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Canary Culture

by Tony Buccì
California

Greens For Canaries

"And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

"And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so." (Gen. 1:29, 30)

Go on! You are not reading the "Watchtower." It is the "Watchbird" you are reading.

The above Biblical quotations were witnessed one Sunday morning while I was eating my breakfast. Sitting in our dinette, I can view through a window my garden which I cultivate mainly for my canaries. It was one of those beautiful California spring mornings. The sun was just rising. The dew deposited on the leaves was still there in the form of tiny droplets of water. Sun-rays reflecting from the silvery droplets gave the illusion of many rhinestones decorating the green leaves.

Three sparrows flew in to have their

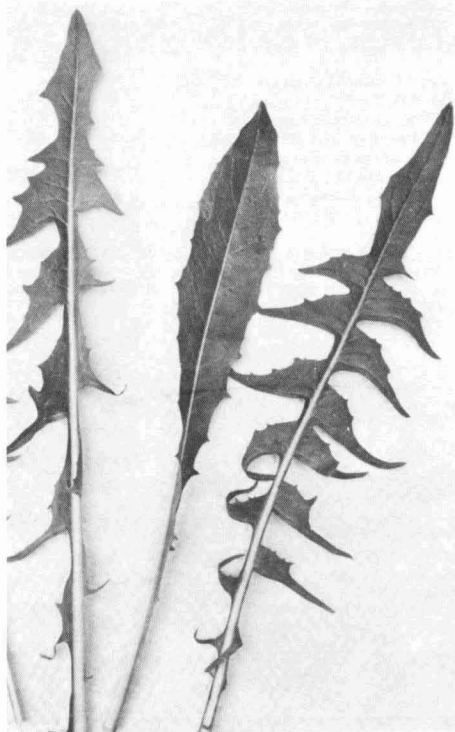
breakfast in my cultivated garden. A very interesting observation was made. The three sparrows moved very quickly throughout the whole garden. They first stopped at the chickweed, eating only buds and flowers, then systematically proceeded to sample the chicory, dandelion, and sow thistle, eating only leaves.

I then concluded that my practice of giving those greens alternately on a daily basis to my canaries was the proper thing to do. The above mentioned greens, with the addition of "comfrey" and "plantain" to the group, are always in my garden.

Chicory (*Chichorium Intybus*) is planted in the spring. It remains there during the whole breeding season, and harvesting its leaves does not terminate the life of the plant. In late June, chicory goes into seeds and no longer produces the leaves which I pick during the breeding season. At this time I cut the plant, leaving only the roots. From the roots I get another plant to last throughout the summer, fall and winter. These plants are cut at different intervals

The long and narrow leaves which chicory produces are convenient for feeding birds.

Chicory, which is a cousin of dandelion, is very rich in vitamins and minerals.



Photos by Tony Buccì, Calif.



Sow thistle. Canaries are very fond of the seeds this plant produces.

of time, therefore, giving me plants at different stages of growth. The long and narrow leaves which chicory produces are very convenient to be placed on the fronts of the breeding cages.

The chicory plant is very rich in vitamins and minerals. It is a cousin of dandelion and has comparable properties. (Note the food value chart.) The bitter taste of chicory stimulates the appetite which feeding hens need. Chicory plants are my main crop; the dandelion, chickweed, sow thistle, comfrey, and plantain are alternate supplements.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), whose name comes from the French words meaning "teeth of the lion," grow wild everywhere. If you have some dirt around your house, you will find dandelion. Seeds are available from any seed company. Once you plant dandelion, have no fear, it will be there year after year. Principal known constituents dandelion offers are: chlorophyll, taraxacin, inulin, hydroxycinnamic acid, levulose and mannitol, choline, sterols, fatty acids; vitamins A, B complex, C; folic acid; minerals: calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, silica, sodium, sulfur and manganese.

Sow thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*) is very much like dandelion in food value. Once in your yard, it will continue to reseed itself. The plant develops very fast, and its branches reach up to two feet high. The plant produces yellow flowers similar to dandelion but much smaller.



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Canaries enjoy both the leaves and the seed-filled capsules of chickweed.



Comfrey. A prolific and easy to keep plant.



Comfrey contains large amounts of carotene, making it a good natural color-food.

Photos by Tony Buccii, Calif.



Chickweed is one of the favorite greens for canaries.

Its branches, when broken, emit a white, milk-like substance. The yellow flowers develop into buds full of seeds. Canaries are very fond of sow thistle. (See the picture.)

