

THE PLANTHUNTER

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au>)

Search

[Categories](#) ▾ [Issues](#) ▾ [Contributors](#) ▾ [The Directory](#) ▾ [Workshops](#) [About](#) [Press](#) [Advertise](#) [Contact](#) [http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-45-dirty/">http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-45-dirty/](#) [http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/gardens/">http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/gardens/](#) [http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/lucy-culliton/">http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/lucy-culliton/](#)



#45: DIRTY ([HTTP://THEPLANTHUNTER.COM.AU/ISSUE/ISSUE-45-DIRTY/](http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-45-dirty/))
GARDENS ([HTTP://THEPLANTHUNTER.COM.AU/CATEGORY/GARDENS/](http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/gardens/))
LUCY CULLITON ([HTTP://THEPLANTHUNTER.COM.AU/TAG/LUCY-CULLITON/](http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/lucy-culliton/))

Subscribe to *The Planthunter* weekly email newsletter!

[Sign Up](#)

Lucy Culliton is an Artist and Dahlia Fancier

Words by **Georgina Reid**(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/contributors/georgina-reid/>)

. Images by **Daniel Shipp**(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/contributors/daniel-shipp/>)

| July 12, 2017

I have a feeling Lucy Culliton was born with dirt under her fingernails. The highly acclaimed artist, keen gardener, and animal rescuer doesn't strike me as one for the frivolity of manicures and makeup, of fashion and show – rather, she's a woman very much of the earth, with a soft spot for dahlias.



Lucy and pal



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/ads/aust-landscape-conference-1-28-feb-2018/>)



From Twitter

AND WE'RE BACK!! We're kicking off 2018 with a little intrigue.... Welcome to Issue #52 (<http://twitter.com/search?q=%2352>):...

<https://t.co/oLZgWxNEeH>

(<https://t.co/oLZgWxNEeH>) about 1 week ago

(<http://twitter.com/ThePlanthunter/statuses/960278281101684736>)

TODAY ON THE PLANTHUNTER: Revisit the gorgeous country garden of landscape designer... <https://t.co/0NRTtxQFTu>

(<https://t.co/0NRTtxQFTu>) about 2 weeks ago

(<http://twitter.com/ThePlanthunter/statuses/958495649724551169>)

TODAY ON THE PLANTHUNTER: Learn how to propagate native plants with Nancy Shaw! Nancy tells me...

<https://t.co/fJ87lAsCfF>

(<https://t.co/fJ87lAsCfF>) about 2 weeks ago

(<http://twitter.com/ThePlanthunter/statuses/958219177143095297>)

I've been hearing about Lucy's garden from my pal Daniel Shipp for around three years now. Finally, a few months back we had the opportunity to visit. It's an incredible place, nestled into the side of a hill on the edge of a small town called Bibbenluke, about five hours south of Sydney.

Bibbenluke Lodge has been Lucy's home for nearly a decade. It's a gorgeous old property consisting of a pine tree lined driveway leading to a 1930s homestead and outbuildings, a big wild garden, and a few acres of paddocks. As well as housing Lucy and her partner Jamie, it is also home to what can only be described as a menagerie. I'll get the numbers wrong, but it goes something like this: Three cows, a few horses, 40-ish sheep, a couple of goats, two pigs, two emus, a shed full of pigeons, some galahs, chickens, a magpie or two and four dogs. I'm sure I've only got half of the residents but you get the idea.

We visit Lucy twice – firstly in the late afternoon, and second early the next morning. It's an enchanting place and Lucy is an incredibly relaxed, no-nonsense host. She takes us on a wander around the garden and we discuss her various horticultural enterprises. Like how she's going to remove the English elm suckers between the road and her house and replace them with masses of rhododendrons so that "when people drive along the road and see them in flower they'll go 'what the fuck!?' That's what I want."

She tells me how there was plenty in the garden to begin with, and how she likes to add to what's already there. She's learning, though, what works and what doesn't.

"When I first came here I tried anything that said cold climate on the label," Lucy says. "They'd die, die, die. I just keep doing things like lupins and dahlias because they work."



