



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 54 Food Swap - Bartering With Your Preserves

Show Notes: www.LivingHomegrown.com/54

This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode #54.

Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh, without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hey, there, everybody. Welcome to the *Living Homegrown* podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this is the podcast where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that's through artisan food crafts like canning and fermenting, growing your own organic food no matter how big or how small your space, and just living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you want to learn more about any of these topics or my online canning courses, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com

Today's episode is kind of a different one. We're going to be diving into a topic that I have never covered here before and my guest is an author named Emily Paster. Now Emily is a lawyer by training and then she launched a second career in food writing and social media in 2010. She started her website at that time and it's called *West of the Loop*. She lives and writes in Chicago, just west of the Loop. Get it? She lives there with her family of four.



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Now her blog is all about the joy of feeding friends and family, exploring new foods, and then sharing what she learns, but she is also a very experienced food writer who appears in numerous publications, on television and radio shows with a focus on DIY projects, food preservation—we love that—and food swapping.

What is food swapping you ask? Well, I'll let Emily fill in all the details on that, but it's basically bartering or trading food with others, and it's the perfect thing for us to do with our canned goods. If you do any sort of canning, you probably have experienced this where you get a little overexcited about whatever season is happening, and maybe you make too much jam or too many pickles, and you just have way too much of something on your pantry shelf, more than your family can possibly consume in the next year.

Well, that is when food swapping can be a great way for you to change out what you have in your pantry and get some other wonderful homemade goods from some other artisan crafters. Now food swaps are organized events popping up all over the country. They've been very trendy for the last several years, and it's where people trade canned goods, baked goods, and more.

Now that is what the focus of today's podcast interview is all about. Emily has a brand new book on the art and fun of food swapping, and it was just released by Story Publications last week, so it is very hot off the press. The title of the book is *Food Swap: Specialty Recipes for Bartering, Sharing & Giving*. But it doesn't just cover food swapping. It also has some fantastic recipes in there that I know many of you would be interested in trying, and I will be sure to ask Emily to tell us all about those as well.



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As always, everything that's mentioned in today's episode will also be listed in the show notes for this episode. Just go to livinghomegrown.com/54 and I will have any links or extra information, including information on her book and Emily's website. Without further ado, here's my interview with Emily Paster, the author of *Food Swap*.

Theresa: Hey, Emily. Thanks so much for joining me here today.

Emily: Oh, thank you so much for having me.

Theresa: Well, I'm really excited about this topic, because as you know, canners, we always have so many jars at the end of the season, and sometimes we get a little overzealous, especially with jam making and we can end up with 20 jars of something and there's no way that our family is going to eat it, and so I'm really excited about diving into this topic on food swapping. First of all, could you explain what is a food swap for those of us who've never participated in one before?

Emily: Absolutely. A food swap is a recurring event where home cooks, home gardeners, home bakers get together to trade and barter their homemade and homegrown foods. There are really only two basic rules to food swapping. One is no money changes hands. Really, it's all trade and barter. That's important for a lot of reasons and we can get into that a bit more later, but the second rule is that you have to trade something that you made or grew or foraged yourself.

If you've got extra vegetables from your CSA, you can't just bring them to the food swap, but you can make something lovely out of

them, make a beautiful salsa and bring that. Or you could bring your homegrown vegetables or eggs from your backyard chickens, but it needs to be your own labor, if that makes sense.

Theresa: That makes perfect sense and I love that things like backyard chicken eggs or something that you grew from your garden can be part of the deal. It's not just canned goods, right?

Emily: Not at all. That's how I got into food swapping. I will tell you that. Just as you said in the beginning, I got into food swapping because I was an overzealous canner, still am, but—and it is wonderful for that. But yeah, absolutely. You can bring anything, any kinds of foods that you can make yourself at home and that are good for trading in this way. But absolutely, homegrown vegetables, herbs, eggs from backyard chickens, things you foraged. They're all fair game.

Theresa: Perfect. Well, all right, so you got into this because you were an overzealous canner. We can totally relate.

Emily: Right.

Theresa: But then you also went into coordinating these food swaps. Explain how that happened.

Emily: I think it was 2011, and again, I was just a deeply overzealous canner and was making way more jam and pickles than any one family could eat. Every time I came home from the farmer's market with yet another flat of berries, my husband would just roll his eyes at me.

