



Let's Rethink That Dandelion Thing

By Carol Gaham

It's time for that age-old battle between green lawn and dandelion. But there are things to consider before you break out the weed killer:



- The dandelion is an important first source of food in the spring for bees.
- It is a member of the Asteraceae. It's in the daisy family! Daisies symbolize happiness!
- Dandelion greens can be found in grocery stores even today. They are high in vitamin A, vitamin C, and iron. As a matter of fact, they contain more iron and calcium than spinach. Not to mention potassium, vitamin B, vitamin D, and on and on.
- From blossom to root, this herb (yes) is 100% edible.
- Dandelion is thought to help fight cancer and diabetes, lower cholesterol, reduce inflammation, protect cells from damage, and on and on.
- Dandelion wine anyone?
- The dandelion root is 10-15% rubber. Dig out your memories of playing with dandelions as a child. Remember the white, sticky stuff that got all over your fingers? Make your own rubber bands.
- Dandelion was one of the original ingredients in root beer.
- People still make dandelion oil to help with aches and inflammation, and to use as a moisturizer.
- Who doesn't remember blowing the seed head of a dandelion and making a wish, or holding the flower under your chin to see if you're going to be rich? Have you ever made a dandelion crown?
- The name is a corruption of the French "*Dent de Lion*" or "teeth of the lion" which refers to the shape of the leaves.
- Dandelion fossils have been found dating back to European glacial times. They're living fossils.

The dandelion is a non-native plant, originating in Europe and Asia, and brought here as a food crop. It is possible, in the right conditions, for *Taraxacum officinale* (common dandelion) to spread 97,000,000 seeds per hectare (2.47 acres). Maybe if it weren't quite so prolific people wouldn't have such a negative opinion of dandelion.

The dandelion is a food source for bees and wasps, beetles, grasshoppers, mites, fireflies, butterflies, white-tailed deer, goldfinches, wild turkey, bobwhite, and sparrows. And don't forget the bunnies. This little plant feeds a lot of creatures.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

Horns and Antlers

By Carol Gaham

These words are sometimes used to mean the same thing, but they do not. The difference between antlers and horns is that antlers are grown and shed each year; horns grow continuously and are not shed.

Antlers are a characteristic of the family Cervidae. Antlers are found on deer, elk, and moose, to name a few. Horns are a characteristic of the family Bovidae. Animals such as bison, sheep, and cows have horns.

Antlers can have many branches or prongs, but horns are mostly a single, permanent structure and generally grow continuously (pronghorn antelope have branching horns!).

Antlers for the most part only grow on male animals (female caribou have antlers!). Horns can grow on both male and female animals.

CAN YOU MATCH THE ANIMAL TO THE ANTLER OR HORN?

Bighorn sheep have horns that begin growing at birth and continue to grow all their lives. A bighorn sheep's horns can weigh up to 30 lbs. Both males (rams) and females (ewes) have horns, although female horns are smaller.

Deer grow antlers. Only the male deer (buck) has antlers which are shed each year. The size of the antlers has a lot to do with the age of the deer.

Bison have horns. Both males (bull) and females (cow) have horns that are black and grow up to 2 feet long.

Caribou have antlers. Both males (bulls) and females (cows) grow antlers.

Moose have huge, shovel shaped antlers. Moose antlers can grow to almost 5 feet and weight about 60 pounds. Only males (bulls) grow antlers.

Elk grow antlers that are shed each year. Only males (bulls) grow antlers.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Answers: (a) deer, (b) bighorn sheep, (c) moose, (d) elk, (e) caribou, (f) bison



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

Stories Our Old Oak Tree Could Tell!

By Pam George

With social distancing being practiced by socially conscious people to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus, taking a walk on the trails at Fox Island Park may be a therapeutic way to help you reconnect with Mother Nature during these stressful times.

So, lace up your hiking shoes, grab your favorite walking stick, and head out past the Bird Observation Building and Geogarden towards the Upper Dunes Trail. When you reach the foot of the sandy dunes beyond the Fox Island Nature Preserve sign, you'll instantly spot the oldest tree in Fox Island Park.

Wouldn't it be amazing to live for 200+ years? Think of all the events and environmental changes you would have witnessed! Well, humans can't live this long, but this monument to nature's handiwork can. This giant **Black Oak Tree** is estimated to be between 110 and 180+ years old.

How do we know this is a black oak tree? **Start** by scanning the ground around the base of the trunk for dead leaves from last fall or loose acorns that still remain like the ones pictured below (A).



A.



B.

Next, take a close look at the bark which should be ridged and furrowed, as well as very dark to almost black. The inner bark should have a distinctive yellow or orange (B). Be careful not to touch the poison ivy vines climbing the tree using their hairy roots.



Now, look for unusual structures that tell the story of this tree's life experiences:

(Photo by Jeff Ormiston)

- **Knobs along sides of the bark:** Where branches have broken off. Shows the tree stood alone as a fence row along a field long before the growth of Fox Island Woods
- **Long slashes along the trunk:** Multiple lightning strikes that have healed over through many years
- **Large hollow holes along the side of the tree:** Former home for a family of raccoons or a winter home for squirrels
- **Small holes in and under the bark:** Signs of dining by woodpeckers or a nursery for a variety of insects and spiders
- **Stripped bark:** Handiwork of squirrels or a **deer rub** where deer used the bark of the tree to remove antler velvet



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The **Fox Island Alliance** is a volunteer not-for-profit organization. Its purposes are to help preserve the natural features of Fox Island County Park, to assist its orderly development as a nature preserve, to raise funds to facilitate its development, to promote Fox Island's use as an educational center, and to coordinate volunteer efforts.

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