

Dandelion Garlands

Overview: Whimsical dandelion garlands are a fun, seasonal craft that offer learning opportunities around seed dispersal, ecology, plant anatomy, and conservation!

Materials:

- Dandelion seed heads
- Floral wire or craft needles and thread
- Scissors
- Ribbon (optional)

Approximate Time to Complete: 30 Minutes, plus bloom time

Location: Indoor or Outdoor

Ages: Grades K – 12

Season: Spring, Summer

Background Information

A familiar sign of spring, dandelions are commonly regarded as pesky weeds because of their prolific seed dispersal and ability to grow just about anywhere. But these edible, nutritious plants are quite useful and very important ecologically in most habitats. The entire dandelion plant — leaves, stems, flowers, and roots — is edible and an important early-blooming food source for pollinators, birds, and more. Hold a dandelion leaf horizontally (or imagine one). Does it resemble a row of teeth? It did to someone, who gave it the common name *dent-de-lion*, French for “lion's tooth.”

Dandelions are perennials. Their long taproots store food over the winter, providing the energy the plants need to sprout in early spring. Those deep roots — the ones that make it so difficult to pull plants out of soil — serve another important purpose: They “mine” nutrients deep in the soil, bringing them closer to the surface, where shallower-rooted plants can make use of them.

Circllets of the plants’ distinct “toothed” leaves emerge as the weather warms, followed by stalks topped with bright-yellow flowers comprised of up to 200 individual florets. Each floret can result in a mature seed, which means that one dandelion flower can produce up to 200 seeds! Once the yellow flower fades, the bud closes again for seeds to ripen within. This is called a seed head. When the seeds are mature, the seed head will open to reveal a spherical “clock” of seeds connected to fluffy white structures called pappus. Once the dandelion clock has bloomed, wind or even a pair of lungs can send each individual seed flying through the air with a powerful enough gust. Dandelion seeds can travel more than sixty miles in the right conditions! If the seed lands in soil with adequate light and water, it will germinate, and the cycle will begin again.

Learn more about these incredible plants (including safe harvesting tips) in our [Dandelion Growing Guide](#). A great picture book to introduce the plant is [Little Dandelion Seeds the World](#) by Julia Richardson.

Instructions:

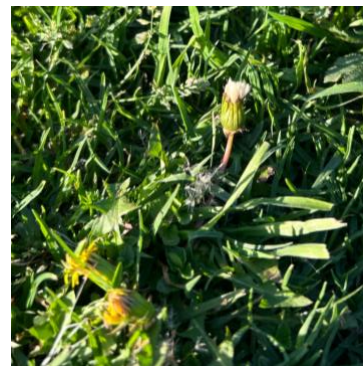
1. Bring children to an accessible area with plenty of dandelions and share information with them about the plants' anatomy and life cycle. Explain that bees and other pollinators rely on early-blooming dandelions as a nectar source at a time when little else



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is in bloom, and that they should only be collecting what they need for the activity, leaving the rest of the plants for the animals that need them.

2. Find an example of a closed seed head (closed buds with small tufts of white pappus visible at the top) that's growing in the area to help kids visualize and identify them. If time allows, also locate a flower bud (often found on the same plant) and have the kids identify the visual differences between it and seed heads to prevent them from picking flower buds instead of seed heads by mistake.
3. Instruct kids to collect a specified number of closed seed heads for the craft. This will vary depending on whether you are with a small number of kids, each of whom will create their own garland, or if you are a larger group working collaboratively. Determine in advance how many garlands you are making and how long each will be, keeping in mind that you'll want a closed seed head for every 2 to 3 inches of garland. Then you can divide the number you'll need among the children so everyone has a chance to observe and harvest.
4. Once the kids have had a chance to harvest their seed heads, collect them together and take them to where you'll be crafting the garlands.
5. Thread each seed head onto your desired length of floral wire, passing the tip of the wire through the bottom of the seed head and out through the tip where pappus are visible. Pull each seed head down the wire until all are on, then gently space each two to three inches apart. **NOTE:** Floral wire is our recommended garland string, being flexible enough to bend and manipulate yet rigid enough to pierce the seed head. However, child-safe craft needles and thread are also an option, or if you'd prefer to use standard needles and thread with older kids, practice sensible safety precautions.
6. Attach each end of your garland to the spot of your choice! They make great decorations across windows, bulletin/chalk/white boards, mantles, or blank wall space! You can add some color by winding ribbon around the wire between the seed heads if you choose.
7. Each seed head will open to reveal its fluffy white clock, anywhere from 12 hours to three days later, depending on conditions.
8. After enjoying the bloom of your dandelion garland, gently take your garland down and remove the clocks by sliding them off the wire. The wire can be reused, and the seeds can be manually dispersed by kids in an open area where they'll be appreciated by wildlife. Take care not to disperse them where someone persnickety about their presence in a lawn or garden will not appreciate it.



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