

Dandelion Digger

The dandelion is a difficult weed to eliminate entirely from the home garden. Once the plant has established itself in a location over a few years, its taproot can become a considerable problem. While most experts agree that, in theory, any part of the taproot that remains in the soil has the potential to form one or more new plants, there are certain factors that can greatly reduce this possibility.

One factor to consider is the health and vigor of the surrounding turf plants. Grass that is growing in optimal conditions with regard to available light, nutrients and moisture has a very good chance of completely crowding out and possibly killing by suffocation any remaining part of the weed root. Regular lawn maintenance, including proper watering and fertilizing as well as annual aerating and dethatching, will keep a lawn healthy and vigorous. Grass left longer in the summer months will crowd out competing weeds.

Another factor in dandelion control is the ability of the dandelion root to sprout new buds. The top 3" to 4" is the most active regrowth area, and the more of this portion of the plant that can be removed, the lower the chances of the root returning. The root tip is also an active growing area. An older plant with a single deep root that has a significant amount of its top removed may possibly not return, as the remaining active growing area is far below ground. The dandelion digger is an effective tool for this type of weed control.

Using the Dandelion Digger

This weeder can be used in one of two ways, by either prying the weed out or severing it a few inches below the soil. The former is most effective if you can get the whole root out, but requires that you bend down to lever the handle. The latter may not be 100% reliable, depending on a host of factors (described above), but can be done while standing when using the long-handled version.

To pry the weed out, orient the two prongs near vertical and right beside the plant's main taproot and push down until they are fully inserted into the soil. Pull the handle back, levering the tool on the spoon-shaped shoulder. The handle only needs to be levered enough to loosen the weed for removal by hand or to lift it out by lifting up the entire tool.

To sever the weed below the soil surface, place the two prongs near vertical and close ($1/2$ " to 1 ") beside the main taproot. With the handle at a slight angle, push down until the forks choke the root, severing it in the process.

Weeds should be allowed to dry for one day before being added to the compost.

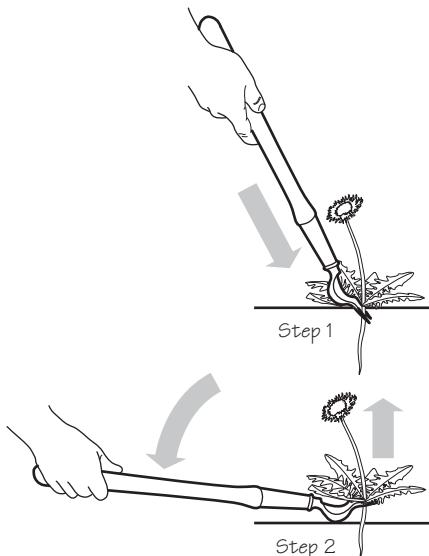


Figure 1: Uprooting.

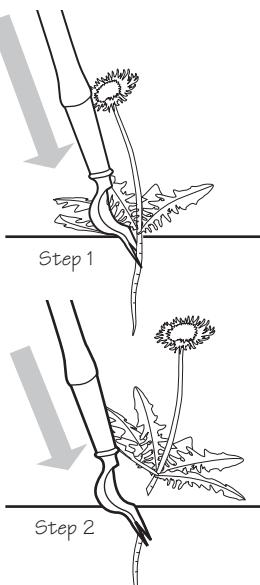


Figure 2: Severing a root.