I think it was, as I said, 2011 and I was reading my friend Marisa McClellan's wonderful blog, *Food in Jars*, which I'm sure a lot of your listeners are familiar with. She wrote a post about the Philadelphia food swap. This was the first time I'd heard of food swapping, but instantly I was totally intrigued by the idea and I thought, "Well, this is what I have to do. This is what I will do with all my extra jars of jam and pickles."

So I looked around in Chicago, which is where I live, and there was no food swap existing at the time. I thought, "Well, I guess I'm just going to have to start one," and so I did.

Theresa: That's fantastic. I didn't realize that you did this when there were none around. You had never experienced it before. You just wanted to create one in your own area?

Emily: That's exactly right. Food swapping was relatively new at that point. It had begun in Brooklyn in about this time, 2010, 2011 in the very same way we're discussing. Kate Payne, who writes the *Hip Girl's Guide to Homemaking* blog and books, she had way too much marmalade and her friend, Megan—we can all relate to that.

Theresa: Yes, absolutely.

Emily: Her friend, Megan Paska, was raising rooftop bees in Brooklyn, of course. This is Brooklyn and had too much honey. So they decided they were going to trade marmalade for honey, and then realized that it was Brooklyn in 2010, so they knew a ton of people who were doing similar types of activities. They decided to get more of their friends involved and organized the first modern big-group food swap.



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That's how the whole movement got started, and by the time I heard about it, it was still relatively young. There were maybe swaps in Brooklyn, in Portland, L.A. These were some of the early ones, but it hadn't hit Chicago yet, so I just decided I had to be the one to bring it there.

Theresa: I think that's so fantastic, and it sounds like the whole idea—because I've actually never been to one, but the whole idea of them. I've only read about them—is that you get this real sense of community both in people who are doing the same type of thing that you're doing, but just in your neighborhood or in your area. What are some of the other benefits that we can get from either participating or starting a food swap in our own area?

Emily: Well, you've hit the nail on the head. It really is a wonderful, wonderful way to bring together people who share a love of good food, homegrown food, homemade food. The benefits really are tremendous. For one, you can diversify your pantry, eat more different types of homemade foods. I think a lot of us who are in this space of sort of DIY we have a niche. We're great vegetable gardeners. We're great canners. We're great bread bakers, but maybe we don't have multiple skills. Maybe we do, but I don't want to speak for anyone.

But, for example, I didn't used to be much of a bread baker, but I was a really zealous canner. It's a way to trade the things that you make for the things that other people are making, and so in the end, you're just all eating more homemade food and that's obviously a wonderful thing. It's very inspiring if you're someone who loves food. It's amazing to see the skill and the creativity that other home cooks and gardeners in your area are displaying. It sort of pushes you as a cook in that way.



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But then at the end of the day, it really is about bringing people together. I think a lot of us who really do like to make things from scratch, the kinds of things that most people tend to buy, sometimes we can maybe feel a little, I don't know if lonely is the right word, but not everybody understands that passion. But when you go to a food swap, you're surrounded by people who understand your passion for creating things from scratch. That's a really nice feeling.

Then the last thing I would say and this is maybe my favorite thing about food swapping. It brings together people who might not otherwise have a chance to interact. At the Chicago food swap, we have people of all different ages, from teenagers and kids to grandmothers and retirees. We have people from all different parts of the metro area and different races, classes, everything. It's the love of food that brings them together, so that to me is just incredibly fulfilling.

Theresa: I had never even thought about that fact, but you're absolutely right because these people would never probably walk up to someone and say, "Hey, I've got some bread. You want to trade it for some jam?" unless they were participating in something like this. When you are trying to find one, let's say you want to participate. How do they typically work? Is it just a certain period of time? Is it on a weekend? What's a typical scenario for a food swap?

Emily: They obviously vary from place to place and depending on the organizer. Some are on weeknights. Some are on weekends. But I tend to do ours on the weekend. I'm a parent, so that's a better time for me. I think sometimes if they're in the cities and most of



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the participants are maybe younger people who don't have kids, a weeknight might be better for them.

But the event basically—very similar timeline of the event. The people arrive with their items. You'll set them up in your space. I think this is pretty universal among food swaps that everybody gets a swap card, so for each different item you've made, not multiples of the same item, you fill out a card that just indicates what the item is, who you are, ingredients, maybe any special instructions, if you want to note that something is vegan or something is gluten-free, if something is perishable, if something is shelf stable, you can put that on the card. Then there's a space for people to make offers.

