

Hear Ye, hear Ye! Inside the new Medieval Garden



Madeleine Powers | WAIKATO TIMES

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Gus Flower, Horticultural and Operations Manager has been overseeing the construction of the new Medieval Garden.

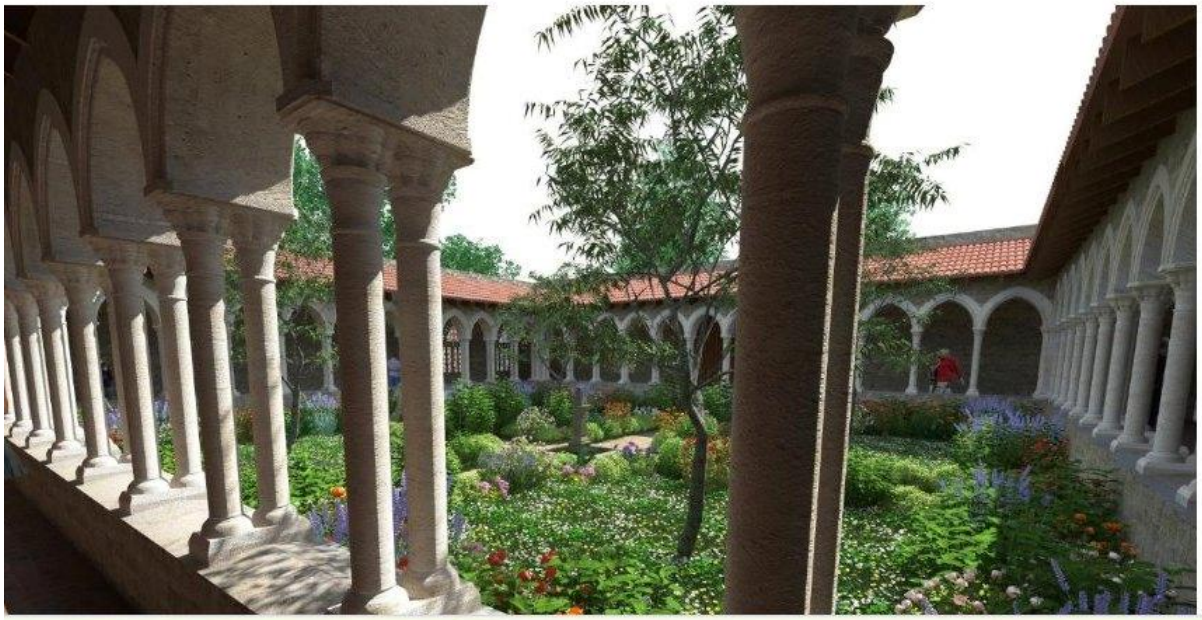
CHRISTEL YARDLEY / WAIKATO TIMES

There won't be blood-letting, but everything else about the Medieval apothecary garden coming to Hamilton will be true to history.

It's still months away from its February 2026 opening, but things are coming together for the latest addition to Hamilton Gardens' enclosed gardens.

The latest milestone in the garden's progress has been the arrival of 30 different medicinal herbs from Kahikatea Farm in the Hawkes Bay to be planted in Spring.

Jo Duff, manager and co-owner of Kahikatea Farm has supplied plants for Hamilton Gardens before, as well as to Hobbiton in Matamata.



But she did a double take when she saw the extensive plant list for the Medieval Garden, which had nearly every medicinal herb in their catalogue.

Some of the herbs, like the Mediterranean perennial herb costmary are hard to come by, but with the biggest collection of medicinal herbs in the country, they had nearly everything on the list.

Kahikatea Farm is a 16 acre permaculture farm that's celebrating its 20th anniversary later this year.



Jo Duff manages Kahikatea Farm, a 16 acre permaculture farm in the Hawkes Bay.

KAHIKATEA FARM

As well as offering workshops on permaculture, they run an online certified organic permaculture nursery, growing and sending a range of plants suitable for permaculture projects around New Zealand and to outer islands.

