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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 85

### Raising Backyard Rabbits

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/85](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/85)

Theresa Loe: 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. We talk about things like preserving the harvest, raising backyard critters, small space food growing, and other simple ways you can live a more sustainable and organic lifestyle. If you want to dive deep into any of these topics, or learn more about my online Canning Academy just visit my website [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

Today's episode is about raising backyard rabbits. Now, I'm not talking about like farming and raising tons and tons of rabbits, but a lot of people are raising chickens, and last week we talked to Lisa Steele about raising backyard ducks, so I thought this was the perfect time to talk about raising rabbits, or bunnies. Now, I brought on my friend Chris McLaughlin. She lives in northern California and she's a writer, and an author, and she has been gardening for over 35 years, and she has authored over six books. Talking about everything from gardening to dyeing, dyeing fibers to, not dying like in the dying sense, but dyeing fiber for spinning and weaving, and also she writes for a ton of magazines. Like Hobby Farm Home, and Urban Farm Magazine, the Heirloom Gardener Magazine, Fine Gardening Magazine and so much more.

Now, Chris and her family live on a flower farm, and also they raise animals for their fiber, because she's a spinner, and they are in the California foothills and they have all kinds of things on their farm. They grow flowers, fruit, vegetables alongside all of their fiber animals like rabbits, and goats, but if you are interested in any of the things that she does you can visit her website at Laughing Crow and Company, and that's [laughingcrowco.com](http://laughingcrowco.com). I'll have links in the show notes for this episode of all of Chris' books and her website, and everything so that if you're interested in any of the topics that she covers you can get it all in the show notes. The show notes are at [livinghomegrown.com/85](http://livinghomegrown.com/85).

Now, what I brought Chris on to talk about is how it doesn't matter how big or small your space is you can raise rabbits for a lot of different reasons. Now, you can raise them for their fiber, like Chris does, so that she can spin their fur, or their hair, and you can also raise rabbits for their manure, which I know is a reason a lot of my friends have rabbits. Rabbit manure is

awesome in the garden, and it's not like chicken manure that is really, really hot and can burn your plants. Rabbit manure is much more gentle and it is full of micronutrients that are really, really good for your garden. We'll talk about that when I bring Chris on. Also, people do raise rabbits for meat. That's not something that Chris does, and that's not something that any of my friends do, but absolutely some people do raise them for meat. That is always an option if that's your thing.

I just wanted to bring Chris on, so that she could tell us exactly what we can use rabbits for, how we can raise them, and I was particularly interested in how Chris raises angora rabbits for their fiber, and how she sells their fiber, and dyes it. It's really quite interesting. Without further ado, let me bring on Chris and we're going to talk about raising backyard rabbits.

Hey, Chris. Thanks so much for joining me, here, today.

Chris: Hi, Theresa. Thank you so much for having me.

Theresa Loe: I'm excited about today's episode, because you and I have been talking about doing a podcast on this topic for a long time and I have a lot of listeners who are interested in raising rabbits, and I know you're my go to gal for rabbits, and fiber, and dyeing, and all that kind of stuff. Before we dive in, why don't you tell the listeners exactly what it is that you do.

Chris: Okay. I'm a garden writer, although I have written a book on rabbits, so I raise and border rabbits, and I also raise angora goats. We also are starting a small flower farm, so we're kind of crazy around here, but those animals, I know gardeners are listening, their manure is just beautiful for the flower farm, so we love how all that combines together. I've been raising rabbits for a long time, so I'm so excited to talk about it.

Theresa Loe: Fantastic. I guess, we should start with why would someone like me, who has a very small backyard, why would I want to possibly start raising rabbits?

Chris: For one, anybody who has a small space, home setting thing going, or garden, or even in an apartment rabbits are the ideal livestock. They don't require fancy equipment, just very basic things with caging and protection, and food, and things like that, so they're very easy. There's not a lot of space required of them. That's why they're like perfect. When I was in the suburbs I raised them and they did just as well there as they do on land. Really, it depends on what your goal is, some people do want to raise rabbits for meat, and that's a great way to go as far as if you are going to raise your own meat, or want to consider it. It's a lean healthy meat. That's really great. We don't do that here.

