

ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

Weeds Are Good Enough To Eat

How much time and effort have you expended on getting the dandelion plants out of your lawn?

None, I hope. Far from being an unsightly eyesore and a blight on the neighborhood, dandelions happen to be one of the most delicious, nutritious plants growing anywhere. Just one ounce of dandelion, for example, contains 7,000 units of vitamin A.

Some wise old sage, whose name has since been lost in history, described a weed as nothing more than a plant out of place. Many people eat dandelion greens, but there are literally hundreds of other weeds that are edible. All it takes is a little know-how and the right attitude.

Consider what Ferris Weddle, an organic gardener from Karniah, Idaho, has to say about wild weeds. He likes watercress but never buys it in a supermarket. "If I can go to a nearby creek, or to an icy cold spring, and pick armloads of invigorating watercress, why should I pay a small fortune for a limp, sad-looking bunch in the supermarket?"

Also, Weddle doesn't look upon weeds as intruders in his garden. Nor does he understand people who do. "I've always been somewhat puzzled by the attitude exhibited by a friend who says somewhat indulgently, 'Wild foods may be found for a hobby or in an emergency situation, but I don't want any weeds in my garden.'"

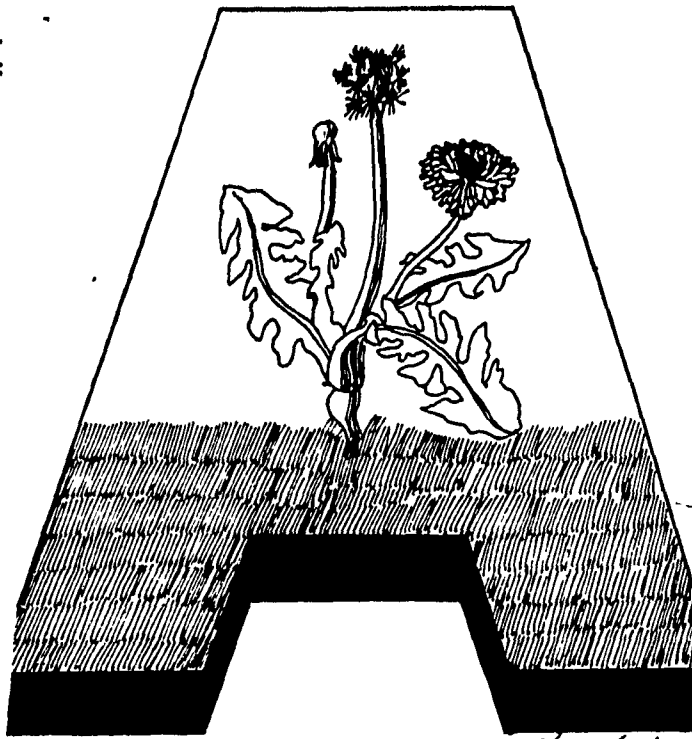
"This man refuses to accept the fact that many of the plants he dismisses as weed pests are higher in food value than several he regularly plants—and they certainly have much more flavor in most cases."

If there is any one, single reason why a person might want to find out which weeds are edible, it's the problem of contamination.

Hike into the middle of a heavy forest or into the center of a large abandoned field and chances are slim that any of the edible weeds found will have been treated with pesticides, chemical fertilizers or herbicides. And to top it off, they won't cost you a cent.

Let's consider a couple of the more common weeds besides dandelion from which you might derive part of a good meal.

Stinging nettle is one. It gets its name from the fact that its leaves have small spines that inject formic acid into the skin. Luckily, cooking destroys their stinging capacity, and the young greens make a good cooked salad. After drying and crumbling, the old greens are so rich in



protein that a handful can be added as an extender for hamburger.

Chickweed is another free food that can be found in just about any spot that is moist and has been abandoned for a period of time. Served raw or cooked very slightly, chickweed is particularly good in salads when it is picked young.

In "Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants" (Stackpole Books), Bradford Angier notes that the roots and lower portions of cattails are good raw, baked, roasted or boiled for a short time. All you have to do is scrub them and peel them while they're wet and you'll have a delicious addition to your table at no cost.

Obviously, with hundreds of plants available for table use, there is some room for error when out wild-plant hunting. If you're new to the game and haven't developed a discriminating eye, there are a few common-sense precautions that you should follow, says Roy G. Scarfo of Thorndale, Pa., who markets educational charts illustrating a wide variety of edible wild plants.

Unless you are absolutely sure that the plant is safe to eat, he warns, you should avoid anything that tastes bitter. When you have any doubts about a plant, cook it first. He also says that you should avoid all plants with a milky juice.

Hubbard Introduces New Layer

The Hubbard Leghorn breeder will be offered to the egg industry by Hubbard Farms in 1975, according to an announcement by Wentworth Hubbard, president of the company.

The Hubbard Leghorn, he reported, is the result of many years of intensive genetic studies by the firm's Research and Development Division. In the past two years it has undergone extensive testing in com-

mercial layer operations in the United States, Canada and Western Europe.

Although Hubbard Farms has achieved international recognition for its work with male and female parent lines for the production of broilers, Mr. Hubbard pointed out that the company began more than 50 years ago as a breeder of egg strains.

This area of research has been uninterrupted over the years, he added. The Hubbard Golden Comet, a commercial brown egg layer, has been highly successful in this field.

Information on the Hubbard Leghorn may be obtained by writing Jacey Huttar, Hubbard Farms, Walpole, NH 03608.

For whatever reason, be it cost or a desire to get closer to an organic way of life, people are returning to wild foods in growing numbers. People are starting to balk at tasteless displays of plastic-wrapped vegetables that were picked weeks ago. It's about time.

Dr. Arthur W. Galston of Yale University notes that mankind is using only a fraction of the world's plant resources. "Most of our important crops, especially our cereal grains, were domesticated by our neolithic ancestors. It's entirely conceivable that a blight could wipe them all out. It was feared a few years ago that a corn blight might prove irresistible."

Wild foods might prove the answer—or one of the answers—to the growing food shortage around the world. Perhaps this is one reason why you should think twice about getting rid of all those dandelions in your yard. After all, when they're all gone, you'll just have to plant some more.

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming Staff.)

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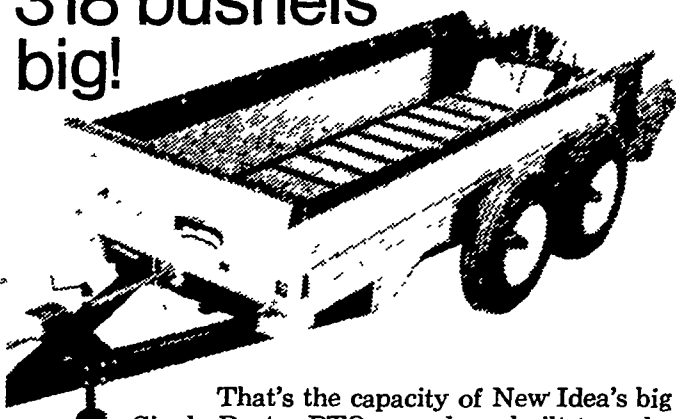
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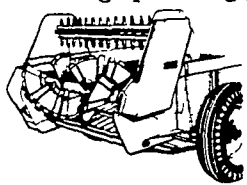
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