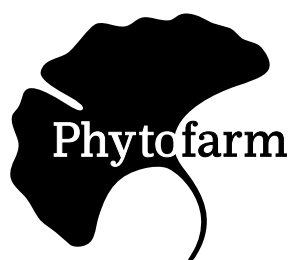


phytofarm apprenticeship



apprenticeship in herbal medicine

2025/2026
4 days in 4 seasons
with 40 plants

Phytofarm herbal learning garden is a 20 acre property in the beautiful Okuti Valley, in Little River on Banks Peninsula. The property has been developed over the last 20 years by herbalist and naturopath Valmai Becker as a repository of plants and a place of learning. The gardens, manufacturing and a drying shed have been purpose built to provide a practical learning experience in herbal medicine. Valmai has forty years of experience, both as an educator and clinician and has inspired many to embrace the healing properties of plants in their daily lives as medicine and as a source of well being.

The apprenticeship programme offers a thorough instruction in the growing, harvesting, processing and manufacture of a wide range of herbal products. Students in the programme are encouraged to develop and explore personal areas of special interest and build confidence with medicinal plants that locally grow. The four seasons are celebrated with the students discovering culinary herbal delights of the spring garden, to exploring the abundance of the summer garden and blending quality products from the drying room during the autumn and winter seasons.

The apprenticeship is intended to develop a passion for herbal medicine, exploring our relationship with plants in this exciting area of health and well being.



Valmai invites you to join the dream team...
Tutor Kirsty Rees, tutor and Chef Hamish Stuart



what is special about this apprenticeship?

A number of colleges in New Zealand offer a high standard of professional education in herbal medicine. However, while students typically attain high levels of academic understanding and clinical practice, many of them lament the lack of hands-on experience with plants especially in relation to identification, plant management and manufacturing.

The Phytofarm apprenticeship programme is a unique approach to herbal medicine education, providing an excellent start for those venturing for the first time into any herbal medicine study. Equally, anyone who has already completed formal studies in herbal medicine will gain practical experience of great benefit to their clinical practice.

Phytofarm is a landscape of diversity and includes open pasture, forest, wetland and formal gardens, making it the perfect place to bring "the garden pharmacy" into "the kitchen pharmacy." The apprenticeship covers in detail the manufacture of medicinal products that reflects the traditions and philosophies of herbal medicine. On the course attendance days a tasty Phytofarm lunch will be prepared and shared. Valmai loves to freedom cook with fresh food and a fusion of herbs. The lunch will be an opportunity for a discussion on "Staying healthy with the seasons".



the essence of spring

four days of hands-on experience in the culinary delights of the herb garden, exploring a range of tastes from sweet to bitter, aromatic blends, nutritional benefits and the visual appeal of colour from flowers and leaves.

Getting set up – Equipment, resources, core ingredients, suppliers, terms and definitions

From the garden

- Familiarisation of Phytofarm gardens, site development, types of herb gardens
- Identification of edible plants
- Plant/person relationship
- Stories and language of plants
- Plant profiles of the spring herbs

From the kitchen

- Culinary herbs and nutrition
- Including herbs as a healthy choice, disease prevention
- Edible Plant Nutrition - Herbal Cook School
- Ways to preserve herbs for culinary use
- Fresh versus dried
- Spring health discussion

From the drying room

- The ambient drying room
- Drying room procedure
- Creating harvest logs and drying room records
- Harvesting, drying, preparation and processing of culinary herbs
- Screens and preparation of culinary grade herbs
- Blending herbal beverages from aromatics

Student Homework (10 hours)

Write a profile for 10 plants with nutritional benefits under the following headings:

Names – Botanical & common, habitat and cultivation, identification of plants using your senses, part used, plant actions, harvesting and drying, processing, precautions for use, manufacturing products, market potential. A plant profile for each plant covered in the season and samples of how to prepare this information will be given in the course herbarium.



the essence of summer

four days of hands-on experience in manufacturing celebrating the abundance of the summer harvest.

Getting set up – Equipment, resources, core ingredients, suppliers, terms and definitions

From the garden

- Gather and harvest aerial parts of plants
- Optimum times for harvest
- Plant profiles of the summer herbs

From the pharmacy kitchen

- Make ointments, creams, balms, salves & gels
- Core ingredients, single preparations, synergistic combinations
- Recipe variations
- Infused summer oils – methods of infusion and pressing oils from flowers and aerial plant parts
- Summer health discussion

From the drying room

- Drying for best quality

- Temperature control; stripping & storage
- Maintaining records
- Screens and preparation of tea grade herbs
- Blending herbal beverages, percentages, strengths and combinations made from aerial parts of plants
- Quality and potency of medicine

Student Homework (10 hours)

Write a profile for 10 plants under the following headings:

Names – Botanical & common, habitat and cultivation, identification, part used, plant actions, harvesting and drying, processing, precautions for use, manufactured products, market potential. A plant profile for each plant covered in the season and samples of how to prepare this information will be given in the course herbarium.



the essence of autumn

four days of hands-on experience in the collection and processing of berries. The incredible value of plants grown for their roots, and the manufacture of tonics.