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We're big old wimps, and we love our fiber rabbits, so we raise a breed of angora rabbit, called French angoras. We clip off the fiber about every 90 days, and we can sell it or keep it and spin it, but there's many other breeds, too, that can be kept as just pets and then gathering up that manure for your compost pile, for your garden. Kids could get involved, if they've ever considered 4-H, a lot of kids have raised 4-H rabbits.

When you do raise rabbits of any sort, by the way there's a couple of other fun things you could do there are rabbit shows and people laugh because they think a rabbit show they're used to dog shows. These guys are super fun to compete with and this a huge, huge industry by the way. The rabbit show that I'll be attending pretty soon has about 1600 rabbits being shown, and it's a very big deal. It's very fun. It's a great way to learn more and make a lot of friends and stuff. It also, there's something called rabbit hopping, or rabbit agility and it is absolutely hilarious, they have them on little harnesses, like you would a little dog. They coax them with a little piece of carrot, sometimes a rabbit loves to jump and they'll have them jump over these tiny little jump, it's absolutely adorable and fun.

Theresa Loe: I have never heard of that.

Chris: Most people haven't, and it's really precious if you look at it, but what I think is fun about that is that your learning always more and more, and more about the animals about the breed. You're becoming involved with other people who are doing it, and can also help you do that and lead to maybe another level, maybe you did just have pets and you think to yourself it might be great to have an animal that produces fiber, so you might try it out, because other people can guide you. It's a really fun thing to do.

They're just a very versatile thing, but of course one of my biggest, biggest things is a love the manure. I'm a gardener through and through, so I've personally found, and I know so many people feel the same way that I do that this manure coming from rabbits is amazing. It's not just high in nitrogen. It's high in everything. I find that when I add it to my compost pile that it makes everything break down all that material breaks down so quickly. It's so wonderful. I'd say for me, I always get really excited cleaning the rabbitry and taking that manure out to the garden and stuff. Obviously, they're great companions. They can be extremely friendly. My grandkids come over and play with them, and they were also in 4-H and got to show rabbits and things like that. They're a great little thing to have, and they're easy to do.

Theresa Loe: Yes. On the manure, I'm really glad that you touched on that, because I know from what I hear from everybody, because I don't have rabbits, but my girlfriend has rabbits and I use her manure in my compost, and from

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what I understand it doesn't burn like the way my chicken manure can. My chicken manure has to be composted first and kind of be broken down and spread a little bit thin, so I won't, so it's so high in nitrogen that it can burn my plants, but rabbit manure-

Chris: Right.

Theresa Loe: Is much better that way. Right?

Chris: Exactly we refer to rabbit manure as a cold manure. I believe, although I don't have any alpacas right now, I say right now. I've heard that's the same way with those guys, but since I haven't really checked it out, but yeah it's a cold manure, so if you sprinkle it at the bottom of your plants just raw, just like little, I call them time release pellets, but anyway, then I put them in the ground. Yeah. It will not burn your plants at all. Ever. It's interesting because sometimes when you get over exuberate and you forget some things like I will put them at the base of my vegetable plants, I'll put them at the base of my flowers. It doesn't matter to me, but I also want to mention that as a writer I also was encouraged to mention that if you're putting them at the base of food plants, there's always the potential for pathogens, you know, even in the soil, of course.

While we assume that people would wash their vegetables before they eat it and things like that lots of times if you're dealing with vegetable plants, maybe the way just to make sure everybody feels super comfortable with it is to add the manure to the compost pile, let it all breakdown and then use it. It's so helpful to breakdown that compost pile that I really like it predominately in there, but you know, potted plants and stuff if you've got potted plants on the porch and we'll just sprinkle it right in there. Yeah. It never burns anything. It's just real easy to use.

Theresa Loe: I love that time release pellet thing, that's pretty funny. Yes. It definitely would be that. That's really cool. I remember you wrote an article, I saw it in a magazine, I believe that you wrote an article about having a rabbit hutch with a worm composter underneath, so that people could have their rabbits and then the pellets would just fall right through into the worm bin and the worms would break it down.

Chris: Right.

Theresa Loe: I thought that was really clever.

