

Beyond Beauty: Lei Making as Medicine

An Embodied Botanical Intensive

Course Overview

Beyond Beauty: Lei Making as Medicine reframes lei-making as a living medicinal practice—one rooted in relationship rather than ornament. Participants are introduced to lei not as decoration, but as a form of wearable plant medicine that engages the respiratory, limbic, and nervous systems through scent, touch, and ritual. Drawing from Hawaiian and broader Polynesian traditions, this course integrates ethnobotanical knowledge, cultural context, embodied practice, and hands-on making to restore lei to its original role as a tool for healing, reverence, and connection.

Not unique to Polynesia alone, the practice of weaving and wearing botanicals as medicine appears across cultures—from ancient Egyptian flower wreaths and Hindu garlands of devotion, to Gaelic seasonal crowns and the medicinal head adornments of Navajo healers. Across these traditions, plants were worn on the body as a means of receiving direct psychological, physiological, and spiritual care from the land itself. Botanicals were chosen not for appearance alone, but for their medicinal actions, energetic qualities, and reciprocal power within rites of passage, healing, and transformation. When warmed on the body, aromatic plants release volatile compounds that engage the respiratory, limbic, and nervous systems, offering a gentle yet profound form of medicine. At its core, this practice is about relationship—between human and plant, body and land, beauty and healing. *Beyond Beauty* calls participants back into this shared lineage, where beauty is not an object to consume, but a living, intentional alliance with the natural world.



Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will understand lei-making as a medicinal, ecological, and cultural practice rooted in relationship and care. They will learn respectful plant engagement and harvesting protocols, gain foundational ethnobotanical knowledge of aromatic and medicinal plants, and experience lei-making as a form of mindfulness, ritual, and embodied storytelling. Participants will create and wear a personally meaningful lei as a “wearable formula,” while developing practical tools for grounding, sensory regulation, and a deeper, relational understanding of beauty.

Course Structure & Outline

I. Opening the Space: Beauty as Relationship

- Setting intention: moving *beyond* beauty as aesthetics
- Introduction to beauty as relationship—to plants, place, body, and ancestry
- Framing lei as medicine, not ornament
- Brief grounding practice to arrive in the body and senses

II. Cultural & Historical Foundations

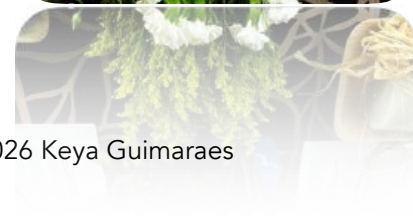
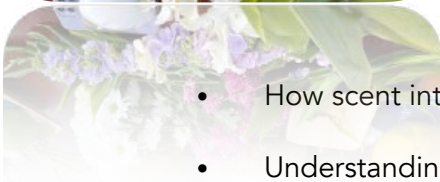
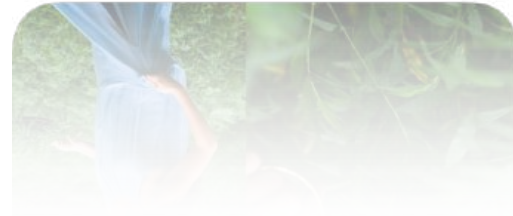
- Origins of lei-making in Polynesia and Hawai'i
- Lei as ceremony, communication, protection, and healing
- The shift from medicinal ritual to decorative object
- Cultural respect, context, and responsibility in practice
- Introduction to Hawaiian protocols (kapu, intention, gratitude)

III. Plants as Allies: Ethnobotanical Foundations

- Plants as relational beings, not raw materials
- Introduction to aromatic plants and volatile oils
- How scent interacts with the respiratory, limbic, and nervous systems
- Understanding “wearable medicine” vs. topical or ingestible remedies
- Choosing plants based on intention, season, and energetic qualities

V. Technique & Making: Wili Method

- Introduction to traditional lei-making methods
- Learning the **wili** technique using a Ti (ti) leaf spine
- Plant preparation, binding, rhythm, and care



- Weaving as meditation and storytelling
- Creating a coherent, intentional “formula” through design

VI. Ritual, Reflection & Integration

- Wearing the completed lei in a guided ritual
- Reflection on sensation, memory, and emotional shifts

•Sharing (optional): personal meaning and experience

•Practices for releasing or returning the lei to the land

•Bringing lei medicine into daily life

Takeaways for Participants

Participants leave with a hand-crafted medicinal lei and a deeper understanding of plants as allies in wellbeing, along with foundational cultural and ethnobotanical knowledge. The course offers a renewed way of understanding beauty as a lived, relational practice rather than an aesthetic outcome, while providing practical tools for sensory grounding, emotional regulation, and mindful self-care. Participants also gain a replicable ritual that can be adapted respectfully into daily life, seasonal transitions, and moments of personal or communal significance.

Practical Considerations and Format Options

Beyond Beauty: Lei Making as Medicine is designed to be flexible and scalable across settings and audiences. It may be offered as a single-day intensive (3–5 hours), a weekend immersion, or a multi-session course over two to four weeks.

Ideal for schools, non-profits, spas, healing retreats and private groups seeking a meaningful, shared experience of growth and healing. The program can be delivered in person or in hybrid formats, with the option of mailed botanical kits to support a rich, tactile experience for online participants.

