
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 75 The Secrets of an Edible Landscape

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/75

Announcer: This is the Living Homegrown podcast, episode number 75.

Theresa: 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 podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm. That can mean preserving, fermenting, small space food growing, or just taking small steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. All the ways that we can live closer to our food no matter how big or how small our garden space. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics, just visit my website: livinghomegrown.com. That's also where you can learn about my online canning academy, which is a beginner course teaching food gardeners and home cooks how to preserve their seasonal produce safely and with no fear of doing it wrong. You can learn more about the academy and get on the waiting list for the next session by going to livinghomegrown.com/courses.

Okay, so today's episode is about giving you tips for growing your own edible landscape. I brought on garden designer and author Stefani Bittner of Homestead Design Collective. Now, Stefani does some pretty amazing gardens. She lives and designs in the San Francisco Bay Area, and her team offer a really unique approach to home garden design as well as design for corporations and companies and different places all around the south bay. Now, when I say unique, it may be unique to the typical homeowner. But to you and me, it's not unique. It's something that would be a dream garden. Basically, what they create are aesthetically designed organic edible gardens.

But she not only designs the gardens. Her team also helps with the installation. She also can do full-service maintenance, harvesting, beekeeping, floristry, even composting services. You can imagine that if you had Stefani living in your neighborhood, you would probably dream of sitting down over a cup of coffee with her so you could pick her brain on everything that she does. Well, you get your wish, because that's what I did in today's episode. I brought Stefani on so that she could give us a lot of her insider secrets for how we can transform an ordinary garden into a more edible garden or take our edible garden to the next

level.

Now, as you hear Stefani start describing some of the gardens that she's worked on, you're probably going to want to see what some of those gardens look like. Her work has been featured in San Francisco Chronicle, Sunset Magazine, Los Angeles Times, Better Homes and Gardens, and gardenista.com. But where you could really get a full taste of her incredible work is in the October issue of Sunset Magazine. This particular episode should be coming out the beginning of November, so that October issue should still be on the shelves. The reason I want you to get it is because Sunset Magazine had Stefani and her team help design the entire test garden for Sunset Magazine at their new location. It sounds absolutely incredible. I can't wait to get my hands on this particular issue and see what it is that she did. But I had her talk about it in this episode, so you'll learn all the ins and outs of what she helped them create.

Now, aside from being an incredible designer, Stefani is also an author. She came out with one book a few years ago called "The Beautiful Edible Garden: Design a stylish outdoor space using vegetables, fruit and herbs." She co-authored that with Leslie Bennett. That book you can still get. It's a fantastic book, and it offers a lot of design tips for how to create an edible garden. Then Stefani has another book coming out the beginning of 2017, and that book is called "Harvest." I'll let Stefani tell you all about the different books and what they offer. But I wanted to tell you that as always, I will have in the show notes for this episode links to everything that Stefani talks about. Links to her website, links to her books, everything else, and that will be at livinghomegrown.com/75.

Let's dive into the interview with Stefani Bittner of Homestead Design Collective.

Hey, Stefani. Thanks so much for coming on the show today.

Stefani: Oh, thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited about this.

Theresa: Me too. A lot of the listeners are really asking a lot of questions about how to start edible landscaping or edible gardening, and you are the perfect go-to person for this. I thought we'd start out, why don't you tell everyone what it is that you do.

Stefani: Sure. I co-own a business called Homestead Design Collective, and we're based here in the San Francisco Bay Area. We design, install, and organically maintain gardens that focus on giving you a harvest, which for us means everything from, of course, your fruits and vegetables, your herbs, and also your cut flowers.

Theresa: Fantastic. You've been doing this for awhile. Do you work mostly with homeowners, businesses? What kind of clients do you have?

