

They've got it waxed!



Where Lulubee products are made and packaged, you see bee motifs of all kinds. **OPPOSITE** Keith Roderick and Lulu Edy-Roderick, photographed in Giba Gorge, which is practically on their doorstep. Their beehives are about 5m higher than where they're sitting.



The lush Giba Gorge near Hillcrest in Kwazulu-Natal is home to two young bee farmers who, under the name Lulubee, are reviving the centuries-old tradition of using beeswax in skincare products and waxed-cotton food wraps.

TEXT JOHAN VAN ZYL PHOTOS PETER VAN NOORD

Seven years ago, before Facebook surpassed word-of-mouth as an effective marketing tool, Lulu Edy-Roderick had to help inform the public about an introductory beekeeping workshop presented at Durban Botanic Gardens, where she works as an administrative assistant. No one knew if there would be any interest in this free information day on offer by bee farmer and artist Jenny Cullinan. But people from all over the province turned up in swarms – suited, veiled, gloved, ready.

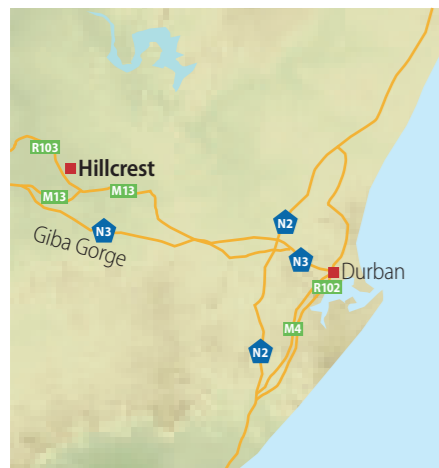
These days, Lulu, who was first in line, refers to *Apis mellifera scutellata* as “role models” and “teachers”, and to herself as “forever an apprentice” who regards her Lulubee range of products as a way of paying tribute to “these lovely, fascinating, mindful creatures that work to die”.

When you listen to Lulu and her husband, Keith, a horticulturist, artist and drum-maker, talking on the back stoep of their house at the edge of Giba Gorge, you might at first be tempted to dismiss them as airy-fairy hippies. But then you’d also have to give the Aztecs and Egyptians the same treatment. After all, they are the ones who, centuries ago, recognised the health benefits of honey and beeswax, and experimented with a variety of infusions and balsams.

In 2014, Lulu was seriously trying to work out how she could combine her love of plants and bees. In time, she began to experiment with plant poultices, ointments and tinctures >



ABOVE Lulu and Keith’s home is on the edge of Giba Gorge in Gillitts, a neighbourhood of Hillcrest, on the same property where Keith’s parents, Ron and Marjorie, have lived for 22 years. On the right you can see one of the garden sculptures created by Keith and his mother. **RIGHT** Lulu and Keith’s house is about 3 m higher up the slope where their eight beehives are, out of the flight path of the bees. The honey is for their own use, and the wax – plus more wax that they buy – is used to make Lulubee products. **BELOW** Giba Gorge (gibagorge.co.za) is a popular destination for hikers, runners, cyclists, birdwatchers and picnic-goers. The reserve spans about 72ha.



Lulu’s top 6 power plants



1 **CENTELLA ASIATICA** is known as pennywort, bubbles or little pig’s-ears, and elsewhere in the world it’s mostly called gotu kola. It makes skin appear firmer and more youthful because it promotes collagen production, microcirculation and repair. Research shows that it is also good for treating cellulite.



2 **SYMPHYTUM OFFICINALE**, known as comfrey, is regarded as a wonder herb that helps speed up the healing of wounds and skin irritations. It assists the skin in preserving moisture and helps to balance and normalise the production of skin cells, which means it’s often used for chronic conditions such as psoriasis.



3 **ERIOCEPHALUS AFRICANUS**, more widely known as wild rosemary or Cape snowbush, has powerful anti-inflammatory properties that soothe skin ailments. In addition, according to the late Margaret Roberts, this indigenous plant has a revitalising effect on skin and hair, much like ordinary rosemary does.

4 **CINNAMOMUM CAMPHORA**, or camphor tree, relieves pain, swelling and rashes. Its anti-inflammatory properties make it especially effective in relieving eczema.



5

TROPAEOLUM MAJUS, or nasturtium, contains lots of vitamin C, which stimulates cell growth and helps to heal damaged skin faster. It cleans and purifies the skin and improves its appearance.



HELICHRYSUM RUDERALE, an aromatic weed (ruderales means “growing among rubbish”!) that occurs in KwaZulu-Natal, is also known as yellow everlasting, but its other name – immortelle – reveals why it is used in skincare products. The plant contains a number of antioxidants that encourage skin renewal and repair.