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/people/david-holmgrens-permaculture-revolution/>) ▲

David Holmgren's Permaculture Revo-

lution (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/people/>)/
<http://theplanthunter.com.au/people/david-holmgrens-permaculture-revolution/>

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/revolution/>)
#46: REVOLUTION
Gardens - Permaculture Revolution

David Holmgren's Permaculture...

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/people/david-holmgrens-permaculture-revolution/>)

A chat with the seriously revolutionary co-founder of permaculture. [Read More](#) (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/people/david-holmgrens-permaculture-revolution/>) ▲

A chat with the seriously revolutionary co-founder of permaculture. [Read More](#) (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/people/david-holmgrens-permaculture-revolution/>)
Gardens (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/gardens/>)/



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/gardens/gaylenes-maximalist-indoor-garden/>)

Gaylene's Maximalist

Indoor G...

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/gardens/gaylenes-maximalist-indoor-garden/>)

We visit a plant packed Melbourne apartment! [Read More](#)

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/gardens/gaylenes-maximalist-indoor-garden/>)

We visit a plant packed Melbourne apartment! [Read More](#)

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/gardens/gaylenes-maximalist-indoor-garden/>)



Bibbenluke Lodge is her first large garden, but Lucy is no stranger to plants. Before Bibbenluke she lived in Surry Hills, then Hartley in the blue mountains of NSW. Surry Hills was all about succulents – she became a member of the Succulent Society of NSW and devoted herself to painting her collection. Then came Hartley, where her focus was cactus. Again, another collection of works inspired by her plants followed. She's painted the flowers at Bibbenluke, the weeds of the Monaro, the interiors of her house, and most recently a series of around 60 portraits of the animals under her care, called [The Residents of Bibbenluke Lodge](http://kingstreetgallery.com.au/exhibitions/the-residents-of-bibbenluke-lodge/?fpage=thumbnails) (<http://kingstreetgallery.com.au/exhibitions/the-residents-of-bibbenluke-lodge/?fpage=thumbnails>).

"I like nurturing," Lucy tells me when I ask her what draws her to gardening. This is clear, but it's also clear she likes hard work. When we visit her the next morning she's already been up for a few hours, feeding the animals. She's

then off to her studio to work on her upcoming exhibition before more farm jobs in the afternoon. As well as being labour intensive, I wonder whether the garden nurtures Lucy and her art practice as much as she nurtures it.

“Gardening is a mental exercise which is different to painting. It’s something that’s never finished and I never intend it to be finished. It’s hard work but it pays off – I think it just suits me.”

To say Lucy Culliton’s garden is all about dahlias would be an overstatement. It does seem, however, that they may be her latest obsession. There’s certainly a dahlia hierarchy happening – the common, self-seeders live down the bottom of the garden, sharing a bed with a wild pumpkin vine. The ‘show-ponies’ are closer to the house, planted in beds near the front door, so she can keep a close eye on them, keeping them staked and well watered.

Her attention has paid off. The Bombala Show was on a week before our arrival and Lucy’s kitchen windowsills are full of her show-pony dahlia blooms, looking a little worse for wear.

“Lucy has won plenty of prizes for her art,” Jamie, her fella, tells us, “but I don’t think I’ve ever seen her happier than at the Bombala Show last week, winning prizes for her dahlias.”

Lucy’s garden is wild and abundant. It’s a space to meander through slowly – offering incredibly beautiful vignettes on both macro and micro levels. It’s also, most importantly, a window into the world of Lucy Culliton. Because, as she suggests, the garden is for no one else but her – “I only do it for myself,” she tells me. “Every gardener only ever does it for themselves.” This, actually, is where the beauty and power of gardening can be found. Gardens are expressions, not show-ponies. They only have to suit the hand that nurtures them, and if they do, well, that’s that. Nothing more needs to be said.