-
- Stefani: Definitely our bread and butter is residential gardens, but we were actually involved in one of the first in the country, actually, a community garden for a new home development here in the Bay Area. It was really exciting. The home developer literally did not put in a golf course and instead built a community vegetable garden for its new residents. We're involved in that project. We also have a corporate kitchen garden for a tech company in Palo Alto, it's on a rooftop on University Avenue in downtown Palo Alto. It's really beautiful. Then of course, we also have the gardens for Sunset Magazine.
- Theresa: I'm going to ask you about Sunset Magazine in a minute, but I have a question about that rooftop garden. The corporate rooftop garden, is that they use the food for the lunch room? What do they use the food for?
- Stefani: Yeah, it's really exciting. The food is used in the lunches for the employees.
- Theresa: Oh.
- Stefani: If you could imagine, it's a rooftop garden, there are hundreds of employees at this company, so the things that we grow for them are really unique vegetables that are hard to find, specialty edible flowers, specialty herbs, so that the chefs can really explore the different types of cuisines. What's also nice about it is it's a space that we also designed and created for the employees to come and sit outside and have their lunch and be able to interact with the garden. Raised beds with built-in benches, spaces for tables, it's super interactive. Sometimes they do cocktails in the gardens for employee after-hour parties. It's a really fun space.
- Theresa: Wow. What a great place to work. I want to work there. That sounds so cool. Especially for the chefs to be able to have at their fingertips all those incredible flavors that they can just go out and create anything they want.
- Stefani: Oh, yeah. It's a lot of fun. Our gardeners get to also help menu plan with them, because of course, what you're eating right now was planted three months ago. It's a lot of fun. We get inspired by the chefs, and they spoil us. Sometimes we go and they've made extra batches of cookies using the sage in the garden or something with some dianthus. They do a lot of fun things.
- Theresa: What a fun job. Okay, so the other thing I know I wanted to mention that you mentioned just a second ago was the Sunset Garden Magazine test garden. Tell everyone what it is you did, because this is pretty super fantastic.
- Stefani: It's really exciting. We were tapped by Sunset Magazine to design their new test gardens in Sonoma. They're open to the public seven days a week. They're at a beautiful facility called Cornerstone. They're highly interactive, and the gardens are really meant to represent life in the west. It's over 12,000 square feet, there's five separate garden rooms, and it goes everything from we have the

ultimate backyard edible garden with raised beds and an incredible greenhouse with beautiful arches by Jennifer Asher at TerraTrellis.

Then we also have a container-based garden that's all about cocktails. Lots of fun different plants we use for cocktails, including things like chinotto oranges, which is the basis for campari. Then you keep traveling in the gardens and we did an ode to the backyard orchard, which is actually, I'm not supposed to have favorites, but that is probably my favorite. We did a successional planting of fruit trees, so when you first walk into the orchard, you start off with apricots, early season harvest. Then you end with late season apples, so as you walk this windy pathway through the orchard, the plants are actually coming into harvest through that line. It's all under-planted with a lot of my favorites for attracting pollinators and beneficial insects.

There's also a rare pipevine swallowtail butterfly that's on the property, so we also included its habitat vine that it likes. There's agastaches, echinaceas, salvias, and then right now we have the fall blooming muhlenbergia grass that's popping off. It's absolutely beautiful.

Then from that room we have an area called the gathering space, and just as an orchard you can imagine the winter it completely goes to bed. It's very dormant. We did a low-water, low-maintenance, foliage-based garden that is evergreen for the gathering space. It's a very different type of garden than the orchard. Then we ended it with what we call the flower room, which is really our ode and our love of growing flowers. It's like the ultimate cut flower garden.

Theresa: Oh, my gosh. It just sounds so incredible.

Stefani: It's a lot of fun, and it's changing. I mean, that's what really fun about it is that it's constantly changing as gardens do. I think it'll be really fun for the readers of Sunset Magazine to be able to go and experience those gardens in person.

Theresa: Yeah, there would always be something looking fantastic. But I bet it's also really awesome for the writers, because this is their test garden, so they're going to be using these different spaces for what they're working on in the magazine, right?

Stefani: They are. We're shooting a couple times a month out of the gardens right now. We recently did a shoot based on preserving herbs and edible flowers, which I know is right up your alley.

Theresa: Oh yeah.

Stefani: Then we also have done, in the spring in the raised beds in the farm, we did a bed completely devoted to natural plant dye plants. We had a lot of fun with camp-style Bunson burners, and we dyed cotton clothes right there in the

gardens and shot it for the magazine. There'll be a lot of fun things. We shot this week a holiday greenhouse. The greenhouse is really the centerpiece of the gardens, and so we stocked it up for the holidays and that will be in the December issue. There'll be a lot of fun things to see coming out of that garden.

Theresa: Man, I don't even think that would feel like work. It would just be total fun all the time.

Stefani: True. Very true.

Theresa: Well, that's fantastic. Okay, so you definitely have a lot going on, and you're always moving and shaking, doing a lot in the area with garden design. But you also are an author, and I know that you have one book out that you co-authored and another book coming out that you co-authored. Let's first have you tell everyone about your book, "The Beautiful Edible Garden." How did that come about?

