

Features and uses of wild herbs

The majority of wild herbs picked for a mixed-leaf salad belong to the compositae or sunflower family. Examples are daisies, sunflowers and gerberas, but also herbs from the garden. All these herbs have some features in common, like the fact that each inflorescence is made up of hundreds of tiny flowers, that look more attractive in the eyes of pollinating insects.

These herbs develop a basal rosette of leaves during winter and often a tap root too. This happens with dandelion and chicory, both bitter herbs. They can be employed for different culinary uses: the leaves can be eaten raw in salads, boiled or cooked with oil and garlic, while roots can be baked and ground to make a coffee substitute.

When spring comes, these plants become unrecognizable, since they turn their leaves into flowers and later (for the dandelion) into very tiny seeds (its fruits), which are spread thanks to their silky parachutes. These field herbs are usually called “weeds”, because they infest vegetable gardens, crops and grow in wild and uncultivated fields.