Lucy's prize winning dahlias



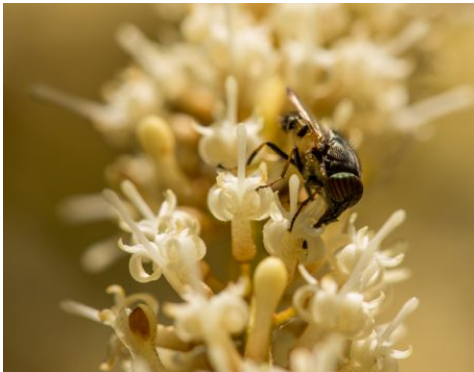


LIKE WHAT YOU'RE READING? SIGN UP FOR MORE

Enter your email address here

Sign Up

Related Stories



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/buzz-native-bees-tobias-smith/>)



The Buzz on Native Bees 'n Bugs with Tobias Smith
(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/buzz-native-bees-tobias-smith/>)
The Buzz on Native Bees 'n Bu...
(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/buzz-native-bees-tobias-smith/>)



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/howto/grow-air-plants-tillandsia-spp/>)



How-To Grow Air Plants (Tillandsia spp.) (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/howto/grow-air-plants-tillandsia-spp/>)
How-To Grow Air Plants (Tillandsia ...
(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/howto/grow-air-plants-tillandsia-spp/>)



(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/botanica/brilliant-green-surprising-history-science-plant-intelligence/>)



Brilliant Green: Plant Intelligence Explained (<http://theplanthunter.com.au/botanica/brilliant-green-surprising-history-science-plant-intelligence/>)

thunter.com.au/harvest/buzz-native-bees-tobias-smith/)

A chat about native bugs and bees with pollination ecologist Dr Tobias Smith.

[Read More](#)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/buzz-

native-bees-tobias-smith/)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/harvest/)/

A chat about native bugs and bees with toby smith

pollination ecologist... [Read More](#)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/toby-smith/)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/harvest/buzz-

native-bees-tobias-smith/)

thunter.com.au/howto/grow-air-plants-tillandsia-spp/)

A guide to growing air plants with expert Bruce Dunstan. [Read More](#)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/howto/grow-

air-plants-tillandsia-spp/)

A guide to growing air plants with expert Bruce Dunstan. [Read More](#)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/howto/)/

tillandsia

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/howto/grow-

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/tillandsia/)

air-plants-tillandsia-spp/)

Brilliant Green: Plant Intelligence...

(http://theplan-

thunter.com.au/bota

nica/brilliant-green-

surprising-history-

science-plant-intelli-

gence/)

Plants are WAY more brilliant than we

realise. Be surprised! [Read More](#)

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/botanica/brilliant-

green-surprising-history-science-plant-

intelligence/)

botanica

Plants are WAY more brilliant than we

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/botanica/)/

realise. Be surprised! [Read More](#)

Stefano Mancuso

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/botanica/brilliant-

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/tag/stefano-

green-surprising-history-science-plant-

mancuso/)

intelligence/)

Categories

Art & Design

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/art-design/)

Gardens

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/gardens/)

People

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/people/)

How-To

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/howto/)

Goods

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/goods/)

Culture

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/culture/)

Harvest

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/harvest/)

Issues

#51: Best of 2017

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-51-best-of-2017/)

#50: DENYARD

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-50-denyard/)

#49: WILD

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-49-wild/)

#48: BEST OF 2016

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-48-best-of-2016/)

#47: THRIFT

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-47-thrift/)

Newsletter

Sign up to our regular newsletter to stay up

to date with the latest stories from The

Planthunter

Enter your email address here

Sign Up

Newsletter

Information

Press

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/press/)

Advertise

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/advertise/)

Contributors

(/contributors)

Contact

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/get-

in-touch/)

About

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/about/)

Connect

(http://theplanthunter.com.au/)

Botanica
(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/#46-category/botanica/>)

47-thrift/)

REVOLUTION

([http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-](http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-46-revolution/)

46-revolution/)

#45: DIRTY

([http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-](http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-45-dirty/)

45-dirty/)

VIEW ALL ISSUES

([http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/from-](http://theplanthunter.com.au/category/from-the-editor/)

the-editor/)

Sign up to our regular newsletter to stay up
to date with the latest stories from The
Planthunter

Enter your email address here

Sign Up

(<http://theplanthunter.com.au/issue/issue-46-revolution/>)
(<http://pinterest.com/theplanthunter>)