Stefani: "The Beautiful Edible Garden" is with Ten Speed Press, which is our local imprint of Random House here in the Bay Area. It came about, quite honestly I got my start in teaching gardening classes, and the managing editor of Ten Speed Press used to go to my gardening classes, little knownst to me. We had a conversation, and she was really excited about the idea of growing edibles throughout a landscape and not just in a raised bed, and how do you do it. Through coming to my gardening classes, I was talking about it, and the conversation just started from there. It was really exciting. I felt very lucky that fate brought her to my gardening class, I should say.

That book, "The Beautiful Edible Garden," I have such a soft spot in my heart for it. All the gardens that are in the book were ours at my previous company, with Star Apple Edible Gardens, which I co-owned with Leslie Bennett and wrote the book with Leslie Bennett. The thing is, it was exciting because these gardens were living, growing spaces, and it's not the typical gardening book where people call out for photos across the country. These were things that we were doing right in that moment, and I think you can really sense that in the book.

Theresa: Yeah, absolutely. The book has great ideas and great tips, but it was so fun to look through the book and actually, yeah, I felt like I was visiting your garden and seeing what you guys were up to. I know that you have another book that you just finished and is actually going to be coming out the beginning of 2017, so why don't you tell everybody about your book, "Harvest," and what that book is?

Stefani: Sure. Just as "The Beautiful Edible Garden" is really focused on how to design a garden that produces food, "Harvest" is really the next step. What do you do, now that I've convinced you to plant agastache throughout your landscape, what do you do with it? "Harvest" is really focused on the plants that do not

need to be put into a raised vegetable bed, so there's no tomatoes in this book. It's really the world of the agastaches and the elderberries, and really unique herbs and edible flowers and things that you put in your garden. But now, what do you do? Calamintha is a really beautiful low-water ground cover that's a relative of mint, but it's not invasive, and it has edible flowers and leaves that you can make tea with. So what's that next step?

The book is split up into the gardening terms of early, mid, and late, and we shot it for two years in my garden. Each plant has a kind of a story about why I love it, why we use it, where it should go in your garden, how to actually garden with this plant, and then how to harvest it, and then there's a project based on that harvest. Each project was photographed as we were yanking it out of the ground or harvesting in that moment and making it right then. It's really fun. The idea behind it is, there's one shrub recipe, there's how to preserve herbs in salt, how do you preserve them by drying, and the idea is it's teaching you this base of skills that you can use with multiple plants. It's a fun one. I'm really excited for it to come out.

Theresa: I'm excited, too, and I got to get a little sneak peek at it, and I told you before we started recording, you have to come back when that book comes out and we'll dive really deep into some of those projects and really go through the whole book. But I wanted you to mention it because it really does offer a great companion to the book we're really talking about today, which is "The Beautiful Edible Garden" and garden design in our own backyards. But I wanted people to know that book's coming, too, because if they start looking at doing all of this now, that's the next book that they're going to want to have. It's pretty exciting.

Stefani: I'm just excited that people want to change their gardens. I think that traditionally gardens have been places for people to have kind of the status quo, the ubiquitous American lawn in the front yard, and now people are realizing that, hey, my garden might just be a deck, or it might be a quarter of an acre, but it can actually be something more. Then the role of food in that is just really exciting.

Theresa: Very exciting, and the idea that our gardens can be productive for us, and it isn't a huge amount of effort. You really go into that in everything that you do. You show some really simple things that people can do that can start adding that production or adding harvest to their yard, and we'll get to that. But I am excited to talk about this, because I love what you're doing, that you're getting so many people turned on to edible gardening. Also just that people will want to try it. You take a little bit of the intimidation away and show them how easy and beautiful it can be, so that's really exciting. How did you get into edible gardening in the first place? What made you go down this path?

Stefani: My mother always kept a kitchen garden growing up, and so there was always an aspect of food in our garden. It wasn't a huge space, but there was always

something coming out of the garden that we were eating. In my 20s, after I graduated from college and I had my first home, my first apartment, I found myself always gardening. I'm a lifelong gardener, and when I did that, I always tucked in something, either herbs or edible flowers or a tomato, of course. I always kind of came back to food.

Then I took some time off after I had my children, and when I thought about what I wanted to, I decided to go back and study landscape design. It was extremely lucky again. There's a very well known landscape designer in the Bay Area named Aaron Moore, and Aaron and I knew each other, and when I told him what I wanted to do with edibles, he just said, "Come start doing it with me." He was a true mentor for me, and I learned so much from him about just really good basic design principles. Then we just started manipulating plants. Well, if a pittosporum can do that, why couldn't a bay laurel do that? Really started getting imaginative as far as what are the ornamental qualities of these edible plants that I could replicate in a garden so you wouldn't even realize how edible a garden is.

