

School-to-Nature



Chicory

Chicory is a perennial wildflower in the Dandelion family. The basal leaves of the plant, and those of newly sprouted chicory plants, resemble dandelion leaves quite a bit. It is native to Europe and western Asia, but has spread over the globe, thriving in temperate climates. Look for it on Conservancy lands at King's Corner and at Trout Ponds Prairie, in the sunny open areas. The bright blue flowers and plants can be seen commonly along roadsides throughout southern Wisconsin and in other states as well.

Chicory blooms from early summer all the way through October; flowers are about 1 ½ inches wide. The plant can grow more than 3 feet tall and it has stiff, segmented branches. Chicory prefers full sun, and medium to dry soils.

This plant has many uses. The young leaves taste like curly endive, and the flowers and buds are edible as well. It's very popular for cooking in Italy, India, Greece, Turkey, and Albania. Chicory roots can be baked, ground, and used as a coffee substitute, and this is popular with many people in New Orleans. During the Great Depression in the US, people were very happy to have Chicory growing wild, as coffee was too expensive at that time for many.

In some places, Chicory is grown as a forage crop for livestock. In fact, because it is toxic to many internal animal parasites, there is research investigating using this plant even more as forage, to reduce worms in livestock, especially those in sheep.

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