Chris: Yes. Exactly. Doing a worm bin that way is like completely different than say a regular compost pile. You're not adding your vegetable scraps or your dead plants from the garden, whatever you might be adding to your compost pile, you're not really putting that in there because really this

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works as a vermicompost pile, which is different than a regular compost pile, although there are worms hanging around a regular compost pile. When you do vermicompost you're intensely feeding the worms, and specifically doing it so that you get their manure, their little special worm manure, so yeah, I've actually built boxes underneath the cages.

Now, what I did have to do, the rabbit would pee on one side of the cage and go through and the worms aren't real thrilled with that, so I would take like a little rack and I would just sort of mix it all in and it worked out just fine, but otherwise the worms literally ate the manure, and created compost for the garden that way. It's such a great thing because of course you're really not having to clean trays. You know, sometimes you'll have a cage that has a tray that slides out from the rabbit cage and in this case there would not be a tray there, so cleaning is like nothing, because really it's just all falling into that.

I love to show how things can go full circle for everybody.

Theresa Loe: Yeah. It's a closed loop system. Yeah. It works great. I love the idea of having a small animal like a rabbit and I know you call them small livestock, which they really are, and if you have a small space this is a perfect thing that you can essentially be creating fertilizer in a really small and condensed way, but have something that's very, very powerful that you can then add to your garden, so that's great. I know you also use the rabbits for their fiber. I'd love to talk about that a little bit, because you've written books on how to dye fiber and I know that you're a spinner, and you raise all different kinds of animals for their fiber. Talk to me a little bit about the French angora rabbit that you raise and how you use the fiber.

Chris: I have French angoras, and they are a handful of angora rabbits that can be used for their fiber. There's the English, and the French, and the German, and the Giant, and that satin. I like the French, they all have their own sort of characteristics that make them a little more doable, or just more desirable for what you're doing. Also, spinning it I love spinning French angora. It's a wonderful to spin, and angora is actually one of the top four fibers, luxury fibers. About every 90 days or if I'm going to go to a show I will what they call hold them in coat, which means I won't take that coat off until we go to the show, so I can show the animal, then I bring it home and then we shear it and I wanted to definitely bring up the whole thing about plucking, and shearing, and how this all works. For one, when they say plucking we aren't talking about plucking like say you've butchered a chicken, you're taking all the feathers off of it, and you're yanking this things from a body. Right?

Theresa Loe: I'm so glad you brought that up.

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- Chris: That's not plucking is. Yeah. That's not what we do.
- Theresa Loe: Yeah. Because someone said that to me when I told them that I was going to have you on the show they said, what about the plucking, and I said plucking, because you've never told me that you were plucking your rabbits. I actually emailed you right away and said, "What is that," because it sounds painful. I'm really glad you're bringing that up. Explain what the real plucking is.
- Chris: Yeah. Okay. The real plucking is for anybody that has a dog with a lot of fur, like okay my brain goes to all these great parodies and things that shed, so those dogs will shed like twice a year, they will call what we would call in the rabbit world, they blow their coat. Basically as that's all shedding all over your house and your kind of brushing it and it's coming out everywhere, that's what's happening with the rabbits, so they release their coat all at once, you know over a few days, and so you can sit them in your lap and you literally take your hand and you're just kind of gently grabbing, and pulling and laying the fiber down to the right, I'm right-handed. Just kind of pulling it lay it down.
- It's all about release from the rabbit, it's coming right off. That's called plucking and I'll explain why that word is used. Basically they're taking this off the rabbit and setting it down and if they did not take it off the rabbit, if people that aren't caring for them properly and taking off this coat that's releasing they will lick it off themselves, they will keep pulling and pulling it off themselves, they ingest it just like horses can not throw up. Everything has to go through that body. Most of the time when you have a rabbit taking off its own coat that way, they're going to have a little bit of an issue, and often they will get wool block that blocks their intestines and if a breeder catches it quickly sometime it's completely reversible, but many times they die of a blockage, which is incredibly painful, so if you're raising these rabbits correctly you need to be caring for that situation. You either need to be taking these off.
- These rabbits contrary to popular opinion, I know it's really, really popular to talk about the naturalness and all that, and I am like that. I am a 100% organic gardener, every animal here is our pet, but with that said people have to understand that we have created these animals. There are no natural, native angora rabbits hopping around the world that take care of this on either own. We have humanly breed them to do this, so it's our responsibility to make sure that they are cared for in the way they need to be, which they wouldn't have to do that in the wild. That's important.
- The reason why it's called plucking is because when you're in the hand spinner world when you are a fiber person that spins, there is a difference between removing that fiber that's being released on its own and actually