Theresa: Exactly, yes. That's what's so awesome, and you do explain that in the book. You do talk about that. But that is so true. If you look at a plant, any plant, edible or otherwise, at its form, color, shape, then you can see how it can fit into your landscape. The fact that you can eat it doesn't even have to enter into it, if you just look at it more from a design standpoint, you can find ways to squeeze it in here and there.

Stefani: Oh, definitely. I think this idea of an ornamental/edible swap is sometimes the easiest place to start. If you love magnolias, and you want that look of a magnolia, then why not look at a persimmon? Because the persimmon actually replicates that look. It has big, broad leaves, they're shiny chartreuse green, the only difference is, instead of a beautiful flower at the end of winter, at the beginning of winter you get this beautiful fruit. Definitely just being like, "Okay, that pittosporum that is a screening hedge, it's hiding a gutter against my house. What's evergreen and kind of stagnant looking and is a good background screening plant, well, there's culinary bay laurel, there's feijoas, there's all types of plants that do those same things. Once you start looking at plants a little bit differently, it kind of opens up this wide world of, "Oh, wow, an edible plant can do that, too!"

Theresa: Yeah. Very good. Persimmons are beautiful. I've always loved them in the landscape. They look like jewels when they're hanging on the tree, especially when a lot of the leaves are starting to fall off and there's not so much color in the garden, having a persimmon is just magical. It doesn't even look real.

Stefani: Oh, yeah. The two of us are both in California, and we just don't have the magnificent fall colors that the rest of the country get to experience. Persimmons are actually one of the few ways that we can get those beautiful

oranges. The leaves turn yellow and orange in this dramatic display before they drop, but then we have these orange, they almost look like Christmas ornaments on the tree. You have this element of orange in the garden during a time of year where other folks are getting these magnificent leaf displays, foliage displays, but the fruit's pretty special. The pomegranate does that for us as well with red. Although we don't get the color of the east coast, we do have some food-bearing plants that give us that color in the garden.

Theresa: When I was a little girl, my mom's best friend had pomegranates growing in her front yard, and you had to walk down this little pathway to get to her front door, and you had to walk under these giant pomegranates. When they were in the tree, I remember because I was really small, I remember that it reminded me of a fairy garden because they looked like tree ornaments. They were hanging from the tree and it did, it just looked magical or mystical, and it was so amazing to me. I always loved going over to that garden. You're right, they're the same. They're very much like persimmon in that they have that jewel-like Christmas tree-like quality. That's very cool.

Stefani: Oh, yeah. I love the pomegranate. Especially for folks who are looking for a more low-water experience in their gardens. Again, in the state of California, we are a drought state. I truly believe that we are now a drought state, so having plants that take smaller amounts of water and also give you this amazing fruit, it's a win-win. How could you plant something else, in my opinion.

Theresa: Yes. Exactly. I agree with you. Well, okay, so let's talk about if someone is looking to start putting edibles into their landscape, where would they start? You've talked a little bit about how we could swap something out. Is that really the best place to start?

Stefani: It is. Just taking a step back, I should say when we create a space, we have edible gardens that are very modern. We have some that are in a cottage style, we have some that are Mediterranean style, edibles can fit any garden's style, in my opinion. But the most important thing, I think, when you're looking at a space, you're thinking about how to create it, is that we always want to at first create a space that's really beautiful. We want it to be an extension of a person's home, we want it to be like an outdoor space that people see as a reflection of their personal style. A lot of great landscape design principles need to happen, and that might be repetition of color, repetition of [inaudible 00:24:15] materials, but how do we make this garden space feel inclusive to what's already existing in the space?

Then we mentioned harvest. We think every garden should have some sort of harvest, specifically because gardens, we put so many resources into our gardens, be it of course financial, but also our time, and also our water. As we're giving all these things to our gardens, why not create a garden that actually gives back to us in the form of harvest?

Then for us, because we are gardening with food, it's really important that we keep some really good organic gardening principles and that the inputs that we put into the garden are coming into it organically, and we're also supporting our local pollinators and also beneficial insects. What's really exciting is that many of the plants that the pollinators love are plants that we really love to harvest for our bases. They are also the plants that make your garden look really beautiful. The same plant can hit all three principles.