The Lulubee product range

BEESWAX WRAPS

INGREDIENTS Durable organic cotton; unbleached local beeswax with antibacterial properties; slash pine resin (*Pinus elliottii*, a Category 2 invasive species in South Africa), which is naturally sticky and makes the wrap mouldable; and a carrier oil (mostly olive or coconut oil) to bind the ingredients.

COLOURING It was Keith's idea to dye the cotton wraps in the traditional way – by hand and with plant-based dyes. Turmeric is used for the yellow wraps, and a mix of brown and red onion skins create the brown shade of the bread wraps, which turns out a little different every time.

ADVANTAGES It's a centuries-old natural alternative to clingfilm – the antibacterial properties of beeswax ensure that food lasts longer. You can use it to wrap sandwiches, bread, cheese, fruit, vegetables or fresh herbs, or use it as you would clingfilm to cover a dish containing food. The heat from your hands helps to shape the wrap and seal it properly.

DISADVANTAGES You can't use the wraps for raw meat.

HOW LONG DO THEY LAST? If used daily, with proper care these wraps will last for at least a year, after which you can discard them on a compost heap or use them as firelighters.

HOW DO YOU CLEAN THEM? Wipe off crumbs and food remnants, then hand-wash the wraps in weak soapy cold water. Let them dry on the dish rack before using them again. Any form of heat (or hot water) is taboo!



Reusable Beeswax Bread Wrap (50cm x 55cm) R180
Set of three Reusable Beeswax Food Wraps (20cm x 20cm, 28cm x 28cm and 35cm x 35cm) R220
lulubee.co.za



Immortelle Face Balm (50ml) R170
Divine Healer Salve (100ml) R190
Bee-Licious Body Balm (100ml) R190
lulubee.co.za

BEESWAX SKINCARE PRODUCTS

INGREDIENTS Unbleached local beeswax with soothing and antibacterial properties that also moisturise and enrich the skin; oil, which (depending on the product) is usually any combination of grapeseed, sweet almond, coconut or rosehip; olive oil with plant infusions (the active ingredients); and essential oils.

ADVANTAGES Lulubee's Bee-licious Body Balm, as well as the two flavours of Lip Nectar, are rich and revitalising, moisturising the skin deeply without leaving behind a greasy residue, and the Immortelle Face Balm is a great night cream that you apply while your skin is still damp (it can also be used during the day if your skin feels very dry and taut). The bestseller is the Divine Healer Salve (with comfrey, camphor and pennywort), which Lulu says belongs in all first-aid kits because it does wonders for skin irritations; insect bites; dry skin; stiff, sore muscles; sunburn; blistered hands and feet; small cuts; eczema; psoriasis; and chafing. You can use it as a chest rub for colds and flu, and many customers buy it to help a new tattoo heal faster.

Lip Nectar (in Mandarin & Ylang Ylang and Lime & Jasmine flavours) R60 each

PRODUCT PHOTOS: GREG COX PRODUCTION MARIAN VAN WYK

and, on daily walks with the dogs in the gorge, she would search for plants with various medicinal properties.

After reading more about these plants, she decided to try to extract the active ingredients by steeping the flowers, seeds and leaves in olive oil for anything between six weeks and three months.

Two years and countless experiments later, she had reduced the number of plants with enough active ingredients to six (see page 109) and had started to hand out testers of her first creams and ointments to friends, family and colleagues. Their feedback on everything from effectiveness to texture and fragrance combinations was used to improve her formulas and then she

took the next big step: markets.

Over and above her skincare range, Lulu also makes reusable beeswax food wraps to use as a substitute for clingfilm. Over the past few years Platteland has come across a number of these products at various markets, but the Lulubee version is in a class of its own. The wraps really do cling, and they seal tightly. Keith was so confident that he demonstrated this by wrapping one over a glass filled with water and turning it upside down – not a drop escaped.

As is the case with many small businesses, Lulu now finds herself in a sticky situation: she isn't yet earning enough from Lulubee to leave her full-time job at Durban Botanic Gardens,

but because she spends almost every weekend at markets and has just launched her website and online store, too, at times she finds it difficult to replenish her supplies consistently.

Ultimately, she will resolve this by following the example of her "teachers": "You must just be organised, work hard and remain calm. You should never work with bees if you are angry or upset or battling with an injury, and I also think women should stay away when they are menstruating. Working with bees is something you should do slowly, gently and mindfully. Just like life itself." 🐝

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LEFT Keith's mother, Marjorie Jones, a well-known sculptor and ceramic artist, made this wall panel that is displayed at their front door. **FAR LEFT** Keith holds a glass filled with water and covered with a Lulubee beeswax food wrap upside down to show off the tight seal. **ABOVE LEFT** Lulu calls the room where she makes and packages her products The Hive. **ABOVE RIGHT** Lucy, who belongs to Ron and Marjorie, sits on a lofty perch in the main bedroom.