clipping or shearing them. There's a difference in the way those two fibers spin up, I don't really find that big of a difference. It doesn't bother me either way, but some people really, really like the ones that are just released that are not cut with scissors or clippers they just prefer to spin it that way. Many of us aren't going to have a choice, because within every rabbit, angora rabbit breed for the most part some of them would hold their coat and you had to clip them off and some of them would naturally, what they call molt, blow their coat. My rabbits, my French angora line they do not do that. Their coats do not come off by themselves, we actually have to shear them off.

You have to know your line of rabbits, which they come from, as to what you're going to do. To tell the difference between clipping and plucking, that's what somebody would say, "Oh. Is it a plucked fiber or clipped?" They are just referring to that molting rabbit. It's definitely not inhumane in fact it's the opposite of inhumane. We bred them to do this and we have to care for them so that they don't get hurt, because what we have bred them to do, which is produce this fiber. Obviously, what I am saying is they are no kill livestock, they live for many years and they produce this gorgeous fiber, and they're very friendly, by the way. Extremely friendly bred of rabbit. They love people.

We enjoy raising them and we use the fiber, we might dye it and sell it to people, or we'll just spin it ourselves. Very often we blend it with a wool, a sheep's wool, because angora rabbit doesn't have a lot spring to it, so if you made like a huge sweater out of pure angora not only would you be too hot, trust me, it's like seven times warmer than sheep's wool. It's kind of crazy. It wouldn't bounce back, so we love the sheep's wool, we love to blend it with the sheep's wool that's just as fine, and we blend it together so that when you wear this it kind of springs right back, and stuff. That said, so people will do a pure angora hat, so pure angora gloves. Something that's smaller that doesn't need so much bounce.

There's so many different ways to use this. It's just another great way if you are using rabbits for manure, and maybe for showing, and you could also use it for fiber. There's a little bit of specialty to them, but not in a way that's ungraspable, but that being said, I blow mine out once a week with a dog blower, you know like they have at the groomers. I blow out their coats and this pushes any tiny little knots, little mats, it pushes it up to the surface, so I can just sort of take a little brush and just brush the tips of it and keep them mat free. If you don't take care of them they will mat all the way to their body. I mean, it's just horrible.

I know people have seen dogs like that, some dogs that aren't cared for and they'll do that, and it very hard to get it all off there. People can get it off, but it's difficult, so before anyone runs out and get any angoras they are a

little bit of work, but I mean, I just have this regular routine, every Saturday I go out there and blow them out. I give them a tiny little brushing and make sure their coats are in great condition. I do really well. If you were to ignore them that would not be the case.

Theresa Loe: Yeah. That's really good. I have a question. On the blow out is it like blowing dry? I'm not sure what you mean by that. By the blow out.

Chris: You never wash them or wet them. I hate to say blow dry, because then people thought I wet them down.

Theresa Loe: Okay.

Chris: Never, ever. It's just a high powered dog groomers blower and it's cool air, it's like a sort of, I mean not cold, but we definitely don't use heat on them. It's just this nice blowout and what it does is because we can use a blow dryer, it's just not strong enough to go through the length of coat, so you have to kind of use a groomer's blower. It blows straight down to their skin and just pushes out, it makes the fiber lay very flat. It just straightens it all out. Just because it's opening up the coat a little bit. You just do that all over and they remain mat free.

We don't like to rake them with a brush, too much, we do use a brush for the tips, or maybe if the paws get a little bit matted, you kind of groom them a little bit with a brush, but if you're planning on, especially if you're planning on showing them we want to keep the denseness of the coat, and when you rake a brush through there, it's just like when you brush your hair too hard, too quickly, if you brush your hair in the morning you really shouldn't be starting from the crown of your head, because you're going to start pulling out extra hairs and it loses the integrity of the coat.

Theresa Loe: No. That makes sense.

Chris: Yeah. This really makes it nice and fresh, and comfortable for the rabbit. In reality, they're coat is very insulating, so when their coat is actually blown out and not matted, even in the heat, we get a lot of heat in northern California their coat doesn't really make them any hotter. It's if they get matted then you kind of have a different story, but if their coats are correct it works very, very well for them.