That's kind of where we start. Then when we look at a space, and we come to a space, and we look at how to transform it, there are certain things that we do when we garden with food that we typically don't do if you garden with ornamentals only. That really is food safety. Food safety is a very important place for us to start, because for many reasons that people want to grow food in their gardens is because they want to know where their food comes from and they want to know that it's being grown safely. There are, however, contaminants below and above the ground that you need to be able to recognize so that when you do put food in your garden, you know that it's being grown safely.

Theresa: I am so glad that you brought that up, because I live in a very old neighborhood. That was something that we did when we started to grow here when we first bought this home was we had our soil tested, because so many houses in the neighborhood were so old, I was worried about lead paint. I didn't want to plant anything edible near my house where the paint could be coming off, and I also wanted just to see what had been there before, because I had just got on the property. I had no idea how the soil might be. I'm so glad you bring that up, because there's some considerations people should do. What are some things that you tell people to look for and safety when you're going to be growing food?

Stefani: Sure. Well, lead. You hit the nail on the head. You definitely want to look for places where lead can be. Typically that is older urban homes. We do a simple soil test. Typically, heavy metals do not travel in the garden. They stay put. If you know that you have an older home that may have had lead paint in its past, you really need to do a test for lead. It's really simple. The test typically costs about \$30, and you just simply take a trowel, you dig down about eight inches, you take a soil sample, and you send it off to be tested.

The other contaminant that people aren't as aware of, though, is arsenic in your soil. Arsenic very specifically comes from pressure treated wood. Until about seven, eight years ago, most pressure treated wood was treated with arsenic, and that does leech into your soil. You don't want to put an edible plant at the base of typically a fence post. That is an older fence post that has pressure treated wood. What we do when we come to a garden is we look around and we say, "Okay, that's about a 15-year-old fence, and there's the pressure

treated posts. Let's put an ornamental plant there, maybe we'll harvest it for flowers." Then we go out about two, three feet, and then we might put something that's edible there. Just away from that possible contaminant.

We also look for contaminants above the ground, and very specifically that comes from sharing our community with our neighbors' pets, or our pets. Especially this is really important when you're growing food in the front yard. I love edible front gardens. I think it's like the greatest opportunity to talk about food, to share with your community. Sometimes it means that if you're going to put an apple tree in your front yard that people may help themselves. I see that as a great way to start a conversation with your neighbors about heirloom apples.

However, I really believe, and this may not be a popular notion, but where you cannot control your community's interaction with your garden, you should not have things there that you eat on a daily basis that are close to the sidewalk. That specifically are things like salad greens, strawberries, kale, and that's because people walk their dogs by. Unless there is a fence where they can't use that space how they do, basically so they don't pee on their kale. Let me just say it, I'm trying to be polite, but I'm going to just say it allowed. You just should not plant it there. Sometimes we do plant herbs to repeat a look in a garden. Maybe we have some herbs as a ground cover throughout the space and we might repeat them on the sidewalk. But when they're on the sidewalk, we actually let them flower for the pollinators, and we don't harvest for use in the kitchen. We just use them as an ornamental way. Then as you get closer to your front door, that's where we keep things that you don't want people to harvest or you don't want to interact with your neighbor's dogs.

Theresa: Yes. This is so good. I'm so glad you brought that up. Yes. Because it is kind of upsetting if you don't think this through and you look out the window and see that a dog is using your vegetable garden in your front yard. It's a little upsetting. But the way I looked at it, too, when I was planting is I planted herbs that were more for fragrance rather than being edible. I would plant those closer to the sidewalk so that maybe people walking by would smell the lavender, but that wasn't the lavender that I would harvest for cooking. I have lavender in the backyard, that sort of thing. But I think that's really good.

The thing that is upsetting, though, is I have grown things like tomatoes in my front yard and then had people help themselves. It is upsetting if you've put in all that time and effort and then someone decided to pick it for you, and you didn't get it.

Stefani: I know.

Theresa: But I do understand that it's a sharing garden, and I had to kind of come to terms with that. What I ended up doing was, my favorite heirloom tomatoes, I

put those in the back. But anything that's in the front yard I know may end up being fair game, so I only put things out there that are not super special to me. But I know some people will plant things that they specifically put there to share, like maybe there'll be little small grape-sized tomatoes, or even grapes growing on their fence line, and they welcome everybody in the community to help themselves. That is kind of a great way to start a conversation.

