

## Nature in the City: Plants

How often have you admired the flowers in the window of a florist's shop? Most likely, every time you pass one. How many times have you admired the plants growing in the alley next to a florist's shop? Most likely, not very often. Yet, if you looked closely at some of these wild plants, you might find them very pretty, too.

Often we call plants growing in the country wild flowers. We call plants growing wild in the city weeds. But, a weed is simply a plant that is growing where it is not wanted. Pretty roses might be considered weeds if they grew in a lawn. Flowers in a vegetable garden might be called weeds if they shade the beans and carrots. If a plant made an alley pretty, why would you call it a weed?

In any city, you can find many weeds or wild flowers. Use whichever name pleases you. This selection describes two of the plants that grow wild in many cities. They may be hard to find where you live. Perhaps you will see them when you visit a friend or take a trip.

You can find many of these plants growing along streets and alleys. They also grow under fire escapes, in vacant lots, and in gardens and lawns. Some grow in the cracks in sidewalks. Others grow between the bricks of a street. People rarely mow closer than within an inch or two of telephone poles, traffic signs, fire hydrants, or fences. Check these places for interesting plants. School yards and city parks are other places to look.

The two plants described below are considered weeds in the city. You don't have to worry about getting into trouble if you pick them. However, there are places where you are not allowed to pick any plants. This includes weeds. Of course, you should never trespass or walk onto private property without permission.

**DANDELION** If you asked people to name just one weed, most would say the dandelion. Almost everyone knows about dandelions. They are among the most common weeds found in lawns and gardens.

The edge of each dandelion leaf is notched. The leaf looks like a row of teeth. These notches gave dandelions their name. Our English name for them comes from the French name *dent de lion*. This means, "tooth of the lion." The leaves are good to eat in the spring when they

are still small and tender. You can eat the leaves raw in a salad or cooked as a vegetable. Later in the year, they become tough and bitter.

A dandelion plant has several stems, each with a head of flowers at its tip. When the heads become older, they close. Then, small fruits with tiny seeds form. When the fruits are ripe, the heads open again. Each fruit is topped by a parachute of fine hairs. The hairs make the head look white and fluffy. The parachute helps the fruit to be carried by the wind. Another name for dandelion is blow ball.

TREE-OF-HEAVEN. In the United States, the tree-of-heaven is more common in cities than the country. The tree-of-heaven comes from China and Japan. It did not grow in the United States until 1820 when a few trees were planted in New York City. They grew so well in the smoke and pollution that they were planted in other cities. The seeds from the trees often grew into new trees.

You may find tree-of-heaven in two different kinds of places in cities. Some of them grow along streets where they were planted. Many more grow as weeds in vacant lots. You can also find them under fire escapes, along alleys, and in cracks in sidewalks.

When they are young, trees-of-heaven look a little like smooth sumac. Unlike the smooth sumac, they grow into large trees. The leaves have eleven to forty-one leaflets. Each leaf may be as long as three feet.

The flowers are small and greenish. They occur in large, loose sprays. The twisted fruits have one seed in the center. The fruits turn yellow or orange by midsummer. They stay on the tree until winter. Trees-of-heaven grow rapidly. They can provide a great deal of shade in just a few years.

## QUESTIONS

How does the author introduce his story?

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What does the author think of wild plants?

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What do we call wild flowers?

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What do we call weeds?

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What does make a plant a weed?

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Where do weeds grow in a city?

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What are the two plants the article focuses on?

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Describe a dandelion:

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What does dandelion mean?

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What happens when the head of a dandelion becomes older?

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How does the fruit of a dandelion look like?

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Where does the "Tree of heaven" come from?

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When did the "Tree of heaven" start growing in the US?

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Where can you find the tree-of-heaven plant?

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Describe the life of a tree-of-heaven:

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