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*), also known as tongue-grass, winter weed, and starwort. Chickweed is one of the commonest of the weeds. Its seeds may remain in the ground dormant and viable for many years. The weak, branching stems, erect or creeping, are from 4 to 12 inches long. The tiny white flowers grow at the end of the stem. Closed at night and on overcast days, they open to bright sunshine. Chickweed, which gets its name from the avidity with which small birds snap up its juicy leaves and papery seed-filled capsules, is one of the favorite greens for canaries.

Comfrey (*Cynoglossum virginianum*); another common name is "dog-bur." Comfrey is a perennial plant. It dies in the winter months and comes back in the spring from its dormant roots. It is very prolific and easy to keep. Comfrey contains large amounts of carotene. Thus, it is a good natural color-food. One year during the moult I fed mostly comfrey. My yellow canaries moulted into a very deep yellow bordering orange. For those breeders who do not color-feed artificially, comfrey is the answer. Comfrey is also good in providing other nutrients, as you can see in the food value chart.

This analysis of food values is based on 1 (one) pound of edible parts of the plant:

	<i>Comfrey</i>	<i>Dandelion</i>	<i>Chicory</i>	<i>Lettuce</i>
Protein	13.75 grams	12.30 grams	4.50 grams	3.80 grams
Fat	0.37 grams	3.20 grams	2.20 grams	0.60 grams
Carbohydrates	26.00 grams	40.00 grams	15.40 grams	9.10 grams
Calcium	1,050.00 mg	842.00 mg	750.00 mg	158.00 mg
Phosphorous	450.00 mg	315.00 mg	322.00 mg	118.00 mg
Iron	10.20 mg	14.00 mg	70.00 mg	0.90 mg
Thiamin	0.60	0.85	0.82	0.14
Riboflavin	0.00	0.65	0.00	0.26
Niacin	4.20	3.25	0.00	1.30
Vitamin C	150.00 mg	163.00 mg	100.00 mg	57.00 mg
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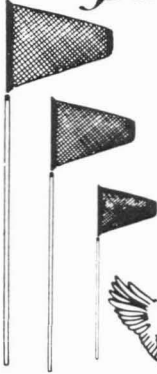
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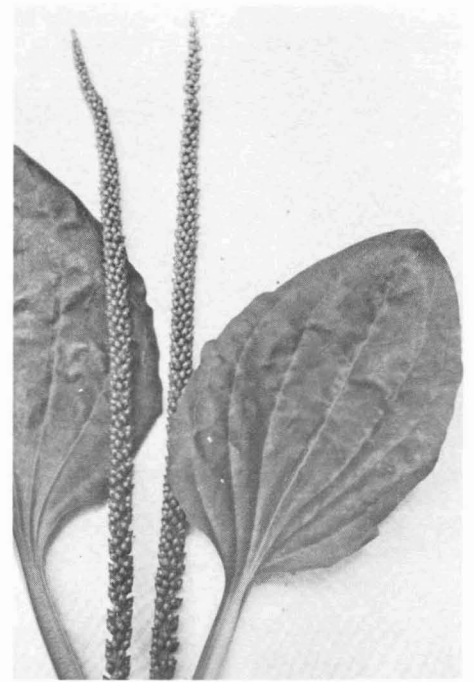


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Plantain 'patch.'



Leaf and seed stalk detail of plantain.

Plantain (Plantaginaceae), also known as goosetongue, snake weed, cuckoo's bread, ribwort and soldier's herb, is grown in my yard mainly for its prolific production of seeding stalks. I never use its leave. The seeding stalks of plantain are given to my canaries and siskins when the stalks begin to turn purple. At this stage they are most beneficial. Plantain is a sturdy, persistent little plant; it grows anywhere. It is a perennial, therefore, once in your garden, it will be there year after year to be used at your will.

If you don't have a garden, then any green vegetable available in the supermarket will do. Canaries will eat kale, cauliflower, celery, spinach, grass clippings, etc. I never make use of lettuce, though. First of all, lettuce is

short-lived in the garden. It is not perennial like chicory, and it is very poor in food value. Worst of all, it contains a narcotic called "Lactucarium" whose effects parallel those of opium. When given to canaries during the breeding season, it is known to cause egg binding. The narcotic "Lactucarium" is capable of subduing the hen's contractions of the oviduct. The contractions are necessary to expell the egg.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of greens as a supplement to the diet. Greens will supply the necessary vitamins and minerals not present in seeds. Also, greens will facilitate proper function of the digestive tract for better health and physical efficiency. Needless to say, horticulture will add another dimension to the fascinating hobby of keeping and raising canaries.



Dandelion grows wild everywhere. Its name comes from the French words meaning 'teeth of the lion.'

Photos by Tony Buccì, Calif.