

Wishing on the Wind Dandelions

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When looking out on a field of dandelions as their white, puffy heads seem to dance in the breeze, the scene invites us to pick one, hold it just so, and gently blow, watching the delicate seeds float away. Drawing us back to our childhood days, this timeless tradition has been practiced for endless generations, although the purpose behind it has become obscured over the centuries. If you've ever wondered why we engage in this playful rite of spring, you may be surprised to find that it was once a highly symbolic action, one imbued with a number of different meanings over the years.

Make a wish! Perhaps the most common interpretation is this: when you blow hard on the dandelion, causing all its seeds to fly away, it is believed that your wish will come true.

"Lovely" thoughts. According to *Unusual Vegetables: Something New for This Year's Garden*, folklore states that, by putting the seeds into the air, our thoughts and dreams can be similarly relayed to a special person in our lives. Along the same line, Alexander F. Chamberlain advises in "The Child and Childhood in Folk-Thought," that if you are separated from your loved one, to "carefully pluck one of the feathery heads; charge each of the little feathers composing it with a tender thought; turn towards the spot where the loved one dwells; blow, and the seed-ball will convey your message faithfully." To determine if your dear one is also thinking of you, he says, "Blow again; and if there be left upon the stalk a single aigrette, it is a proof you are not forgotten." He also suggests that the dandelion can be consulted "as to whether the lover lives east, west, north, or south, and whether he is coming."

Passion flower. While playing "He loves me, he loves me not" with a daisy is said to reveal whether or not the object of your affection returns your feelings, folkloric tradition states that blowing the

seeds from the dandelion can clue you into the intensity of that special individual's emotions. According to *Unusual Vegetables*, if one blow causes all the seeds to fly off the plant, you are loved passionately. If a few seeds stay behind, your lover has reservations about the relationship. When many seeds remain, your feelings are most likely not reciprocated.

By the numbers. If lots of seeds are intact after your puff, don't lose heart! Other traditions claim that the remaining number of seeds after giving the dandelion a blow can indicate how many years of your life still lie ahead or how many children you will have.

A floral sundial? Since the dandelion is a flower that opens one hour after sunrise and closes at dusk, the belief that the plant is a 'shepherd's clock' became more prevalent. For this reason, Chamberlain reports that the head of the plant has been referred to as the "dandelion clock." To find the time, the practice was to blow on the seed head until no seeds remained: the number of puffs required would indicate the hour. Another method was to blow three times on the seed head, since the number of intact seeds would reflect the time of day.

Rain or shine. In *Camping for Boys*, H.W. Gibson states, "The dandelion is an excellent barometer, one of the commonest and most reliable. It is when the blooms have seeded and are in the fluffy, feathery condition that its weather prophet facilities come to the fore. In fine weather the ball extends to the full, but when rain approaches, it shuts like an umbrella. If the weather is inclined to be showery, it keeps shut all the time, only opening when the danger from the wet is past." According to other sources, if seeds fall from the head of the flower when no wind is present, it is said to indicate that rain is on its way.

Wealth, health, and happiness. In addition to blowing the seeds, some traditions involve the flowers themselves. To determine if you will be rich, it is advised to place a dandelion under the chin; the intensity of the glow it leaves behind is said to indicate the individual's degree of financial success. Another folk belief states when people rub dandelion flowers all over themselves, that they will be welcome wherever they go and that all their wishes will come true.



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