The thing about rabbits I want to bring up too is that if you live in a cold climate, you're more likely to not have to worry as opposed to living in a hot climate. Rabbits die very quickly of heat. They cannot tolerate it, at all. Some tolerate it better than others. Often once you get above 90 you're going to have to either put misters outside in your rabbitry, or you might give them a frozen water bottle to lean up against, or just a fan, just fans



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blowing the air around will help keep them cool. Whereas in the winter, and we've been having a really cold winter, here, we even have snow here in California in the northern part. As long as there's no drafts. I know rain isn't hitting them or anything, but they prefer the cold air, they're hopping around and having a great time out there, as opposed to in the summer when they're like, oh, please.

Theresa Loe: Yeah.

Chris: Yeah.

Theresa Loe: That's really good to know. There's a couple terms that you have said that I wanted to talk about, because it was something you and I talked about before and that was that you call the rabbit fur, you were calling it rabbit wool.

Chris: Yeah.

Theresa Loe: I wanted you to talk, because I thought that was really interesting when we had that conversations about goat angora versus rabbit angora. Could you explain the terminology there?

Chris: Right. Okay. Usually when we talk about wool we're talking about a sheep, I mean, that's most commonly what people think. We always like to use the term fiber, because people may ask somebody what fiber is it that you use to spin that up, because we want to know technically, which one you're using. With angora rabbits, we call that angora, but we call it angora wool. Angora rabbits have wool. I think technically speaking if you're a scientist I think that they call it hair, but nobody out here calls it hair. It's not wool, in the same way the sheep's wool is and the way that it acts. Angora wool is so incredibly soft, very few fibers are softer than that.

There's an argument as to whether, depending on the number of microns Kashmir is going to be softer, but really you're looking at some of the softest wool. A lot of people will blend their angora with sheep's wool, or maybe alpaca, just whatever they feel they are trying to give it a little bit of softness or give it what we call a halo. Once it's spun up into a yarn you'll see those tiny little, just like the sweaters you buy and stuff, those little tiny fibers sticking out and they're like a little glow that's called the halo. A lot of people want that in their fiber, so they'll add angora wool.

Rabbit wool is always called angora, but now I also raise angora goats. That is never called angora, though. A little confusing. It's also not wool. It's actually mohair. Anything from an angora goat is called mohair. It's also a very fine beautiful luxury fiber, but both of the fibers that I raise they need that extra little spring, most knitters really prefer to have some sheep's

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wool in there to give it that bounce back.

Lots of things. You don't have to do that. Like, they do the gloves and hats, shawls and things, that actually don't have to have a lot of spring to them, and then they'll use them purely. That's both again angora and the mohair.

Theresa Loe: Got it.

Chris: They take dye gorgeous. Both of these fibers take dye like there's no tomorrow. It is so beautiful. That's like another reason, it's very versatile for me to play with.

Theresa Loe: Got it. Awesome. Okay.

Chris: Yeah.

Theresa Loe: Now, another term that you have said a couple of times that I wanted you to explain was a rabbitry.

Chris: Okay. It's sort of like, it's not two words it's a rabbitry.

Theresa Loe: Got it.

Chris: [crosstalk 00:26:42].

Theresa Loe: Okay. Good.

Chris: Yeah. Rabbits, with an R-Y, so you're just describing where you're keeping your rabbits. If you have two rabbits inside your house, in a cage in the kitchen, you probably won't define that as a rabbitry, but those of us that actually have them in our, where sort of implying that we're breeding. If you raise rabbits, and that may not even be the truth, because I only breed only about once a year, and yet I'm still raising those rabbits for their fiber, but we have rabbitries because we cannot keep them all in the house, because we have more than two.

Theresa Loe: Got it.

Chris: Yeah.

Theresa Loe: Perfect. I'm glad I asked, because I thought you were saying to words. Okay. Perfect. All right. Let's say I wanted to start raising some rabbits, maybe just one or two, what are some of the things that I have to take into consideration? You've already talked about temperature, which is very important. What about a shelter, or a rabbitry, or some kind of housing. How much space would a rabbit need?