Everyone sets up their stuff with their cards and the first part of the event is spent browsing, sampling, and that's a little insider tip. It can really help to bring samples. And just mingling. If you see something you like, you can jot down an offer on the card, but these aren't binding. It's not like a silent auction. I always tell people, "You're not going to accidentally go home with a trip to Nantucket that you didn't want."

Then at some point, the organizer will announce that it is actually time to swap, and that's when all the negotiation and trading begins. It can get a little frenzied at that point, and everyone negotiates the trades themselves. Saying no is part of the process. Once you've gotten—you've traded all your stuff away. You gather up what you've collected and you can head out or you can stay and chat with your friends, whatever you prefer.

Theresa: This sounds like a lot of fun. It really does sound like a lot of fun, especially the sampling of all the food part. Go ahead.

Emily: It's so much fun.

Theresa: It is fun, yeah. So one of the things I'm wondering is if you've never done this before—so how many items would you bring? Do they usually say you need to bring 10 of something or does it really matter?

Emily: That is probably the most common question I get. It really doesn't matter. The more you bring, the more you'll go home with, so it's really up to you and what your capacity is. You should—it's helpful to have multiples of something. If you just have one of something, that can be a little tricky. If you bring strawberry jam, you can have three jars of strawberry jam, for example. But no. There's no sort of set limit.

Theresa: What are some first-timer tips? If I was going to go to my very first swap, what would be some tips you would give me?

Emily: Oh, that's a great question. So a couple things. First of all, think small. That's what I always tell people. For the canners out there, an eight-ounce jar of jam, that's a very reasonable portion to swap. That makes total sense or a pint of pickles. But if you're going to bring something like baked goods or soup or candies, you may think, "Well, what's the correct amount?" I always say to people, "Think small."

A whole pie, a whole cake, a whole large loaf of bread. You might have trouble finding what seems to be a fair value in trade for something like that. So better off to make cupcakes, make a hand pie, make mini loaves of bread. These things are going to be easier to trade. Again, if you sort of think of a jar of jam as maybe the standard currency. What would be a fair trade in your mind for a jar

of jam? Would it be two cupcakes, four cupcakes? That's one thing I always tell people is sort of think small. You can always offer somebody two packages of cupcakes or brownies if you really, really want their item, but if you've got one big item, you're going to have a hard time finding something that you feel like is a fair trade.

The second thing I like to tell people is bring two different things. That's going to give you maximum flexibility. Say you bring yogurt and the person you really, really, really want to trade with and has the item that you just can't live without, they're a vegan. Well, they're not going to trade for your yogurt, so that's another thing I like to say. But if you had brought a jar of pickles, several of your pickles or your jams and some yogurt, then all of a sudden you can trade with a vegan or you can trade with someone who is dairy-free or you can trade with someone who's gluten-free. That's another little insider tip I like to give people. One more last tip. Savory items do very well because there are always a lot of sweets and baked goods.

Theresa: Those are excellent tips. Okay, well, all right, so I know you have—you're a lawyer by trade. One of the first things that came to mind when I was thinking about the food swap idea was about legal issues. Are there things that we should be worried about with doing or setting up a food swap?

Emily: Yeah, that's a really fair question and I do go into the legalities of it quite a bit in the book. Basically, the key thing here is to go back to one of our very first rules of food swapping, which is that no money is changing hands. I think as we all know food sales tend to be very highly regulated by government officials, your local health department, or whatever it is. But we also all know that a church



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potluck or a cookie exchange among neighbors, that kind of thing, the government doesn't get involved in that.

You really want to make sure your food swap is a lot more like a private event than any kind of marketplace or commercial venue. One thing I say to people, again, is you have to be really, really vigilant that no food sales are taking place. Don't let someone walk into your food swap and say, "I'll give you \$10 for that jar of jam," because you're going to get yourself into trouble that way.

The second thing I like to tell people is the more you can make your food swap seem like a private event, the better off you are. That does not mean you can only invite people you know, but it does mean, for example, make your food swap a ticketed event, something for which people have to RSVP and the ticket can be free. It doesn't have to be the kind of thing where people pay for a ticket, but if you say, "You need to register in advance to come to my food swap," again, then all of a sudden you're really in a private event space and less likely to trigger any kind of government scrutiny.

