

Dandelion & Chickweed: Early Spring Tonics

by Judith Kohnen, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

3/9/2026

For generations, spring tonics were a simple way to welcome the new season. After a winter of stored foods and heavier meals, fresh greens were traditionally used to help “wake up” digestion and restore vitality.

Two of the earliest and most accessible spring tonics may already be growing in your yard: dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) and chickweed (*Stellaria media*).

Dandelion’s young leaves — best harvested before flowering — contain vitamins A, C, and K along with important minerals. Their natural bitterness has long been valued for stimulating digestion and supporting normal liver function. Even a small handful added to a salad or lightly sautéed can bring that fresh spring flavor to the table.

Chickweed appears in cool weather and offers a mild, tender green that was traditionally enjoyed as a gentle, nourishing herb. Its delicate leaves and stems can be eaten fresh, and many people appreciate its soothing qualities. Look for its tiny white star-shaped flowers and the single line of fine hairs along the stem for identification.

As always, harvest only from pesticide-free areas and positively identify plants before consuming.

Spring tonics remind us that sometimes the first step toward renewal is simply adding a little fresh green to our plates.

References:

National Library of Medicine: <https://circulatingnow.nlm.nih.gov/2016/06/07/the-dandelion/>
University of Vermont Extension: <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/news/dandelions-foe-or-friend>
NC Extension Toolbox: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/stellaria-media/>
Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine: <https://chestnutherbs.com/dandelion-video-newsletter/>
and <https://chestnutherbs.com/best-wild-foods-for-beginning-foragers/>



Dandelion
(*Taraxacum officinale*)



Chickweed
(*Stellaria media*)

Entire plant is edible:
root, leaf, and flower

Young leaves are less
bitter

Rich in vitamins
A, C & K

anti-inflammatory &
antioxidant

Distinguishable feature:
single hollow stem +
smooth, deeply toothed
& milky-sapped leaves

Edible Parts: leaves,
upper stems, & flowers

Mild, spinach-like flavor

Contains vitamin C,
minerals, & soothing
mucilage

Traditionally used for
skin support

Distinguishable feature:
single line of fine hairs
along the stem



Harvest only from pesticide-free areas.
Positive plant identification is essential.