Chris: You know, usually it depends on the size of the rabbit. If you were keeping the really small guys like the Netherland dwarfs, and maybe your children were showing them or something like that. People keep them, I know in like 24 by 24, that's pretty acceptable, especially if you take them out and do something with them, too. Not just leaving them in there full-time. I prefer the bigger cages. I like to have hutches. Where I can get them very long or have them made really long, but like I said if you have 36 by 36 cage for an angora rabbit that's perfectly fine. Angora rabbits aren't very big, by the way. Once their coats come in they look huge. I mean they look like this giant thing. You should look up some of the rabbit shows, it's hilarious, people are walking them up to the table where they're being judged, and it looks like they're carrying this medium sized dog, and the fact is when you take that coat off they weigh like five pounds, or six pounds. It's so crazy. I just always find, I just really like them to be able to move around.

Theresa Loe: Yeah.

Chris: You know? Speaking of outdoor hutches and things like that, these guys are at the bottom of the food chain, just like chickens, or mice, or whatever.

Theresa Loe: I was going to ask you about predators, because I figured even if you do have a hutch, I know raccoons can open up chicken cages, so I'm sure they can open up hutches. That's why whenever you have these cages outdoors you have to make sure that there's an extra latch so that they just cannot open the door and reach in.

Chris: Yes.

Theresa Loe: Right. That's important.

Chris: Yeah. What I always did is that I kind of made it to where they couldn't even get to the hutch, whether that meant a cyclone fencing with a top on it. Now, what we have here, we have a livestock guarded dog, an Italian Maremma who is worth his weight in gold. I have these guys in their hutches behind a chain link fence, like seriously I mean, I'm serious. Right?

Theresa Loe: Yeah.

Chris: But, that said, their roof does not meet the cyclone fencing, so there is a gap, but we do have Vinnie and he just simply doesn't let predators here, so I feel super confident that, that gap is okay. The other thing that people will do is they will keep them say in their garage. In the day light hours you might have your garage open, or maybe a side door open and maybe they have light and stuff, and then at night you're closing that up. That's also very protective.

Theresa Loe: We have the housing, and we have a protected area and we're careful with the sun, and the heat. What about food and water? Would they just eat, I'm assuming rabbit food that you can get at a feed store.

Chris: Right.

Theresa Loe: But, then also is it okay to give them supplemental vegetables and things like that?

Chris: Yeah. You know, there's sort of like three different ways people do all this. The pelleted feeds that you find, and I like the ones that are at a regular feed store, I don't like the ones at the grocery store. I cannot say for certain that they're all nutritionally inferior, but the problem is they've been lots of times sitting on the shelves for so long. When you go to a feed store, they're going through that stuff like I mean, it's amazing. Right? They're getting fresh stuff from these mills, so often that I just find that always looks, and smells, and feels the best to me. Pelleted feed can definitely be their main course. Personally, I think it's always great to have hay for them, if not full-time, like several times a week and you can get that from the feed store, and I don't need a big bale, you do not have to buy a big bale.

They sell, sometimes, this Timothy hay and stuff in bags and they sell them at like the grocery store, or Walmart, or Target, or something and they're kind of expensive and I think, Oh. My gosh. I can buy a bale of hay for that. You know? But, if you go to a feed store, very often, for people that are not interested in a bale of anything, they will have plastic bags that just have what they call a flake, and that's where naturally when you open up a bale of hay, a little slice, like a slice of bread will fall over. That's called a flake. They'll slide that into the bag and they'll fill it for like \$4.00 or something. That will last one bunny like oh, my goodness, like a long time, because you're just kind of supplementing.

They definitely could just live on pellets. A lot of people do it. I find it feels healthier to me to give them that. I like to give them a little bit of treats. If you give them a lot of treats, like someone might give their dog or something, they're little guts are much, much smaller. You could over run them with sugars and stuff. You don't have to feed with pellets, a lot of people just want to feed what they can grow on their farm, it's sort of like a whole different train of thought. That can be done. As long as you're setting the nutritional value of what they need, and you're balancing it, that also can be done, it's just a whole different thing. Rabbits lifespan, by the way, if they don't get sick is about 10 years.

Theresa Loe: Wow.