Stefani: It is, and for some folks, their only option may be to grow food in the front yard, because that may be their sunniest spot. Typically when we encounter a client with that situation, we start off in raised vegetable beds with onions and herbs in the front, and then the tomatoes the closest to the front door as you can get. Because it's one thing to be on the sidewalk and kind of reach over and take something, but it takes a lot of gumption to walk up someone's driveway and go all the way. People do it, of course, but at least you're protecting yourself from just the passer-by.

We have a client that has an edible front garden, and she has shared with me multiple times that she feels like she's a much bigger part of her community because of course, when she's out tending to her front yard edibles, people are getting used to seeing her in the front yard. They're interacting with her. She's getting to know the neighborhood kids. Then, again, is able to share something. It's a starting point for a conversation.

I think it's so important today. I have teenagers, I can tell you as much as I don't want to have a huge amount of technology in my house, of course, we do. Getting people outside and away from screens, it's a really nice moment. Gardening makes you put down a screen. You cannot hold onto an iPhone and your snips and your trowel at the same time. You put down your iPhone or whatever device you like, and you're connecting with your property through gardening with food. Then what happens when you're doing it in the front yard is that other people get inspired and can also connect with you, and I think that's what's so wonderful about it.

Theresa: That's very nice. Yes. Then you can just use your iPhone to take a picture of the harvest when you're all finished.

Stefani: Oh, yeah, and put it on Instagram.

Theresa: Yeah, there you go. Great. I'm really glad we talked about that, the different things that we should worry about with safety. If someone has a handle on that, they've had their soil tested, what are some other ways that they can start incorporating edibles into their landscape?

Stefani: The first thing that you want to do is have an honest conversation with yourself and your family about how much time you want to spend in your garden. For many folks, that may be, "Hey, maybe a couple hours a week, maybe a couple

hours a month." Again, depending upon the level of how much involvement you want in your garden really also helps set the tone as far as our choices. There are many plants that can give you a harvest that will just sit there and wait, and if you don't harvest them they're still super beautiful, and you can pick them as you want them. But there are other things that have an intense harvest over two weeks, and you know that you're going to actually be out there and picking plums for six weeks straight or two weeks straight, and then what are you going to do with them.

Once you have an idea of how much you want to be gardening, we start with that focal point front yard tree, and we swap it. No more fruitless plum, we want a fruiting plum. Again, we look at a person's house style, colors, and we start there. Then from the front yard focal point tree, we move on to, okay, does this garden need screening? Does it need hedging? We start working on the foundation plantings. A screening plant ideally is evergreen and many parts of the country they don't need to be evergreen because it gets so cold everything's losing their branches, but if you are in a climate where you don't have snow, you're going to want some plants that don't lose their leaves.

Some of our favorites include, I mentioned that culinary bay, rosemary, there's a variety called Tuscan blue that gets four to five feet tall. We use that often. The feijoa, the pineapple guava, is a beautiful silver color. That plant actually does a lot of good for us because it's really happy in full sun and produces a lot, but it's also just as happy to live in shade. We can use it as a foundation planting to repeat silver in the garden throughout, to go from your space that might be a mini garden start in shade, then it'd come all the way around and have some parts that are in full sun. We can repeat that plant. The plants that are in the shade are not going to fruit as much, but if you have some that are in the sun, you're going to get plenty of harvest, and yet you have this very cohesive look. Again, we're looking to have these gardens look like gardens and not farms, so we're looking to repeat certain plant materials.

Theresa: I didn't know that about the guava. Is all guava like that, or just the pineapple guava?

Stefani: The pineapple guava, I have yet to kill a pineapple guava. I have tried, let me tell you. Strawberry guavas, which you would find much more in southern California than northern California, can also live in partial shade. Then there are guavas that are a bit more frost tender and definitely want more sun, like the lemon guava. But the pineapple guava is just a sturdy low-water plant. The best thing about it in my opinion, it's kind of like the garden's best girlfriend. Anything you put up next to a pineapple guava automatically looks better, because the guava has this beautiful silver color that just shows off any other plant. It's really great to have it in your foundation planting. It lights up a shady corner, it can actually provide a backdrop to some showier plants, we use it a lot. It's really fantastic.