Medicinal herbs are a speciality, and something that Duff has grown in popularity since covid, with more people interested in growing their own medicinal herbs.

“Some people call them preppers”, said Duff, but she says it’s not about that.

“If you do want to harvest your own herbs for culinary or personal use, then having them in your own garden, fresh, is best.”



Duff, who is English, said the idea for a medieval medicinal garden “resonated”.

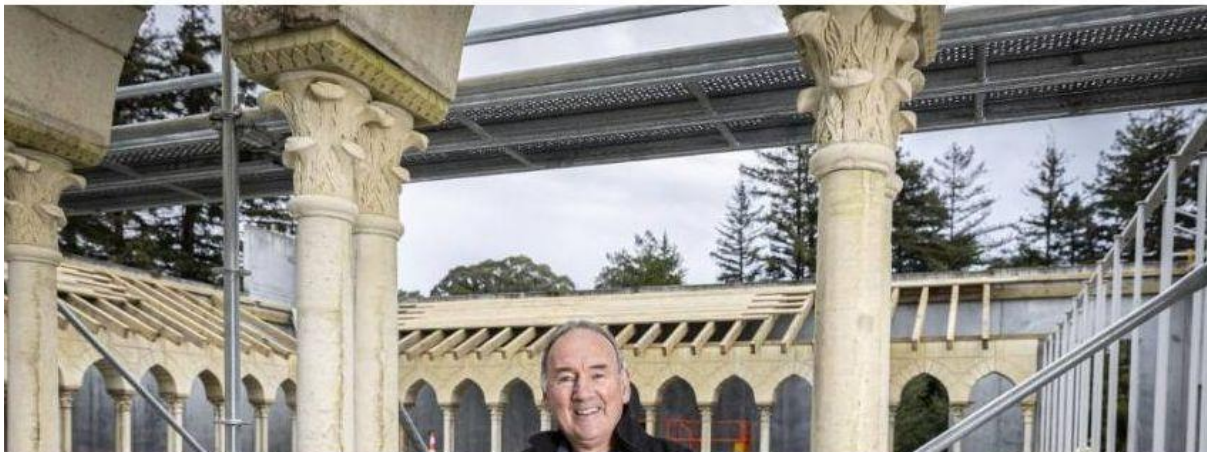
The garden is inspired by the garden at the church of St John of the Hermits in Sicily, but is similar to other similar gardens found in monasteries across Europe.

True to the original, the new garden will have an apothecary garden for medicinal cures and a cloister garth for prayer and contemplation.

Gus Flower, horticulture and operations manager at the gardens, says unlike botanical gardens, Hamilton Gardens gives visitors a unique insight into a particular period of history.

You could almost say the Medieval apothecary garden was “the start of hospitals”, says Flower.

“If you think of Europe during that time, all these warring tribes, Anglo-Saxons, Normans, suddenly there was a place for people to rest.”



The apothecary was the “business end”, providing medicinal herbs for healing, but also to use in cooking.

“A lot of modern day medicines are derived from herbs”, says Flower. Many common drugs like Aspirin, which comes from willow trees, have botanical origins.

While some practices like blood-letting to “take away unwanted feelings” are dubious, Duff says a lot of what they thought was correct has since been proven by science.

“They were using horehound for chest complaints and bronchitis, which we still use, and peppermint for the mouth and gums.”

“It was amazing what they knew.”





Artist's impressions looking into the apothecary garden.
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Standing under the cloisters on a cold winter morning, it's hard to imagine, but come February, Flowers says the garden will be in full bloom, resplendent with the bright colours and the fragrance of medicinal herbs.

The plants from Kahikatea Farm will be planted in early Spring, with the final stages of construction including roof over the cloistures finishing before the scheduled opening in February.

Patrons attending the gardening opening can expect nods to medieval European cuisine, including mead made with herbs and honey produced at the gardens, says Flower.



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