



## The Edible Lawn

Most gardens contain a lawn - it's an area where we can walk, play and relax, our own little area of relative privacy. Now we could decide to be very practical and dig the lawn up to plant vegetables, but apart from losing our leisure area, sometimes we also feel constrained by convention and want our gardens to retain their accepted appearances. There is, however, a compromise. Assuming that we do not want a so-called 'perfect' lawn which consists almost entirely of grass and, apart from being quite boring to look at, offers very little diversity of habitat for a potentially wide range of birds, mammals and insects etc, we could introduce various plants that can provide food both for us and the wildlife, and a visually more attractive area with flowers for most of the year. There are problems involved with this - we would have to allow the lawn to grow a bit longer, but all the plants listed below will tolerate fairly regular cutting and most would not object to being walked on quite often. Basically, if we raise the height of the grass cutter blades by about half an inch there should be no problems. The regular cutting of the lawn will ensure a constant supply of succulent young leaves. It would also be nice if the lawn could be left uncut for a few weeks in summer to allow the taller plants to flower. Unless stated, all these plants are perennials and all are native to Britain.



### **Achillea millefolium - Yarrow:**

This is a common 'weed' in lawns and succeeds even when the grass is cut very short. The young leaves make a tasty addition to salads. It is a good companion plant for grass, and its mowings will greatly enrich the compost heap. If left uncut for a month at any time during the summer, it will produce some lovely flowers. The leaves are very rich in minerals and have medicinal

properties. The plant is said to repel beetles, ants and flies.



### **Ajuga reptans - Bugle:**

For this to succeed, the grass would have to be allowed to grow a bit longer than usual. It does well in damp, slightly shaded areas and the young shoots can be eaten in salads. If left uncut it flowers from May to July, the flowers being very attractive to bees.



### **Alchemilla vulgaris - Lady's Mantle:**

Requires a slightly longer grass than usual. If allowed, it flowers between April and June. The young leaves are eaten raw or cooked and the root is said to be edible but astringent. The leaves make a herbal tea.



### **Allium oleraceum:**

*Field Garlic and Allium vineale - Crow Garlic:* Both grow well in grass. The leaves can be used as a garlic substitute. If allowed, they will flower in July.



### **Bellis perennis - Daisy:**

A common 'weed' in the lawn, able to tolerate constant cutting and still flower. It can produce flowers even in the middle of winter. The young leaves are eaten raw or cooked.



### **Chamaemelum nobile (Anthemis nobilis):**

*Chamomile:* Grows very well in a lawn and flowers even if cut regularly. The flowers make a very refreshing herbal tea which is very good for the stomach, especially recommended for children. The mown leaves will greatly enrich the compost heap. The flowers can also be used as a hair shampoo for those

with fair hair. It flowers from July to October.



### **Cichorium intybus - Chicory:**

A marvellous plant with a deep taproot that brings up minerals from deep in the sub-soil. It will tolerate quite regular cutting but not if the grass is cut very short. The leaves are an extremely valuable source of nutrients and can be eaten in salads. The root is also edible, or it can be dried, roasted and ground to make a coffee substitute. If allowed, it flowers between July and October, but, as it is likely to grow up to five feet, you

may decide to keep it cut short.



### **Leontodon hispidus - Rough Hawkbit:**

Looking somewhat like a dandelion, this plant is often found growing wild in the lawn and garden. It prefers a

chalky soil. The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. It flowers between May and September.



### **Melilotus officinalis - Melilot:**

This plant, a biennial, must be allowed to flower if you wish to keep it on the lawn. It can be cut regularly until early summer but would then have to be left uncut until it had set seed. It could grow up to four feet tall so you may decide not to put it in the lawn. Nevertheless, its flowers are very attractive to bees, its leaves can be eaten in salads, and its flowers and seeds cooked with other vegetables. You could mow it regularly to prevent

flowering of course, and sow fresh seeds every year.



### **Plantago lanceolata, Plantago major, Plantago media - Plantains:**

Very common 'weeds' in lawns. The lawn can be cut as often as you like and as short as you like without causing them any inconvenience at all, and they'll send up a flowering stem that is almost immune to the

cutting abilities of many lawn- mowers! Use the young leaves only, either in salads or cooked.



### **Prunella vulgaris - Self-Heal:**

Able to tolerate regular cutting, though preferably not too short, and still flower. The flowers are very attractive to bees. It prefers a moist soil and doesn't really like a chalky soil. Young leaves can be eaten cooked or raw. Medicinally it is used to treat cuts and bruises.



### **Sanguisorba minor - Salad Burnet:**

This plant is occasionally cultivated in the herb garden but grows very well in the lawn especially if the grass is allowed to get a little bit longer than usual. The young leaves are eaten in salads, many people saying that they taste somewhat like cucumbers. It prefers a chalky soil and will flower between May and August.



### **Taraxacum officinale - Dandelion:**

A superb plant for growing in the lawn, able to tolerate regular cutting and constant trampling. The quality of the leaves will be better if the grass is allowed to grow a little longer than usual, but this is not essential. It will manage to flower even if cut regularly, and a lawn of dandelions in flower is a beautiful sight in the spring, though it will produce the odd flower at other times of the year. The leaves are extremely nutritious and are best eaten raw though they can also be cooked. The roots, like chicory roots, are a coffee substitute should

you ever find that you've got too many plants in the lawn. The old and mown leaves are an excellent addition to the compost heap.



### **Trifolium repens - White Clover:**

Another common 'weed' of the lawn. It flowers and flourishes even when cut regularly and short. It is an important food source for many caterpillars, the flowers are attractive to bees and butterflies, and we can eat the leaves - raw or cooked - and the flowers and pods. It is an excellent companion plant in the lawn since it can supply nitrogen to other plants with the help of bacteria in the root nodules.



### **Tussilago farfara – Coltsfoot:**

This plant sends up flowering stems in March or April before its leaves appear and are a sure sign that spring is with us once more. These flower buds can be eaten raw or cooked. The leaves appear during April and May and these also are edible. They are also used medicinally to treat coughs and colds. The plant prefers a heavy, moist soil and a sunny position.

#### **Database**

The database has more details on these plants: [Achillea millefolium](#), [Ajuga reptans](#), [Allium oleraceum](#), [Allium vineale](#), [Bellis perennis](#), [Chamaemelum nobile](#), [Cichorium intybus](#), [Leontodon hispidus](#), [Melilotus officinalis](#), [Plantago lanceolata](#), [Plantago major](#), [Plantago media](#), [Prunella vulgaris](#), [Sanguisorba minor](#), [Taraxacum officinale](#), [Trifolium repens](#), [Tussilago farfara](#).