

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION
OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

For the week of
April 15, 2007

Q. Dear Twig: Why are dandelions called dandelions?

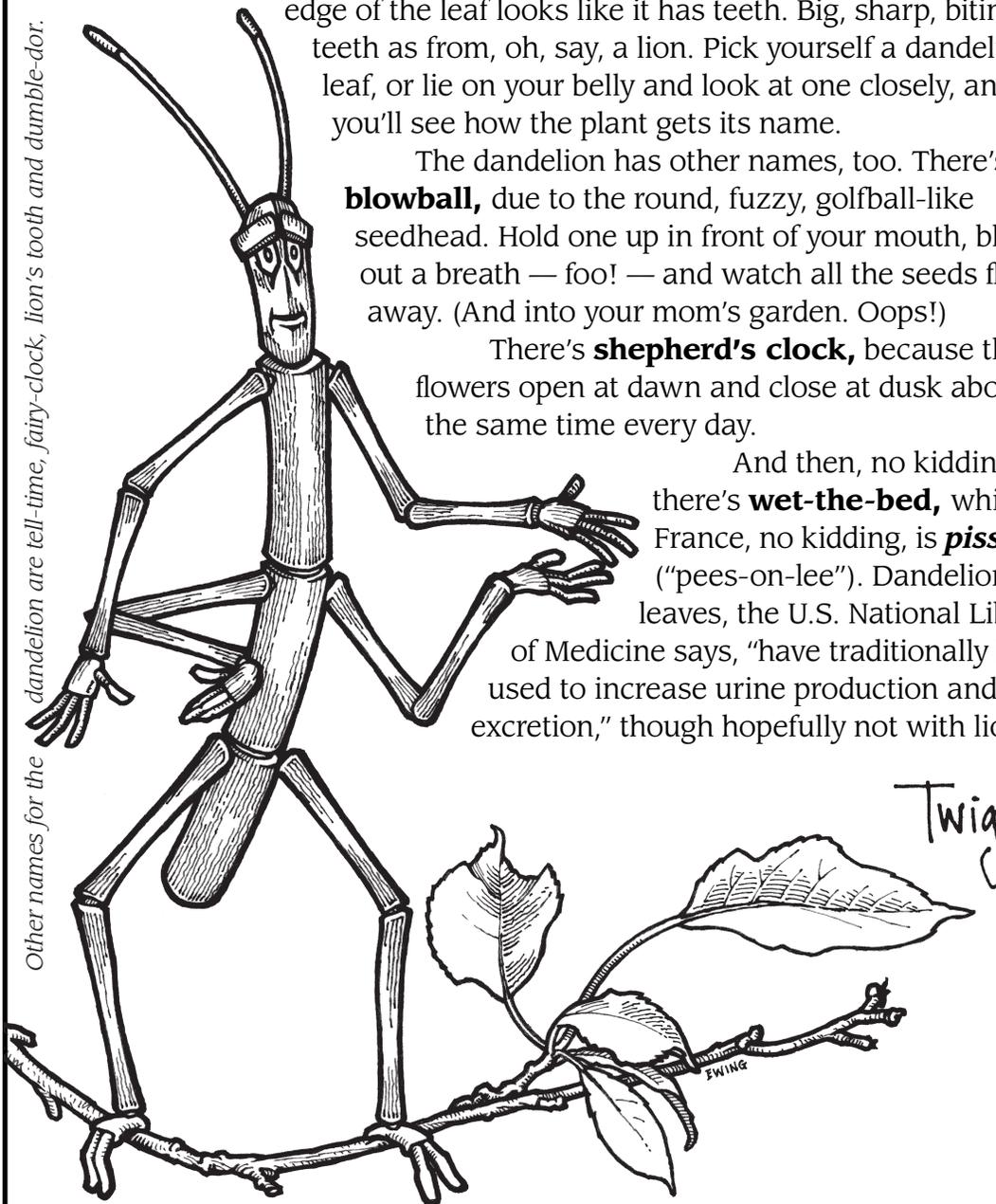
A. The name comes from the French word **dentdelion**. "Dentdelion" means "tooth of the lion," which has to do with the shape of the leaf. The edge of the leaf looks like it has teeth. Big, sharp, biting teeth as from, oh, say, a lion. Pick yourself a dandelion leaf, or lie on your belly and look at one closely, and you'll see how the plant gets its name.

The dandelion has other names, too. There's **blowball**, due to the round, fuzzy, golfball-like seedhead. Hold one up in front of your mouth, blow out a breath — foo! — and watch all the seeds float away. (And into your mom's garden. Oops!)

There's **shepherd's clock**, because the flowers open at dawn and close at dusk about the same time every day.

And then, no kidding, there's **wet-the-bed**, which in France, no kidding, is **pissenlit** ("pees-on-lee"). Dandelion leaves, the U.S. National Library of Medicine says, "have traditionally been used to increase urine production and excretion," though hopefully not with lions.

Other names for the dandelion are tell-time, fairy-clock, lion's tooth and dumble-dor.



From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).

By Kurt Knebusch
(330) 263-3776
knebusch.1@osu.edu

Notes: Scientists call the "teeth" of the dandelion leaf "lobes." Know what a maple leaf looks like? A maple leaf has lobes, too, though not as many and not nearly as tooth-like. A Feb. 20, 2002, "Smart Stuff" column looked at eating, not just naming, dandelions. Find it at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/story.php?id=1982>. Sources included the University of Maryland Medical Center, <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/ConsHerbs/Dandelionch.html>; and the U.S. National Library of Medicine's Medline Plus Web site, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-dandelion.html>.

Section of Communications and Technology

2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services Bldg.
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780

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