

Kahikatea Farm: A *Permaculture Paradise*

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Although I have had a long interest in holistic healing and the healing power of nature, it was Kahikatea Farm that really set me on my path to becoming a Naturopath and Medical Herbalist. I had the pleasure of working for Jo and Aaron Duff in their organic nursery when I decided to study Naturopathy and Medical Herbalism. I was involved in the planting of seeds, preparation and care for seedlings and potted perennials.



Kahikatea Farm Home (Duff, n.d.)

Surrounded by fantastic plants in the nursery as well as growing them at home, whet my appetite to learn more about utilising the healing power of medicinal plants. So, it is with pleasure that I find myself receiving this opportunity to introduce Kahikatea Farm to the readers of Avena.

Kahikatea farm is a 16-acre property in Poukawa, Hawkes Bay. The farm itself is a peaceful, productive slice of paradise run by Jo, her husband Aaron and their two daughters who have a passion for the environment and who have chosen to live as sustainably as possible.

Permaculture and its ethics of Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share (Sharing the Surplus) serve as the core principals of how the Duff family live their lives. For those readers unfamiliar with Permaculture, it is a set of design principles developed in the 1970's by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren. It focuses on utilising the



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patterns and resilient features observed in natural ecosystems. Permaculture is designed to be an ecologically sound way of living, with minimal input for maximum output, which can be applied to households (large or small), gardens, communities and businesses.

The Duff family homestead was built with sustainable features such as rainwater catchment, solar power, composting toilets and an impressive wood burning range takes centre stage in the living area to provide heat for the home and to cook on. The family also make use of their land by growing stands of trees for firewood and source as much of their own food as possible by raising poultry and growing food in their vegetable gardens and food forest. Over the years, volunteers have come to the farm to help share the workload and learn permaculture techniques. They work alongside contract staff in the nursery and on the farm.

Jo is a permaculture teacher and gardener who has taught permaculture, sustainability and gardening workshops since 2005. She also founded the Hawke's Bay Permaculture Group that same year. In 2007 Jo was awarded the *NZ Gardener* magazine's 'Hawke's Bay Gardener of the Year' for her gardening, teaching and community efforts.

Jo regularly runs courses throughout the year on topics such as propagation, introduction to permaculture design, edible gardening and designing food forests in order to share her knowledge with the wider community. These courses include spending time on the farm so students can have hands-on experience and be inspired by Jo and Aaron's permaculture lifestyle. I highly recommend these courses having attended both the introduction to permaculture (a four day course) and food forest courses (a two day course), before I went on to study a full course in Permaculture design. These courses are perfect for herbalists who are also passionate about gardening and the environment and wish to learn more about soil health, water catchment, multi-purpose plantings, composting and using animals within the garden.

Jo and Aaron established a plant nursery at Kahikatea farm in 2009 and became certified organic with Organic Farm New Zealand (OFNZ) in 2010. In order to maintain certification standards, the nursery uses certified organic potting mix and seaweed fertiliser and, where possible, source both organic and local seeds including seeds from plants grown on the farm. No treated or hybrid seeds are used in the nursery.

Kahikatea farm prides itself on providing plants that are healthy and hardy, as the plants are not sprayed chemically for pests, but rather observed and watched and, if needed, sprayed with a non-toxic approved product. In this way they tend to develop a strength and immunity to pests that many garden centre plants lack. Personally, I have been impressed with the robust health of plants and trees I've purchased from the nursery. All have transplanted well and continue to thrive and multiply in my garden.

More than 200 varieties of edible and medicinal herbs, companion plants, perennial vegetables, flowers, shrubs and trees are available from Kahikatea farm. The focus of the nursery is on multi-functional perennials and self-sowing annuals which are perfect for those who wish to grow plants for food, fuel or dyes for crafts. The nursery has a large collection of medicinal plants available. Their plant catalogue can become quite addictive, especially if you're an herbalist who likes to grow as many medicinal plants as possible! You will find medicinal plants such as wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*), withania (*Withania somnifera*) and vervain (*Verbena officinalis*), as well as other plants that may be less familiar, such as yomogi (*Artemisia princeps*), woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) and alehoof (*Glechoma hederacea*).

Some of Jo's personal favourites from the plants available at



Food Forest Walk (Duff, n.d.)

the nursery are the perennial vegetables. These perennials have more nutrition than that of annual vegetables, as their roots penetrate deeper into the soil and therefore mine a wider diversity of nutrients. As a bonus, these plants may take less water to grow. Some of Jo's "must haves" are perfect for salads; for instance salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*), lemon sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), wild fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and chicory (*Cichorium intybus*). Alehoof (*Glechoma hederacea*) and bunching onions (*Allium fistulosum*) and the reliable self-seeding biennials such as, angelica (*Angelica archangelica*) and alexanders (*Smyrniolus atrum*). Jo also loves weeds such as the mallow family (*Althaea officinalis*) and chickweed (*Stellaria media*) which are not available through the nursery but grow freely on the farm.

Jo's favourite medicinal herbs that she grows for her family are the ones she finds her family most often need. These are mainly used for coughs and colds. She utilises sage (*Salvia officinalis*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), angelica (*Angelica archangelica*) and horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) for teas.

Jo regularly chops up sage and thyme which is mixed with hot water and a teaspoon of manuka honey for colds and flus. These herbs have also been used successfully with their dogs when they succumb to coughs!

Permaculture design tips

- 1. Make the most of your vertical space, especially if you are urban. Use walls, fences, carports etc. for growing productive climbers, or stack your plants like a forest with trees as canopy, then shrubs, herbaceous groundcover and root layers below.**
- 2. Try to ensure everything you plant is multifunctional. This means you increase the number of yields in your system. For example, alfalfa is edible, medicinal, nitrogen fixing and a great bee plant.**
- 3. Always ask 'What would nature do?' Does Mother Nature dig the soil? No. Does Mother Nature leave the soil bare? No. Does Mother Nature grow a monocrop? No. Does Mother Nature cycle nutrients solely from within the system? Yes. Then follow her lead in your garden!**

You can find more information on courses offered throughout the year and the full plant catalogue on Kahikatea Farms website at <http://www.kahikateafarm.co.nz>. The website is currently in the process of being upgraded to have a new look and a more user friendly search function. The nursery will also be adding a wider range of medicinal herbs to the collection currently available and Jo would welcome any feedback and input from *Avena* readers about the types of medicinal plants they would like to see available for purchase. Kahikatea Farm ship New Zealand wide, so you can enjoy a spot of armchair plant shopping no matter where in the country you reside! ♻️