Getting set up – Equipment, resources, core ingredients, suppliers, terms and definitions

From the garden

- Mulching, dead heading; pinching
- Wild crafting, the ethics and guidelines for collecting from the wild
- Value of Roots – Digging roots and rhizomes, harvesting roots, re-planting roots, cleaning and preparing roots for drying
- Plant profiles of the autumn herbs

From the pharmacy kitchen

- Distilling your favourite herbs into hydrosols
- Blends and singles for oxymels
- Blends and singles for syrups and herbal honey
- Blends and singles for plant tonics
- Liniments
- Throat sprays
- Recipe variations
- Autumn health discussion

From the drying room

- Preparation and drying of roots
- Blending herbal beverages from berries and roots
- Plant actions and considerations of compatibility

Student Homework (10 hours)

Write a profile for 10 plants under the following headings:

Names – Botanical & common, habitat and cultivation, identification, part used, plant actions, harvesting and drying, processing, precautions for use, manufacturing products, market potential. A plant profile for each plant covered in the season and samples of how to prepare this information will be given in the course herbarium.



winter



the essence of winter

four days of hands-on experience in the drying room. Blending from dried plant material and making warming protective remedies.

Getting set up – Equipment, resources, core ingredients, suppliers, terms and definitions

From the garden

- Planning changes for the new season
- Plant profiles of the winter herbs

From the pharmacy kitchen

- Make pastes
- Preparations for the skin
- Tinctures – methods of preparation
- Powders and capsules
- Creams for internal use
- Recipe variations
- Herbal first aid kits
- Winter health discussion

From the drying room

- Blending herbal beverages from roots and winter warming mixtures
- Keeping the drying room tidy and organized
- Managing dried herbs, storage and containers

Student Homework (10 hours)

Write a profile for 10 plants under the following headings:

Names – Botanical & common, habitat and cultivation, identification, part used, plant actions, harvesting and drying, processing, precautions for use, manufacturing products, market potential. A plant profile for each plant covered in the season and samples of how to prepare this information will be given in the course herbarium.

founder

valmai becker lover of all things herbal

Valmai attained a Diploma in Naturopathy (ND) in 1980 and established and managed a clinical practice for eight years, specialising in using the philosophies and traditions of natural medicine and a holistic self-healing model of wellness.

Valmai is a well known figure in natural medicine in New Zealand. Her passion for this took her into the realm of education, and for 17 years until 2005, she was a Co-owner and Director of Canterbury College of Natural Medicine.

As the course director she wrote curriculum to New Zealand Qualifications Authority standard for the Diploma programmes taught at the college and she tutored many aspects of natural medicine. Phytofarm is now her primary passion.

Valmai invites you to join tutor Kirsty and chef Hamish for an inspirational learning experience in herbal medicine, wellness and creating your own garden pharmacy.

key facts

The interest in the Apprenticeship programme is growing, so please make your application early to secure a place. Course days and times are scheduled as follows: Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday from **10am - 4pm**
Total Attendance Hours: **96**

Home Work Hours each season: **40**

Total Hours: **136**

General months of seasonal classes:

2025 Spring: November

2026 Summer: February

2026 Autumn: March

2026 Winter: June

student info

Entry into the apprenticeship programme is open to anyone with an interest in medicinal plants, no previous gardening or herb experience is necessary.

Application Procedure: Complete the application form and email to info@phytofarm.co.nz or post to Phytofarm, 166 Okuti Valley Road, Little River. We will review your application and email a letter of confirmation of your place on the apprenticeship programme. Once this letter is emailed to you a **\$500** non-refundable deposit is to be paid. All the details of programme dates, bank account number and when payments are due will be in the confirmation letter. Fees are to be paid in advance for the full year **\$4,900**, less deposit of **\$500**.

Apprenticeship fees include G.S.T., all tutoring, materials, ingredients, course manual for each season and lunch on class attendance days. The apprenticeship has been developed as a hands-on herbal experience. On successful completion of it, attendance at all seasonal weekends and completion of plant profiles, Valmai Becker will be awarding a Phytofarm Certificate in Herbal Apprenticeship. The course is not NZQA accredited so student study loans and allowance will not be available to students.

Refunds/Withdrawals : There will be **no refunds** once the programme has commenced. If there are some extenuating circumstances why completion is not possible, it can be negotiated to complete at another time with the payment of a 10% surcharge on the seasonal rate.

If you have any questions we welcome your contact email info@phytofarm.co.nz www.phytofarm.co.nz · Phytofarm, 166 Okuti Valley Rd · Little River 7591 · New Zealand

Accommodation options

Accommodation in Little River is in addition to the course fee.

The six hour days will be detailed and physical so it is ideal to stay in Little River, relax and share some out-of-class time with the other students.

Phytofarm:

- Classic Café Marshmallow camper \$70 per night.
- Glamping bell tent \$50 single per night. \$70 dble
- Gypsy Caravan \$70 single per night

Please enquire for details.

SiloStay: Unique accommodation in the heart of Little River using innovative eco-friendly design. View on www.silostay.kiwi.nz

The Twisted Ngaio Bed and Breakfast: off the grid accommodation with queen sized rooms own ensuite and superb panoramic view out over the valley. View www.holidayhouses.co.nz/properties/54537.

Kowhai Cabin is set amidst pasture and many trees, a peaceful and private retreat in walking distance. Search **Kowhai Cabin** Little River on Airbnb or call 03 3251 427.

Summer-only accommodation options:

Okuti Garden Eco Stay: This beautiful property is within walking distance of Phytofarm and offers a variety of accommodation including a house truck \$50, yurts from \$40, tent sites \$10. Breakfast available for \$15. Cooking facilities are available in the garden kitchen that is surrounded by pick-your-own culinary herbs. www.okuti.co.nz

Little River Campground and Manaia Native Reserve

provides a little piece of paradise in a bush and stream setting. Powered sites suitable for campers \$25, tent sites \$10 and cabins available. www.littlerivercampground.co.nz