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- Chris: It's like longer than some marriages. Right? You know? That's a long time. Seriously, right?
- Theresa Loe: Yeah.
- Chris: You're thinking to yourself, they are not rats, they don't live two to three years or whatever. I'm going to get a lot of rat people jumping on me now.
- Theresa Loe: Yeah.
- Chris: By the way, just to throw this out there in case, I watch people, they're not rodents. Rabbits are not rodents their lagomorphs, so they're not rodents. They do have their own unique differences about them and how they work and how their body works, and everything. They do live a long time. If you had a bunny for 10 years, which I often do, that's quite a lifespan, so thinking about that and I'm not saying if you get rabbits you have to keep them forever, because of course you can pawn them off on your unsuspecting cousin, or whatever.
- You have to think about, though, if you kind of just want to try it out, then you may want to borrow a bunny, or go visit someone who raises them or something like that just to see if you really want to do it. I'll tell you what's fascinating even if you don't want to show rabbits, it is very fun to go to a local rabbit show and just talk to the different people who have all these different breeds that you might like. It's like having this smorgasbord in front of you just like you can ask everybody every question you want and how they do it and why they like the breed they have, if you're considering that.
- That is also very fun.
- Theresa Loe: Yeah. That's a great idea, because I would love to go to a chicken show, so I can imagine a rabbit show would be the same way, where you would see breeds that you maybe had never even heard of and to get to actually talk to people-
- Chris: Yeah.
- Theresa Loe: Who deal with that breed, and understand their personality, and they're particular corks. I think that's awesome.
- Chris: Right.
- Theresa Loe: While we're on the topic of that, if I wanted to start raising some rabbits, where would I go to get those rabbits if I'm in the city and I'm not in a rural area, do I have to go to a show to get some of the more unusual breeds?

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Where would people go to actually purchase some of the different ones?

Chris: You know, again it's going to depend on what your goal is. If you just wanted a pet rabbit, you thought, you know, I just want to get a pet rabbit either for me, or my child, or something, you just the manure and you wanted the companionship, you very well could go to a pet store and just find one that you think is cute. I mean, that's fine. I like a little more backup, like I try hard to have everything enhance the farm in some way, and sort of become a part of it. I want to kind of have backup. I do want to make sure that these animals are healthy when they come to me. I cannot tell you how many people have said to me, oh, they just want a pet, they would never want to show, that's just not even in the spectrum of their reality, it's not going to happen, and I'm telling you six months later they want to know if they can just enter a show. They just get into it.

Then, they come to find out when they got one from the pet store that those rabbits that are at the pet store came from a breeder because those rabbits will be DQ'd, disqualified on the rabbit table, because there's something that isn't fitting within the breed standard, so now they have this rabbit and they cannot show it. Here's how I look at it. I would always try to get something that, whatever I was going to raise, if I was looking for a meat rabbit and I was going to look to breed New Zealand's, or something that is a meat breed, I would find a local breeder, and even if you're in the city or something, honestly if you just simply go onto the American Rabbit Breeders Association, their website, you can look up a breed and they tell you in the closest vicinity of you where the breeders are and also, I'm not sure on their site they say where the shows are, but if you looked up your states show, if you said Colorado Rabbit shows, or something they would come up. You would be able to find one, within a two hour distance to go to. You really would.

I would recommend that, because those breeders you could go right back to them, and go wait this rabbit seems sick, or whatever, or I don't know how to raise this type of rabbit, I'm reading this, but this is a different rabbit. They have all the answers. To me, if you were seriously interested in it, I always think why not start with the exact right thing. That animal will be papered and they'll explain to you, they'll have like in their rabbit barn, they'll say, that's another they'll say rabbit barn or rabbitry, you know, I have these over here, they're not show quality but if you're just raising for meat, you'll get some great animals out of this. Then, you might say okay, that's perfectly fine but then over here, let's say with these guys, they'll put them on the show table and you could have a lot of fun that way, too. It's sort of like that, it's not that I'm saying mut rabbits aren't good, I'm just saying that if you have a purpose, just like anything I'm not going to get a Yorkie to guard my farm.

