

GLAD I'M NOT A STARVING COLONIST

Susie Hill, Frederick County Master Gardener

My son stood in the back of the pickup truck surveying his work. His eyes were wide, arms outstretched, and his jaw slack in amazement. "Did I plant all of this?" he asked, as he pointed to the broad swaths of brilliant yellow dandelions smothering the field, encroaching on the lawn. Grady did help sow those dandelions, but he was not alone. Many kids have blown dandelion seeds in my yard with great delight, hoping that their wishes would come true.

If I were to turn back the hands of time to the era of our early American ancestors, I would be monumentally proud of my kids. Ours is an old farmhouse that was a one-room cabin in the 1700's. If I lived in this house back then, I would have spent my winter subsisting on pork rinds, corn bread, and half rotten squashes from the root cellar. I would have jumped for joy at the sight of emerging dandelion greens. After all, colonists brought dandelions to the new world. They were a welcome addition to the dinner plate after long, vitamin deficient winters.

I am so glad that I am not a starving colonist. Green is my favorite color to eat. I grow a lot of my own greens, but when those are unavailable, I do not suffer through a long winter, waiting on bated breath for poke greens and dandelions. I just go to the store and buy what I want. I have tried, but to date, I have not developed a taste for dandelion greens. I have tried them in salad- never again. I have tried dandelion wine- not my favorite. I tried feeding them to my chickens- they turned up their beaks.

Hoping to find a way to reduce my dandelion colony, I thought I would try feeding them to my eldest sister. She is an extraordinary cook and she has a broad culinary palate. In the early 90's she paid \$6.00 for a bunch of purslane, a weed that grows prolifically in my sidewalk. She seemed the most likely taste tester. When I visit my sister in Manhattan, I always bring produce, eggs, and flowers. On one visit, I brought dandelion greens. I spent an hour carefully selecting the best rosettes I could find. I triple washed them and brought them bagged and ready to eat. She did eat them because of the effort involved in getting them to her, but they were so bitter that she said she had to choke them down.

On my way home from the city, I stopped in a Pennsylvania Dutch meat market where they just happened to have bags of dandelion greens for sale. I inquired about how to prepare them and the woman behind the counter told me that you must dig them when the rosettes are very small. Clean them well. Then cook them with lard and bacon, topped with hard-boiled eggs. It seems the only part of this process I got right was the triple washing.

This spring, I shall try them again. I'll probably skip the extra lard but will surely cook them with bacon. I will dig the rosettes when they are very small and I will triple wash them with care. If after that, I do not like them, I will not eat them again until I am starving to death following the next apocalypse. Surely, dandelions will survive an apocalypse. Maybe then, I will actually turn to Grady and all the other kids in my life and thank them for a job well done.



Katy Hill makes a wish as she ensure the proliferation of dandelions. Photo courtesy of Susie Hill.

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

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