-
- Theresa: That's really good to know. I'm going to have to get one. Yeah. I wanted to say something. When you say "light up a shady area," I know what you mean, but the listeners might not know what you mean. You mean that when you use gray or white or something very bright, if you have a very dark corner, it lightens it up. It draws the light into it. Isn't that what you mean?
- Stefani: That's exactly, you said it so much better than I could have, Theresa. Yes.
- Theresa: Okay, you have to hire me now.
- Stefani: I would be happy to. But no, that's exactly what I mean. In these dark corners of our gardens, it really is nice to have a little bit of silver, a little bit of white, just to get that reflective light. It definitely lightens them up. It's wonderful.
- Theresa: Yeah. Okay, great. Okay, so definitely screening plants, we're looking to swap out any trees that are just flowering trees with something that's more fruiting. Is there anything else that we should be doing or that we can do to transition more into being edible?
- Stefani: Well, sure. Once we've done our screening plants, and it can also be anything from there are edible varieties of clumping bamboo. There are so many plants that can be used for screening. But from screening, we're just going a little bit lower, and we're looking at our bedding plants. Our bedding plants are things like the smaller shrubs, tall flowers, and there's just this beautiful world of plants that fit in there that can also give you harvest.
- Everything from rhubarb ... Rhubarb actually, people don't realize this, rhubarb is a low-water perennial vegetable. It's really fantastic in a garden if you're looking for a tropical look, or again, a cottage garden. It's very at home in a cottage garden. But we've included rhubarb in very modern, very geometric gardens, and in groups of sevens and tens, and honestly, when you plant rhubarb, you don't want just one. You want to have five to ten plants, because then on the weekends if you're making crisps or pies, you can harvest just one or two stalks from each plant, and yet your landscape doesn't really change. They're a beautiful plant. I really love rhubarb.
- Anything from elderberries, they're a fantastic plant as well, huckleberries, which is the low-water cousin to the blueberry. We use huckleberries a lot in our gardens nowadays. But of course, if you are in an area where you have more rain, blueberry is just the ultimate. I think blueberries in a garden are just absolutely stunning.
- Theresa: Yeah, the foliage on a blueberry is quite stunning.
- Stefani: Oh, yeah, they're beautiful. There's so many different varieties. There's one that we really like called sunshine blue. On the west coast, it's an evergreen shrub,

which is really exciting. But then there's so many different varieties that give you great fall color. What's really beautiful is that once these deciduous blueberries lose their leaves, their stems actually almost have a coral color to their bark. If you underplant a coral bark Japanese maple with these blueberries, in the winter you have this beautiful interest where on the tree you have this beautiful coral bark, and then at this lower level in the garden, you're repeating that as well through the blueberries. It happens to be something that I think is really pretty.

Theresa: Oh, it sounds amazing. Yeah.

Stefani: Then flowers, if you're growing them organically, your roses are now edible, which is really exciting. I actually use my rose petals in more things than I ever imagined. I dry my rose petals a lot and use them in everything from tinctures to doing some really great teas. I also just recently made edible flower black pepper blend that I used roses with. Your roses are organic, and that means you can eat them. Or you can just simply harvest them for their beauty and bring them indoors. There is a whole world of flowers that you can eat as well.

Theresa: Yeah, and it's not just that they have to be used in a recipe. You can use them as garnishes when they're grown organically and not have to worry that you're putting any pesticides or anything on your plate. You don't want to do that with something that was bought at the supermarket, because they are heavily sprayed, or if you get a bouquet of flowers, they are actually sometimes dipped into different pesticides. There's a whole 'nother rabbit hole we can go down there. But we'll stay on the growing-

Stefani: Yeah, in talking about food safety. The world of edible flowers, it's been really exciting to watch recently. I've seen a lot of chefs really delving into edible flowers, and I know that folks are just so inspired by these recipes that they're seeing on social media, on Instagram, the photos of these things. But you cannot go to the flower mart or the grocery store and just buy a dozen roses and then start eating them. You really need to know the source of your flowers. It makes me think of Debra Prinzing and the slow flower movement, and we're inspired by her. Here in the Bay Area, now when you buy flowers you'll see if they're American grown or locally grown. But what I always am looking for is, do they say "organically grown?" That's not happening a lot yet in the flower industry when it comes to flowers that you can eat, so starting off with, "Hey, I really want to start adding flowers to my salad mixes." Starting off by including edible flowers in your garden might just be an easy place to start.

Theresa: Absolutely, and I have had Debra on the show. She was on one of our episodes, so I'll be sure to link to that in the show notes. But you're absolutely correct, and one of the things that people do when they're growing roses and they don't really think about it as far as being edible is they use systemics.