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- Theresa Loe: Right.
- Chris: You know? I'm not putting down Yorkie's, I love Yorkie's.
- Theresa Loe: Right.
- Chris: I'm not putting them down, but that's not the right job, so that's why I'm saying it's just so great if you really have a vision, if you just want a pet, you certainly could feel free to just get one locally, but also your local 4-H. Call your California Cooperative Extension office.
- Theresa Loe: Yeah.
- Chris: They will put you in touch with a local 4-H and those children who are raising animals and showing them, and trying to feed them, by the way, they have to keep a record of what they've put out, what that rabbit cost, everything. 4-H is intense, they're teaching them stuff. They'd be happy to sell you a rabbit.
- Theresa Loe: Yes.
- Chris: They'd be more than happy. Those kids will tell you what is going on.
- Theresa Loe: Yeah.
- Chris: They'll tell you exactly how to raise those animals and what to do with them. It's amazing. Yeah.
- Theresa Loe: I love that.
- Chris: There is ways of doing it, just depending on what you're after. The angoras you definitely would have to go to a show, or contact a breeder.
- Theresa Loe: I really like the idea of going to a 4-H and buying from a kid who is really learning the ropes. I think that would be so great, because you'd be supporting them. I know that there's even rescue operations where people buy rabbits at Easter, and then don't want them.
- Chris: Right. Yeah. Remember a lot of times, if you're interesting, and I'm really specifically more talking about meat, because you have to breed to do meat rabbits, that's what you're doing, remember that if you get a rabbit from some of the rescues they're going to be neutered or altered, so that they cannot breed.
- Theresa Loe: Right.

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- Chris: Because they're goal of course is to not have you breed. That's their sole purpose is to not have you breed. That's their sole purpose.
- Theresa Loe: Right.
- Chris: I just wanted to give a heads up on that. Again, it's all about the goal. It's just whatever is happening. I love supporting the 4-H kids, though, because they learn and do so much. It's really pretty amazing to shop through them.
- Theresa Loe: Yeah. I like that. I really like that. Chris, I so appreciate your coming on, because I think you really have illustrated that just like if you're going to start with any livestock in your backyard, it is a commitment, so it does take a little bit of research-
- Chris: Yeah.
- Theresa Loe: And, understanding the type of breed that you're going to have and what its special circumstances are, but at the same time, it's very doable for someone with a very small or no backyard. It just depends on-
- Chris: Yes.
- Theresa Loe: What type of breed you can find to breed that will work for you and still have the manure, or companionship, or you could even be harvesting the wool. There's a lot of options and-
- Chris: Right.
- Theresa Loe: I love that. I'm so glad you could finally, we could get it together, so you could come on because I've been wanting to talk to you about this for a long time. We always chat in person when we're at events and things-
- Chris: Right.
- Theresa Loe: It was just really cool that I got to share the conversation here on the podcast, so thank you for coming.
- Chris: Thank you for having me. You know, it's so funny because I'm known as a garden writer and I love what I do with the gardens, love it, but a lot of times you don't get to talk about your other passions. Raising these fiber animals is so much a part of our farm, so I was so excited you wanted to talk about rabbits. I talked all of your ear off, so sorry about that.
- Theresa Loe: No. I'm thrilled.
- Chris: I'm passionate.





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Theresa Loe: I'm thrilled that you talked our ear off, I think that's awesome, because there's, I mean, it's not like I can just go down the street and find someone that knows this. You are definitely my go to gal for rabbits. I'm really-

Chris: Cool.

Theresa Loe: Excited that you came-

Chris: Thank you so much.

Theresa Loe: On. Yeah. Thank you for coming on.

Chris: Thanks for having me.

Theresa Loe: I hope you enjoyed that interview with Chris McLaughlin of Laughing Crow and Company. Now, I'm going to have all the information in the show notes for this episode, so that you can learn more about Chris's website and her different books. If you really want to get into dying fibers, she has an entire book just on that it's called, A Garden to Dye For, and it's by St. Lynn's Press, and she has some fabulous gardening books, one I really love is the Vertical Vegetable Gardening Book and it's by Alpha Books, but I will have links to everything about Chris, and all of her information in the show notes for this episode and you can get them at [livinghomegrown.com/85](http://livinghomegrown.com/85). I'll have everything right there for you. I hope that gave you a little taste of what it might mean to raise and angora rabbits, or any rabbits, and enjoy all the benefits that they have to offer, no matter how small your space is. Until next time, thank you so much for joining me here, today, and I hope you'll try to just live a little bit more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: