Know Your Species

DANDELION
(Taraxacum officinale)

Dandelion is a perennial which reproduces both by seed and by
sprouting at the roots. Next to crabgrass it is probably the most com-
mon weed around homes, but it is well adapted to meadows, road-
sides, and waste places. Widespread throughout North America, it is
easily recognized either by the bright yellow head of many tiny
flowers in May and June, or by the cottony tuft or "blow-ball" which
it forms when the seeds are ready for dispersal. Upon sprouting the stem remains very short (flush with the ground),
forming a rosette of toothed leaves. Leaves, 3 to 10 inches long, are
covered with short hairs and have a milky juice. From this rosette grows a
hollow shoot (scape) which will bear a single head made up of many
tiny flowers. When each minute, single-petaled flower has been
pollinated, the green sepals close over the flower and appear as they
did before it first blossomed. When they open again the feathery
tufts, each bearing one seed, are ready to be shed on the wind. The
seeds themselves are oblong, %-inch long, longitudinally ribbed, and
barbed at one end.

The root is a fleshy taproot (growing straight down, like a carrot)
with branches which can form new plants.

Chemical control of dandelion is still dependent upon postemergent
treatment. Dandelion is controlled by foliage sprays of the phenoxy
compounds such as 2,4-D; 2,4,5-T; MCPA; and silvex. Applied in the spring or fall, these chemicals will eliminate broad-
leaved weeds. Treatment is recommended for fall; otherwise spaces are left when the dandelion dies. In the fall these spaces will readily be filled with desirable grass; in spring chances are that crabgrass or
another weed will move into the vacant spaces.

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