Theresa: Good, good tips. Also, the location that you have it, too. I know a lot of people do these even in their home.

Emily: Yeah, I would say that's maybe a touchy topic or controversial among food swap organizers. I personally don't recommend it because my food swaps are open to the public. I don't always know the people who are coming, and so I've always said, "Let's not do it in people's homes."

I know some food swap organizers really think that's a lovely thing to do. It's got to be obviously up to each individual's comfort level,

but I think better off to have it in a public space that happens to be only open to the people who are attending your event.

Theresa: Sure. You mention in the book I think one of your events you did in the basement of a local store, so you can maybe talk to one of your local—a local store that—or local people that have a building and maybe use the space there. Things like that.

Emily: Absolutely. Local businesses that are sort of complimentary to the idea of a food swap. If you've got a spice store in your area or a gardening center, these are the kinds of businesses where they might welcome a food swap. They might really enjoy having 30 people who love food in their store for an event like this if they've got enough room for you.

Co-working spaces are also really popular. The Chicago Food Swap meets at a teaching kitchen, so we've got tons of space there. These are all great spaces for food swaps. Church basements, libraries, community centers are another possibility. It's just about finding a good space in your community.

Theresa: I know you also talk about you can just make it a one-off event and just have them every once in a while or yours eventually grew to being a regularly monthly thing, right?

Emily: Yes, we had so much interest and demand that we started swapping monthly, but I know other swappers who are in other cities who do it quarterly or seasonally, for example. If you're really wanting to do maybe more like a garden swap where people are trading things they've grown, you can maybe do it twice a season, once in the middle or once in the fall. It really depends on what you

—the organizer has the bandwidth for and what your community is demanding.

Theresa: I really like also in the book you mention that if you're not really ready to do a public swap you can just have a mini swap among friends or family. There are things like that that you can do so that you can still have a way to maybe swap some of your canned goods or something that you've made.

Emily: Absolutely. It's great way to sort of get your toes wet. One of the things I think we talk about in the book is have a holiday swap among your friends and family. I think a lot of us are wishing for a holiday season that was maybe less commercial, and we all have way too much clutter in our homes, so why not propose this year among your friends and family, "Hey, let's do a food swap. Everyone can make something and we'll just trade it or each give each other one item."

This is also really nice if you've got young people or students, folks who maybe are just starting out in their life in your family and buying presents would be a real hardship for them. It's a nice kind of thing to offer.

Theresa: It just sounds like such a fun time. I really liked your idea about doing it at Christmastime. That's a great idea.

Emily: Yeah. I mean wouldn't that just be nice?

Theresa: Yeah.

Emily: Instead of having to buy all those presents?



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Theresa: Yeah, it's so much better. I have a couple girlfriends here in town, and we all garden and grow food. We each grow different things. It's like one of us will be growing zucchini. Another person will be growing spaghetti squash, and we trade so that—because we don't have room to grow all the different things that we want, so we'll do that.

I have a lot of fruit trees. One of my girlfriends has a lemon tree, so we'll trade. Two of us have chickens, so we do sometimes trade our eggs for some of the produce, but we just trade among—we're all best friends, and so we trade that way. But I would love to do this with doing with preserves. I think that would be really fun.

Emily: I think you're really hitting on something there, which is that this kind of trading is as old as the hills, right? If you were back in the farming days, somebody had a cow and someone else had chickens, they would trade milk for eggs. Where you live in wonderful California, you guys have all that abundance to do that. I think the thing about the food swap movement is that it's taking—it's just extending that idea to people who don't already know each other.

Theresa: Yeah, because now in today's day and age, we don't always know our neighbors. I mean I'm lucky enough that I do, but a lot of people don't. You can live right next door to someone your whole life and never really talk to them, and it's so sad. I think this is a great way to open up the communications.

Emily: Yeah, absolutely.

Theresa: One of the things that I really love about your book is it's not just about how to do a food swap. Most of the book covers these



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incredible recipes that can be used for food swapping, but also for gift giving and just great ideas for recipes to make. Tell me or tell us a little bit more about some of the different recipes that are in your book.

Emily: Yeah, this is a really nice aspect of the book, I think, because the whole thing about food swapping is you make multiples of the same item and you package them really nicely, and that works just as well for edible gifts as it does for food swapping. All the tips about packaging and transporting your goods. That all comes in handy for gifting as well as for food swapping.

