
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 86 Redeem Your Ground

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/86

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. This podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm. That means that we're talking about preserving the harvest, raising backyard critters, small space food growing, and other simple ways that you can live a more sustainable lifestyle. As always, if you want to dive deep into any of these topics or learn about my online canning academy, or any of the other things that I have cooking up, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com.

Now, this week's episode is a little different. It's a conversation and a story about how one landscape designer found his calling after discovering the power of connecting with his family outside in his own backyard. The reason I started this podcast, Living Homegrown Podcast was because I wanted to share the stories that I was discovering while I was working as a TV producer for our PBS show, Growing A Greener World. Part of my job with that show is to pullout some of the stories of people that we would want to have on the show. Many times when we were filming or when I was pre-interviewing people for the show, I would have the most incredible interesting conversations with these people, but it was always off camera. I never got to share those conversations.

I always wanted to do that. I always wanted to share the conversations and that's actually one of the initial reasons I started podcasting. Then as I developed Living Homegrown, it grew into much more than that. As you know, I have episodes that alternate between DIY food crafting like how to make cheese, yogurt, or how to can food to gardening in small spaces and composting, and focusing on different ways that we can live closer to our food.

Today's episode is very similar to those fly on the wall conversations that I always thought were so valuable when I was interviewing someone for the show. Today's guest is one of those people. His name is Doug Scott. We've actually worked together on Growing A Greener World. We just filmed an episode on him, which will be airing in this upcoming season in the spring. Now, I think Doug's story really resonates with a lot of us. Today, he's a landscape

designer in Atlanta. He and his wife also run the blog, "Redeem Your Ground." Through his landscape work and his writing, Doug helps other families connect with nature and themselves as a family.

I'll let Doug tell the story of how he got to where he is today. I wanted to point out that there is a reason why I always bring so many landscape designers onto the show. Part of a designer's job is to look at someone's backyard space or their front yard space and assess what they have to start with and then connect that to the dream of what they want that space to be. I have to say that if you have a space where you're trying to connect with your family, Doug is a master at this. I will link to Doug's website a really cool video that he has on his site and all the information of everything that he talks about. I will link to that in the show notes for this episode. To get to that, you can go to livinghomegrown.com/86 and everything will be right there for you.

With that, I'm just going to bring Doug on and let him tell you his story. Here is Doug Scott from Redeem Your Ground. Hey, Doug. Thanks so much for coming on the show today.

- Doug: Thanks for having me. It's an honor and a privilege. I'm looking forward to it.
- Theresa: Great. I'm excited to have you here. We'd go way back, we've known each other for several years, and I think that what you do is super exciting. I'm really excited for everyone to learn about it. I'd love for you to start by telling everybody, what is Redeem Your Ground?
- Doug: Redeem Your Ground in a nutshell is a company that is both a landscape design firm, if you live here near me in Atlanta. It's also a family home and garden blog that my wife and I do. We can get into it in a second. There's a little backstory behind the whole world of social media and the irony of me actually doing anything in social media. The whole overarching goal of Redeem Your Ground is to help families, help people get outside the walls of their home and enjoy the outdoor spaces that are out there. Too few people do that. They're stuck inside and I want to help them, we want to help them to do that. If you're in Atlanta again, it's through landscape design, but if you're anywhere in the world and you can get onto redeemyourground.com. That's where we share stories and how-tos and anything to inform, or demystify, or whatever someone might need to walk out the door and enjoy being with friends and family outside. Long winded answer to your question, but I hope that explains it.
- Theresa: Yeah, it does. You basically are designing gardens for people. I know that you definitely spend a lot of time researching what it is that would light them up outside and you customize. You do this because this is what you did for yourself and your family. I love that story. I think we should start with you telling everybody the story of you leaving Corporate America.

