (another useful distinguishing feature). The flower is made up of many tiny flowers called florets, each one capable of producing a seed. This seed has its own 'parachute' and can fly for hundreds of metres.



DANDELION IS NAMED AFTER ITS SHAPELY LEAVES. IT'S DERIVED FROM THE FRENCH TERM DENT DE LION WHICH MEANS LION'S TOOTH.