I really strove to have a mix of recipes in the book for different skill levels. There are some really fun no-cook projects like homemade vanilla extract or spice mixes or even some infused vodka and things that are great for a beginner cook and would really make an impressive gift. But I know a lot of your listeners are really, really experienced cooks and are canners, and so there are a lot of recipes for jams and jellies and pickles.

I tried to make things a little bit unusual so it's not just your run of the mill recipes, but for example, we have a strawberry rhubarb jalapeño jam, so a little bit of a twist on that old favorite. One of my favorite recipes in the book is for pickled fennel, which also makes a very beautiful presentation. Then there are some challenging projects in there like quince paste, for example. All of which make really impressive gifts and are fun to do.

Theresa: Explain quince paste.

Emily: Sure. So people might have seen it as membrillo. You see it a lot at a tapas restaurant if you like Spanish food at all. It's a hard—it's like

a gel candy almost. It's firm and comes in squares and you slice it, and you can serve it with a hard cheese. If you can source quince, which I can at my farmer's market. It's a really fun project and it's delicious.

Theresa: Now see I have seen apricot paste, but never quince paste.

Emily: Yeah, apricot paste is really yummy as well. You can do it with Damson plums. Or anything that's really high in pectin like that.

Theresa: Okay, so that was my next question. Does it have added pectin or is it something that it just has a real high pectin on its own, because quince is very high in pectin.

Emily: Exactly, yeah, it doesn't need any more. If you cook it long enough, it's going to turn into paste.

Theresa: Yeah, and blueberries are very high in pectin, too. I wonder if you could make a blueberry paste. We'll have to test that out. Okay, so yes, you have some incredible recipes that are very, very unusual and I love that. you also have at the back of the book there are labels or tags that you can use for whatever it is you've made, which I thought was pretty cool.

Emily: I thought that was a really cute thing. My publisher—that was their idea. In the back of the book, there are these beautiful gift tags that punch out. They're perforated. You can use them to jazz up your homemade pickles and preserves. There's also the—I was talking about the swap cards earlier. They also have examples of swap cards that tear out really easily from the book, so if you were thinking about starting that food swap, you've got everything you need.



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Theresa: Fantastic. You've got us all interested in doing a food swap now. What would we do to try and find one in our area? Google it?

Emily: Yeah, why not? There is a website called the Food Swap Network, which does list a lot of the swaps in the country, but it's the kind of thing where the organizer of the swap has to submit their swap to be listed on the Food Swap Network, so it's not 100%, but it's a great place to start.

Otherwise, yeah, Google it. Google—if you were in Chicago, you would Google "Chicago food swap," and hopefully my site would come up really quickly. But also if you've got—sometimes they have cute names like in Denver. They are called the Mile-High Swappers. If your city has got a nickname, I would definitely Google that as well.

Theresa: Okay. Then if someone is like your situation, they couldn't find one. Then your book is perfect for helping them get their feet wet and learn what to do, how to organize one for themselves.

Emily: Exactly. Even if a lot of the biggest cities in the country already have an existing food swap, but I think there's really room for cities to have multiple food swaps because if you're in Chicago, for example, and I'm the only food swap, you could be driving over an hour to get to my event. What I'd really love to see—this is all about community and bringing people together, so I'd love to see people starting them wherever they're located and having them be something in their community for that community.

I really encourage people to, even if there is a food swap an hour away from you, by all means, go to it. See what it's like, but then



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think about starting one closer to home with the people around you.

Theresa: I think that's excellent advice and a great way to end the interview so that everyone can run out and get your book. I so appreciate you taking time out, Emily, to give us all these tips and information because this is something I've never done, but I always thought it sounded like so much fun, so I'm definitely going to check this out. I probably—if I can't find one in my area, I know there is one here in Los Angeles. I'm going to have to see how close it is. But if I can't find one in my area, I'm going to have to just set up my own, and so I appreciate you giving us all this information.

Emily: I'm so delighted to talk to you and to reach this wonderful audience of people who share my passion for home food preservation, and I really think that the food swap is the answer to all that overzealous canning.

Theresa: It's a great answer. Great. Well, thank you so much.

Emily: Thank you, Theresa.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown podcast. Visit LivingHomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh, without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown podcast.