Doug: Yeah, so my story is not the typical landscape designer story. I went to a great undergraduate school, worked in banking and consulting, went and got an MBA, worked in more consulting, and was a part owner of a sales training company. I was absolutely dying on the vine. It was a good job and it was making good money, and the rest of the world say, "Yeah, that's exactly what you should be doing given your pedigree." I was absolutely dying on the vine. It was having to do with just a ton of soul searching. I like to say it was having garden therapy of sorts. Whenever life was going great, it is getting outside and getting my hands dirty, and doing something with my friends or my family, building something outside is what I look forward to do on the weekends.

More often than not in this state of mine that I was in which was dying on the vine, when things weren't going well, it's where I would go to medicate. It's where I would go to calibrate my heart, calibrate my mind. Again, it was my medication. I would say at this time where I was having this recognition that I wasn't really following my passions or whatever, I had these two young girls, my two daughters who are looking at every move that I made. When I would literally put them to bed at night and I would say their goodnight prayers, I would say, I would just pray that they would understand what it was that they were uniquely and wonderfully made to do.

I remember the night. I was literally walking from one of the bedrooms to the next bedroom and I realized that I'm such a hypocrite. I am not living out the way that I'm now discovering that I have these passions and these giftings for, but I wanted them to. The best way for me to really optimize the chances of them pursuing their passions and their giftings was to do it myself. I was in a comfortable Corporate America job and didn't know how to do that, so I did more soul searching and do more medicating on the weekends with other projects. My yard became transformed, but I did become more intentional about helping friends and family come up with designs that were specific to the ways in which they wanted to live outside.

I just discovered this thing that I was beginning to discover was affirm that every single time I did that and that's that I have a certain act or certain gifting to see the potential in people and the potential in spaces, and to be able to connect those dots for people, to change their lives in that way was really obviously significant to me. Again, with my girls watching me, with my recognizing that I have these passions and these giftings that are not being exercised in any day of my week in the day to day work a day world. Combined with the fact that this is something that I think really contributed to my final leave in Corporate America, was at the same time my wife was really, she saw our life at home as a lot of coming and going and not much resting and not much getting to know each other. It's just really carpool and going from here to there.

She was really wanting to bring margin back to our family. Again, that contributed to finally I just, it was not three or four years ago, I left my

comfortable job and comfortable meaning source of income to launch Redeem Your Ground. It has been a challenge. I won't say that it hasn't, but I will say what is different is that I'm alive. I am doing what I believe I was made to do. I'm engaging with my girls and Britney my wife like I've never did before that. They're engaging with me. This Redeem Your Ground thing, it's all about family and so we're engaging together.

There's one other thing that I don't know if I've ever mentioned to you Theresa, but it wasn't until I started moving forward with Redeem Your Ground and started to dream again, that I ever realized that I ever stopped dreaming. To me, it just shows the level of life that you're having. If you can dream about what you're doing, to me that is an indicator that life is moving in the right direction and I wasn't, I wasn't dreaming. It wasn't until I started dreaming again that I realized that I'd ever stopped. I hope that answers what you were getting at.

Theresa: It does. That's why I love that story, because the fact that you had stopped dreaming makes you go, because a lot of us don't even realize that.

Doug: I didn't.

Theresa: Yeah, exactly because you're in the moment. You're like you said, doing the carpool and doing the day to day. When you're following your passion and you and I have had these conversations before, because we're both following our passion now. When you follow your passion, you light up and that comes off in everything that you do and everything that you touch. There's no reason to be working a job that you hate if it's at all possible that you can do something that you love. If you can do something that you love, it's a whole another life.

Doug: It is. It's really exciting. That's one of the reasons why I appreciate any time that I get to spend or to talk with you, because I know that we're from the same, cut from the same cloth there. I've definitely found when I'm working in this passion, it helps me help others move beyond where they are, so that when I'm working with a client in their yard is I can passionately literally or figuratively paint a picture of what their yard could be. More importantly, and this is where I think Redeem Your Ground is different as a landscape design firm that's different from other landscape design firms is more importantly, focus on how the cadence of their life will change. As long as we design their outdoor spaces to reflect how they want to live outside. Not their neighbors, not their mom, not their mom, how they want to live outside.