-
- Stefani: Oh, gosh.
- Theresa: Yeah. What a systemic is is when you add something to the soil and it's brought up through the plant to take care of bugs or insects so that when they bite the plant, they end up dying. People will use systemics, and then they'll think a month later, "Now I can eat the roses." You really can't, because it's in the soil and it can be there for a very long time. You never ever want to use anything in the soil that is not organic. You don't want to do that anyway, but you certainly don't want to eat the roses, or any edibles, if you're using any kind of pesticides in the soil.
- Stefani: It's so true, because if you think about it, we are what we eat. The plants are what they eat. Where the plants are getting their nutrition is the soil. In all of our gardens, typically any answer to any problem in a garden for me, organic compost. Add organic compost. If you have a white fly infestation or aphids, the first thing you want to do is actually power up that plant. You need to actually give it some defense mechanisms, and by creating a healthier ecosystem, doing a top dressing of organic compost for us is the place where we start.
- But yeah, that's why we check for the lead and we check for the arsenic. Whatever is in that soil is going to be brought up into that plant, and we definitely do not use systemics. We're very careful with any type of pesticide that's used in our gardens.
- Theresa: Great. Okay. After we have gotten the main plants, is there anything else that we should look to add? We can add flowers now, and that brings in the pollinators, and we can also add edible flowers. Is there anything else that we could do next?
- Stefani: Sure. Imagine, now we're in your planting beds and we're doing things, maybe roses, maybe agastaches. We're in this world of these beautiful bedding plants. Then the next level down in your garden are your ground covers. Ground covers can be edible, too, and can be harvestable. Again, a little bit of food safety, I love the look of flagstones with herbs in between, but anywhere where your foot touches the ground, you should not be eating that plant. If you are going to put herbs amongst stepping stones that you are stepping on, you might want to put herbs there to have a continuous look in your garden, but do not harvest those to eat. Because I have backyard chickens, I don't know what's on the bottom of my shoes. I don't want to be eating what's on the bottom of my shoes.
- Theresa: Right.
- Stefani: But what you do do is you take that herb that maybe is in your stepping stones, and then you have it be the ground cover in the planting bed. Then the plants that are in your planting bed you can then harvest from there. There's a whole

world of herbs that are beautiful in the landscape. There are also things like alpine strawberries. We love using alpine strawberries in our woodland gardens. You put partial shade. alpine strawberries are great in the landscape because they don't send out runners. They stay put. They're a really fun one to have. They also come in colors like yellow and white, so if you have a lot of birds and squirrels in your garden, which hopefully you do, it tricks them. They might go after your red strawberries, but they don't think that the yellow or white ones are ripe, so they leave them for you to harvest, which is really nice.

Theresa: Yeah, I learned that when I was growing something called a pineapple strawberry, and it's white.

Stefani: Oh yeah!

Theresa: The birds never touched it, and I couldn't figure out why until someone explained that to me, that they're looking for red. They associate red with being ready.

Stefani: Yup. It's great. We do that a lot. It's a fun way, again, if you're repeating color, and let's say that you have a garden that's showcasing a lot of white. Let's say you have a variegated shrub that has green and white in its leaves, maybe you have some white flowers like an iceberg rose, let's just say. You have white repeating then in your planting bed, then it can be really fun to have a ground cover that also has white in it. White alpine strawberries are good for that.

There's a plant that we really like called calamintha. Calamintha is a low-water perennial flowering plant that tops off at 18 inches high. It's in the mint family, but it's not invasive. You can eat the flowers, you can make tea with the leaves, you can just let it be beautiful in a garden and never harvest it if you want. The pollinators will enjoy it. So we look for plants like that that we can be harvesting from, and also continue a theme of color.

Theresa: Fantastic. I'm so excited. I want to run out and start planting something. Well, Stefani, I just want to thank you for coming on. This has been so great. You have given some great tips, some great pointers, and I think anyone listening will want to run out and start ripping out some of the things in their garden and putting in more edibles, which is a good thing. I just want to thank you for coming on. This has really been fantastic.

Stefani: Oh, thank you so much for having me. I've really enjoyed it.

Theresa: Wasn't that a great interview? It just made me want to run out and start gardening, I swear. I have to tell you that her designs are really, really inspiring. You have to try and check them out, so be sure to get the October 2016 issue of Sunset Magazine, because that's where they really feature the test gardens. But you can also go to her website. Everything that was mentioned in today's



Live farm fresh without the farm®

episode is in the show notes for this particular podcast episode. You can get that at livinghomegrown.com/75. I'll have links to everything that Stefani mentioned, plus I have a full transcript of our entire conversation if you want to make note of anything special that she mentioned or a special plant that she might have mentioned. That will all be in the transcript, so that also will be in the show notes at livinghomegrown.com/75.

That's it for this week. Thank you so much for joining me here today. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care!

Speaker 1: 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.