

Management Tips for Dandelions

By: Scott Reuss, UW-Extension

Although the brilliant yellow blooms of the dandelion are one of the absolute harbingers of summer, many people would prefer to do without them in their lawns, gardens, alfalfa fields, etc...

Biology Common dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*, is a crown-based perennial which spreads via wind-blown seeds. It does not reproduce via asexual means, although individual crowns can become large enough to appear to be multiple plants. Each plant will produce multiple flower stalks each growing season, with each flower stalk capable of producing approximately 150 seeds. A seed is produced from an individual ray flower, with each composite flower (thus the reason they are in the Compositae family!) having 150 or so ray flowers. If you examine the crown, you will find multiple flower stalks staging at the crown base. The flower stalks elongate periodically, so that each plant will have flower stalks in almost all stages of maturity.

Management Dandelion infestations can be managed relatively easily, but it is extremely difficult to prevent or limit re-infestation due to the ability of their seeds to be wind-blown over long distances. This makes their control as an entire population very difficult and rather frustrating for most homeowners.

Physical control is effective if done correctly. By correctly, I do mean digging deep enough to remove the crown and root to a depth of at least three inches. If you do not remove at least this much, and preferably all the root mass, the plant will likely re-bud from root reserves.

Cultural control is also effective in most lawn and field situations. Cultural control entails having healthy desired plants to help prevent successful seedling establishment and growth of the young dandelion plants. In a lawn situation there are many things you can do to really help yourself:

1. Mow correctly, cut height of 2.5-3 inches.
2. Maintain healthy turf via supplying 1 inch of water per week (rain or irrigation) and fertilizing appropriately.
3. Rogue out individual plants before they produce seeds.
4. Use mulches in garden beds, around tree trunks, and any area where the turf grasses are likely to be stressed.

If necessary, chemical control is an option, but most often is done incorrectly. The optimum timing for dandelion control is in the fall (mid-September) with any product containing 2,4-D. The second-best timing is about the second week of June. The risk of using 2,4-D is that it can volatilize on hot, sunny days and cause damage to any surrounding broadleaf plants, so be careful if you decide to go this route. Applications should be sprayed on, not done via an impregnated fertilizer which contains 2,4-D as these do not work as well and place higher rates into the environment.