My ability to communicate that I think has helped by my passion and then not to mention the whole girls situation, my daughters. They see that I'm passionate, I'm alive and I'm not trying to figure out, how can I sit, plot myself in the middle of the yard and have them run around me because I'm miserable, right?

Theresa: Yeah, exactly.

Doug: Which is what my life was before.

Theresa: Let's talk about some of the ways that you have redeemed your own ground, some of the things that you've done in your own backyard, because I think that will help people understand what a difference you can make. Yeah, so why don't you talk about that?

Doug: Yeah, so we moved into a 1960s ranch that was we bought from the granddaughter of the original owner and nothing had been updated, nothing whatsoever, the carpet, nothing. At one time, I believe this woman's grandmother was an amazing gardener. I discovered that she was an amazing gardener, but you could not tell it from walking the house, because you couldn't see the house. It was completely overgrown, I mean, completely overgrown. Again, this was our first house. We just gotten married, we moved in six months later, and then we just started working through what needed to be done on the inside and I started working on the outside. Really, that just started by clearing things away.

Again, I have no background, no official background in landscape design. I've discovered this about me, but I didn't when I first got here. I guess at first what we did was we really created the bones of our yard. We cleared everything out and created the bones, on which I eventually started to add certain elements. I would say the first real element that reflected who we are, that differentiated our yard from our next door neighbor's yard was when my wife Britney, again wanting to create opportunities for our family to connect, she signed my then four year old or five year old daughter and Katherine up for a family vegetable garden little seminar at the Atlanta Botanical Gardens.

Then when we went, it was great, but my expectation was I was literally going to come home with that proverbial lima bean in a cup. It's like, "Yay." We learned something, right?

Theresa: Yeah.

Doug: I came home with 70 little seedlings and I had to figure out somewhere to put them. We live in a fairly mature yard or fairly mature neighborhood with mature trees. The only sunny spot in my yard or my property was my driveway. I literally took redeemed, I took back a part of my driveway where it was sunny and created these raised-beds for these 70 seedlings. That's really where a lot of things started clicking for us. Our kids started to recognize where food came from and what real food was. They were involved in putting in the ground. They were at the time four or five. My younger one was probably two or three at the time, so they weren't as much help as they thought they were, but it was fun doing it with them. Then they were there to harvest it.

There's a certain cadence that comes with growing plants and vegetables that I think is right, that is true. That was something that we were starting to see happen in our girls' lives. These are two little suburban girls and that often times suburban children don't have the opportunity to really understand where real food comes from. I would say the first element in our backyard that reflected who we were and was different was our vegetable garden. I would say that the next significant one was taking off the same idea of understanding where real food came from was when we started to raise chickens. It has been awesome.

We did it again for our girls to appreciate where real food comes from, but I wanted to give again another opportunity for my suburban girls to get their fingers dirty, and so we did that. They've loved the chickens and again they go and collect the eggs and all that. There's all the typical things you would think that would come from if you had chickens, but there's so much more that I have found that our girls have come to know and come to appreciate. There are all kind of life lessons that can come with raising chickens. They almost give you these real live visual aids to talk about, life and death, chickens die. Our named chickens that we picked out and that we petted, they died on a more regular basis than Spot the dog.

That gave my wife and me opportunity to talk about life and talk about death, and talk about disappointment. Those are all things that I think are good for parents to talk to their kids about. I love when we have friends come over, because that's when friends that specifically have kids because that's really when my girls really want to engage with the chickens, because they have this sense of pride of the added knowledge and the comfort that they have with animals that have beaks and sharp nails and flapping wings, but to see them introduce these little kids and often times they've never seen or held a chicken, have them hold Henny or Penny or one of our other chickens and answer the questions that it might have.

