

Let's take control, get hands-on with herbs

To truly discover the amazing things plants can do for us, as with all things, you can't beat a hands-on approach. Nicolette Perry discusses the study programme at Dilston Physic Garden.

With the numbers of workshops and courses exploring herbal medicine becoming popular across the country from Devon to Arran, it's easier to find one near you covering anything from hedgerow medicine to cooking with herbs. For those willing to dedicate ten whole days in the wild and beautiful Northumberland, Dilston Physic Garden offers a truly unique experience.

Visitors want to know more

Since the creation of Dilston Physic Garden in the early 1990's, one thing stands out – visitors always want to know more of what plants can do. So five years ago Dilston decided to provide a comprehensive and innovative course drawing together the experience of many wonderful medical herbalists and scientists studying plant medicine and teaching at the physic garden. The Foundation in Plant Medicine was created to teach not only the remarkable medicinal powers of the plants around us, but also their health-giving properties with a discovery of the principles behind our health.

The unique physic garden setting makes this course unique in the UK. Finding yourself immersed in 0.8ha of medicinal plants, you can't help but discover. With information everywhere, during the course you experience the folklore, health, science and medicine of over 800 plants.

The basics

One of the key foundations of the Dilston course is exploring a basic level of anatomy and physiology, exploring how plant preparations work on the systems of our body.

From traditional uses through to modern scientific knowledge, you can learn how to use plants in many different situations, from first-aid, to treating minor ailments, and just maybe how to prevent disease. However, as well as exploring the science of why and how plants work you also discover some of the fascinating ancient folklore and history of herbs.

Make the stuff of our health

With a hands-on focus this course teaches you how to grow, identify, harvest and store herbs. Participants say there's no greater pleasure than making a range of safe effective medicines from the plants growing in their gardens and waysides. They say one of the nicest parts is experiencing the simple pleasure of recognising medicinal plants out in nature. We've heard being outdoors is good for mind and body, but also soul. Connecting more deeply with plants and nature, identifying and gathering plants, in a sustainable way, is entirely satisfying and some say life-changing.

Participants on the Dilston course enjoy guided physic garden walks, collecting herbs, herb tastings, preparing herbal decoctions, poultices and ointments, tinctures, tonics and teas, first aid preparations, as well as herbal syrups and infused oils. You'll become familiar with detoxing dandelions, burdock and cleavers, to skin healing comfrey marigold and ribwort, to calming St John's wort and valerian.

Course tutors come together from a range of expertise in plant medicine and assigned tutors answer any questions you have during the course. Taught by

registered medical herbalists, Ross Menzies, Jill Schnabel and Sarah Hughes, the course also has pharmacognosist Nicolette Perry and is curated by neuroscientist Elaine Perry, who has many years experience in the science behind medicinal plants for the brain.

Outcomes

On completing the foundation course, you'll know bitter and astringent herbs that cleanse and detox, aromatic, carminative (gut-soothing) herbs and nervines (herbs that calm), herbs for circulatory and cardiovascular health, antiseptics and wound-healing herbs, anti infective and respiratory herbs.

You'll come away understanding the fascinating distinctions between folklore, historical traditional use and scientific research. And you'll know how a herbalist uses and understands the benefits of medicinal plants, which plants to use in which situations, and how to search a database for scientific research on a medicinal plant.

Perhaps the most rewarding part will be reflecting on all the above in the completion of your own medicinal flora monograph on your favourite herb.

Above all you'll learn how to look after yourself and lead a healthier life. After all this, you might just be convinced to start using herbs in your life, every day. The Dilston foundation is a complete beginner's guide, it just requires passion and enthusiasm. And the requisite enjoyment of a unique and tranquil setting.



The Herbology House, with its spacious and covered verandah is the venue for the classroom sessions on the Dilston Course.



Above: Students take part in medicinal plant extraction.
Below: Herbs are gathered and prepared for use in herbal decoctions.

Photos: Nicolette Perry

Photo: Terence Walsh



Dilston Physic Garden.

Remember grandma's rose hip syrup?

Herbs should be making a come back in our lives? Could they even nourish us enough to maintain our health?

While we enter the season of viruses and bacteria, we often wonder what our best defence is. Since the chemical age came into being and we have had single compound drugs, have we lost the ability learnt over past generations to use plants as medicines? Have we fallen asleep on our health and could we even take back control of it?

Growing scientific evidence suggests herbs could, the same as our five a day, be protective agents. In discovering a unique hands-on course that embraces effective herbs for medicines as well as for maintaining our health, we might just learn some life changing facts on the way!

Plants are a key source of essential drugs, from morphine to digoxin. They're a key source of herbal medicines, from their gut soothing, immune boosting, skin healing to their sleep inducing, stress relieving and mood busting. But what's now becoming clear is that plants are also a key source of phytonutrients, substances that maintain our health, and may prevent ailments becoming chronic.

Could preventative plant medicine be a life saver?

We're now realising that plants contain an abundance of anti's. They're a positive power house of preventative medicine. From flavonoids to terpenoids they contain antibiotics, antivirals and antifungals, antioxidants, anti-inflammatories and anticancers, as well as other compounds with a number of other beneficial biological effects! Take sage for example – it's antibiotic, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant, great for colds, sore throats but also brain boosting. With new and fast growing scientific evidence behind exactly what and how these plant compounds boost and maintain our bodily and mental health, it's becoming obvious, if we want to live without disease, we can't live without plants in our lives, everyday.

Foundation in Plant Medicine 2017 & 2018

The 2017 Foundation runs as a 10-day block in midsummer, from Monday 12 – Friday 23 June (with a weekend break).

The 2018 course runs as a weekend seasonal course: early May, mid July, end September and mid November.

For more information visit <http://dilstonphysicgarden.com/foundation-courses/> or email info@dilstonphysicgarden.com.

Nicolette Perry BSc(Hons) PhD is a pharmacognosist and managing director of Dilston Physic Garden and its Foundation in Plant Medicine. Her interest is in the science behind the use of plants for health and as medicines with particular focus on the pharmacology and phytochemistry of aromatic plants and essential oils for the central nervous system. She is also keen to convey to the public, schools, professionals and universities the knowledge of plants for health, in herbal medicine, as cutting edge medicines, in research, as well as in integrative medicine.