SPRING FLOWERS
Discover the built-in springs of a dandelion.

THE SETUP
You probably don’t think of plants as being especially quick moving. But dandelion stems can spring into action with amazing speed. One of the first flowers you spot in the springtime are dandelions. Find a yellow dandelion blossom and pick it. With your fingernail slit the stem lengthwise into four strips. Put the dandelion into a glass of water. Watch the stem. In a matter of seconds, it begins to move. Each section of the stem rolls into a tight curl.

INSIDER INFORMATION
Dandelions are members of a group of plants called stem succulents. They store water in cells located on the inside of the stem and the water filled cells become a column strong enough to support the flower. This property has survival value for plants. Succulent cells can store water for a long period of time, enabling the plant to survive droughts. When rain comes, the inside cells suck up water rapidly. This is what is happening when you put your slit stem dandelion into water. Those interior cells swell up with as much water as they can hold, expanding in size. But now the cells on the inside of the stems are longer than the outer stem cells. And when one side of something is longer than the other, you get curls. This phenomenon puts new meaning into the phrase “spring flowers.”