It's just been really a cool thing and those other things, those life lessons and these other learnings were really not anticipated values that we thought of. Obviously, we've never had chickens before. I would say that the one thing that I believe that has been one of the unexpected values for us that have come from raising chickens is that it really has helped gel or I guess gel is the right word, our family identity who are the Scott's. We're known as that family that has chickens and I hope we're not known as the family that has the crazy chicken family, and had feather stuck all over them or whatever. We're a family that wants to live healthy intentional lives and that are creative.

Again in these times, I think it's important for kids to have a family identity. I don't want to pump raising chickens have to be such a huge thing, but it has certainly been a contributing factor in forming our family identity. We have the vegetable garden, we have other things. We have swings, we have tree houses,

and we have a bunch of redeeming qualities of a yard.

Theresa: You absolutely do. I love what you're saying about the girls though with the chickens. I noticed the same thing with my boys. My boys were growing up when we first got chickens and they're teenagers now and they still take their friends out to see the chickens. It doesn't go away as they get older. I think what's so cool about what you're talking about with your girls is the confidence that they get from raising chickens and sharing their chickens and the information with their friends. That's very, very cool. You basically started this by just doing one step at a time. The way most of us get into growing food and raising chickens is just one thing leads to the next thing.

I love what you're doing for your clients, because you can decide or talk to them and help them decide what it is that they need to do and then they can start building their own whether it's you come in and create it for them or they can start in small baby steps and work their way across. Why do you think it's important for people to redeem their ground on their own property?

Doug: Yeah. There's a practical side. I could go several different ways with answering this question. There's a practical side. You've bought your home, which is not just your house. You have all the space outside the walls of your home that have so much potential. I believe that again, in today's times there's so many things that even though we may be in the same room, we are not together. We are watching TV, we're busy doing one thing or doing another and always just looking at screens. So often, there's so much more just right outside your door. Unfortunately, either I have clients that are from all ends of the spectrum, either their backyard looks like everybody else's backyard.

They live in these McMansions or they live in these homes that have these yards that is basically a ring around the house and then grass, and a fence. There's just not much exciting that draws you out there. I've had other clients that have these yards that are completely overgrown and they literally don't allow their kids to step outside the door because they're fearful of what they might get themselves into. I just think that it's such a shame. There's so much research that's done on the importance of free play, of free time, of unsupervised time outside and discovery.

There's so much cognitive development that happens when something is not so scripted, so expected. I think you can just look to your left and your right and you can see that few people are doing that. I just think that it's awful. I would not want it for my family. Again, I started out doing this for friends and family, and having done that for them and seeing how it changed their lives, to get pictures and voicemails, or e-mails from people saying, "Look what I get to look out in my backyard." Yes, it's now beautiful but what they were really showing me was their kids playing in the sprinklers.

I know the backstory. The backstory is that this wonderful family had three wonderful kids, lived in this house for five years, and they literally never stepped outside the back out of their porch, they won't allow it. That's huge.

Theresa: I agree with you so much on so many levels, because I was always teaching kids how to garden. When my kids were in elementary school, I was helping at the school garden, and helping them install a school garden. That connection is really lost on this generation. If there is a way for us to engage our children and even if you don't have children, engage yourself outside in nature, it's so grounding and so calming. I definitely have read the same things you have about the brain development-

Doug: Yeah, nature deficit disorder. Yeah.

Theresa: Oh, yeah. How many times have you gone out for a meal with your family and you're sitting there and you can see this other family and they're all on their phones texting. We have literally been sitting at a restaurant and we all glance over. We're all having a conversation and the other family is just all on their devices and no one's talking. It's very, very weird.

Doug: It's weird and it's unfortunate. It's not that my kids don't have devices, they do. It's not that it's not a challenge for us to keep that in check, but it's very difficult to keep it in check if you don't have an alternative. If you had these spaces, these natural spaces which I know that I might be on the far end of the spectrum of really nature being a place where it just feels right to me. I realize that, but I believe that anybody that spends any amount of time outside, they will start seeing, they will start feeling that same connection.

