

# Common Dandelion and Spotted Cats-ear

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COMMON DANDELION — *Taraxacum officinale*—Showing plant and seed. Seed magnified 4 diameters.

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# Common Dandelion and Spotted Cats-ear

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Illustrations by Cathrine Davis Young

These two weeds are often confused so both will be discussed in this leaflet. Both are found in all sections of the state and often grow side by side. With yarrow, they are probably the most widely distributed of Oregon weeds. They grow bordering the sea and on mountain slopes immediately below the line of perpetual snow.

## COMMON DANDELION

(*Taraxacum officinale*)

This perennial weed spreads by seed and by short shoots from a fleshy taproot. It produces a rosette of leaves that generally lies flat on the ground, and sends up hollow unbranched stems each with one head at the tip. These stems contain a milky, white juice that is slightly bitter and avoided by animals. The stems vary from a few inches to more than a foot in length. The leaves generally are about 6 inches long, deeply lobed and toothed, hence the "lion" part of the name, from a fancied resemblance of the jagged leaf edge to a lion's teeth. The young leaves are sometimes hairy and the flower heads are a bright yellow, generally about three-fourths of an inch in diameter.

Flowers open on bright clear days and close at night. There is no regular blooming period. The flowers are one of the earliest to appear in the spring and can be seen just before snow in the fall. After blossoming the head becomes a round ball of white, silky strands. The strands are attached to the tips of the seed cases and when ripe float easily in the gentlest breeze. The seeds are yellow-brown, about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch long and toothed near the tip. A single-head ball will produce 150 seeds or more. It is a common impurity in lawn-grass seed.

**Oregon seed law.** The state seed law classifies dandelion and spotted cats-ear as noxious weeds only if present in seeds of turf grasses. If present in such grass seeds, the tag must state the number of seeds per pound.

**Uses and damage.** The tender young leaves have been used for greens for many years and are attractive to most animals, especially sheep. The extremely early growth and the quick regrowth after grazing make it an important forage plant. It withstands overgrazing. The roots are used in medicine. On the debit side is its habit of encroaching on lawns and hay meadows.

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**Control.** The most common method of controlling this pest is to dig or cut below the crown. This method will work only if one is persistent and digs early and often. It is usually necessary to dig out each plant several times during the season. If part of the root is left it forms a new plant. Digging is objectionable since this leaves holes in the lawn, destroying its smoothness. Digging is much more effective if sodium chlorate, gasoline, acid, or ammonium sulphate is sprinkled in the hole.

Good results can be obtained by treating each crown with concentrated sulphuric acid in the spring or early summer. A satisfactory method is to carry the chemical in a tin can with a long wire handle and dip a soft wood, pointed stick into the chemical and then jab it down into the center of the crown of the weed. (Do not store acid in tin.)

Another effective chemical mixture is made by combining white arsenic and caustic soda. This material has proved very effective in eradicating dandelions; but because of its very caustic nature and the difficulty of mixing, it will not be discussed in this leaflet. If desired, specific instructions can be obtained from the county agricultural agent. Results of recent experiments conducted by the Experiment Station indicate that good results can be obtained by spraying the dandelions with a mixture of a new chemical called *Sinox* and ammonium sulphate. One pound of ammonium sulphate and one-third pound *Sinox* dissolved in one gallon of water will treat one square rod. The weeds should be sprayed in either the spring or fall. Experiment Station Circular of Information 219 gives instructions on the use of *Sinox*.

Still another chemical is sulphate of ammonia. It is a lawn fertilizer but will kill dandelions if half a spoonful of the crystals is put on each plant. Sodium chlorate may be used in the same way but it should not be used without reading precautions in Oregon Extension Bulletin 510, *Control of Perennial Weeds in Oregon*.

Dandelions grow in lawns where the grass is thin enough so that the seedlings can start. The most effective prevention is to fertilize the lawns, sprinkle them frequently, and maintain such a thick turf that weed seedlings cannot grow.

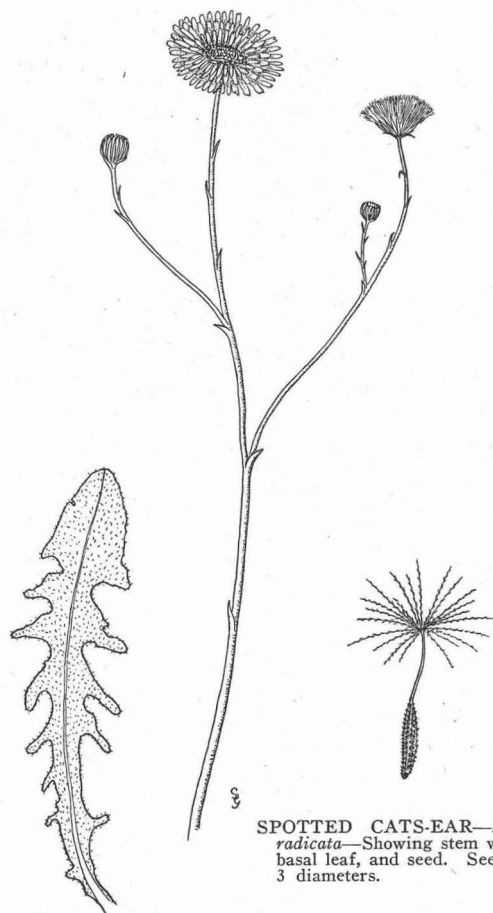
## SPOTTED CATS-EAR

(*Hypochaeris radicata*)

Spotted cats-ear is often called false dandelion. It is even more common in lawns than dandelion. Its stems generally grow from  $\frac{1}{2}$  foot to 2 feet tall. They often branch several times and heads are produced at the tips of these branches. This branching is the easiest way of distinguishing it from common dandelion, which produces a straight stem with one flower head at its tip. The leaves are hairy and

more irregular than dandelion leaves with deeper lobes along the margins.

**Control.** The same general methods of control recommended for common dandelion are satisfactory for this weed.



SPOTTED CATS-EAR—*Hypochaeris radicata*—Showing stem with flowers, basal leaf, and seed. Seed magnified 3 diameters.

*This is one of a series of 39 bulletins discussing 58 perennial weeds in Oregon, and their control. A list of bulletins in this series will be found on the last page of Extension Bulletin 510. The individual bulletins are punched so that several may be bound together if desired.*

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