I know our childhoods were very different than what the typical child's childhood is today. There is part of me that wants to help other families who don't see the potential on spaces and can't really or even articulate what they want. I want to help them get there. That's what I want to do with my clients with Redeem Your Ground landscape side, but it's also what we try to do on the blog. It's obviously a little bit more of a distance to be able to do that. That's what our intent is.

Theresa: I think you guys are doing a good job with that, because your blog is very inspiring. We'll have to include in the show notes for this episode a photo of your chicken coop, because it's absolutely adorable. You have on the outside the little signs with each chicken's name, which is so cute. I suppose when one of them goes that you have to take their sign down.

Doug: I designed the sign recognizing that there will be some turnover, so each of the names that's on its own little panel that are hooked so I can unhook, and re-hook, and paint over.

Theresa: Yeah, because if someone hasn't raised chickens, that just happens. Chickens can die. Yeah, they are a bird and they can be delicate. Sometimes you don't even know what it is and a chicken will go. For the most part, chickens can last a long time. I have some chickens that are eight years old now and they're still going strong. They still lay an egg every once in a while, which is always exciting.

Doug: Yeah, every once in a while.

Theresa: Yeah. One of the things that I know you do when you are helping people with redeeming their own backyards and trying to figure out what to do with them is you take them through a process of certain steps. Not always is someone a gardener and I realize that you're designing gardens for people who are not gardeners maybe. Maybe they want to grow food, but maybe they don't. For the listeners that are listening, what are some things that they could do in their own backyards to start redeeming their ground?

Doug: No, that's a good question. I think that the reality is, is the answer to that question is probably, there's probably as many answers to that question as there are people that ask themselves that. Because the first thing that I would ask anybody to ask themselves and the first thing that I try to discover in any of my client interactions is, what is it that truly brings life to my client and their family? What brings life to me may be very different than what brings life to somebody else. If I go in as I believe a lot of landscape companies do, assuming that we want grass to run around in and pretty plants to put around the yard, that doesn't necessarily do it. That wouldn't necessarily do it for me.

Again, the thing that I challenge myself with before I even put in any pen to paper to come up with the design is to do my best to spend time with the family, to understand really what it is that brings life to them. That could be doing being growing plants that are beautiful, because they love the beauty in nature. That could be growing plants to eat, because they want like I've wanted to eat healthier or to teach their kids something. It may be raising chickens. It may be what might bring life to somebody is not worrying about doing much yard work.

Designing with that knowledge helps you come up with what spaces you're going to put in there, where are you going to put storage, where are you going to put maintenance equipment, or you can even have maintenance equipment. There's all kinds of things that you need to consider. The first thing I would say for somebody that wants to redeem your ground is to spend some time trying to wrestle off what other people are doing and say, "I want to do that because somebody else is doing that," but more, spend time figuring out what is it that really brings life to me.

The second thing I would do and you touched on it a little bit and it's really what I did to my yard is, don't feel like you have to do everything all at once. If you

can afford coming up with a master plan and then afford installing a master plan, by all means, go for it. Start living all your dreams that you want to right here, right now. Most of us can't do that. I think it's a good idea to have an understanding of maybe directionally where you want to go with your yard, but don't allow everything that you could do in your yard overwhelm you to the point where you don't do anything in your yard.

For someone that either can afford to do everything or somebody that wants to do it themselves, I would say start small. One thing that I've found helpful for clients that are do it themselves, they have found helpful is that if they were to think of their yard like they do to their home and think of like you have rooms in your home, you have rooms in your yard. Pick out the room that you want to spend the most time in or pick out the room that you look at from your windows the most or pick out the room that you pass by every time you walk in and out of your house so you're always reminded of something.

Remind yourself of something that's complete versus reminding yourself of something that is still to be done, right? Start small in that direction. If you do that, obviously, starting small will not overwhelm your budget either. If you wanted to do a vegetable garden, maybe start small with just some pots. Starting small may just be, let's organize the backyard and let's clean some things out. Let's cut the vines away from this so that you have the margin of, literal margin of space to see what the potential holds in your backyard.

That's not necessarily a small project for some people, but in some respects it is truly just a weekend project. Let's just go out in there and clean things up. What did I say? The first thing I said was, figure out what it is that brings life to you. Start small. I would also say, don't be afraid to make mistakes. I think again, so many people I have found feel like they have to research to the ends of the world to figure out exactly what it is that they're going to be doing.

If they want to be a vegetable gardener, they need to read all the books on vegetable gardening, or they're just fearful that they're going to kill something. First of all, a vegetable is two bucks. If it dies, it dies you go get another one. Don't worry about making mistakes. I would say that you can read all you want and I think it's smart too. It's not until you roll up your sleeves and literally get your hands dirty and do something that you actually learn something that is really, really valuable.

Once you learn it, you apply it to the next time you do it and then you apply it to the next time you do it. Then next thing you know, you have these beautiful raised-beds or you may discover that you don't actually like to do it so you move onto the next one. There's all kinds of things that are learned, but you don't really learn them until you try.

Theresa: That's why it's important to start small. Because if you start small and you end

up you don't like that, it's easy to fix. You haven't invested too much time or money.

Doug: Exactly.

Theresa: I have a quote over my desk and it's actually more for business, but I was looking at it while you were talking, because it fits in perfectly with this. The quote is, "You don't have to get it right. You just have to get it going." That's so true with redeeming your ground too. You don't have to be perfect.

Doug: Yeah, I think in the no doubt whatsoever and especially these families that I've worked with here in Atlanta that these young families that had these young kids and they were fearful of doing anything because they wanted to have the perfect backyard. What happened is they really had effectively no backyard. To a person they said, "If I'd only just started six years ago, my kids could've had six years of playing in this backyard." They were just paralyzed for either fear of doing something wrong, making sure that they wanted to have it perfect, they wanted to do it all at once. Guess what happened? As my dad said, the worst decision is decision by indecision. That happens to a lot of people.

Theresa: Yeah, I think it's common in a lot of areas, yeah.

Doug: Yeah. No question. Earlier before we even started the podcast, you and I talked a little bit about the name Redeem Your Ground and where it came from and the significance of it. There is some significance to it. I feel like first of all, Redeem Your Ground, there's a charge to it. It's redeem, go do something, bring back to life, resuscitate. There's a story there, right? There's almost an implied, there was life at one time, there isn't now so let's bring it back to that. I think that that just tells the story of a lot of young families.

Again, as you can tell, because I'm coming from the young family point of view, I think a lot of people they get married and they have dreams for their home. They buy their first home. They have dreams for what that looks like. They have their kids and they have the dreams of what that looks like. Then life happens. Life gets busy and there are bills to pay and there's places to go and people to see. Those dreams just melt away or go away. I believe the name Redeem Your Ground, that whole redeem side of it, I think it touches people, reminds them of the dreams that they once had, the dreams that they had for their family.

Then ground is it's a fill in the blank word. It can be literal ground. Let's go redeem your ground and do what's very practically done in a landscape company. Let's bring life to this dirt right here. Also ground is, again it's that fill in the blank, it's redeem your blank, redeem your life, redeem your family, redeem your parenting, redeem your marriage. There is this thing that really helps people take a deep breath and let's go and now intentionally do something. At least that's what I hope when people hear it or see it.

I feel like when I first started this and I would tell this, I would say the name to friends or family of what I was thinking of calling it. There are some people that literally I saw them stop and take a breath and it was almost as if they were remembering, "Oh yeah, I remember when I had that dream and I'm not any closer to doing it."

Theresa: I love the name. When you and I first met, I thought that was such a great name. It does really resonate. You have a great way of describing what us as gardeners feel. I love your take on calibrate my heart that you would go out and calibrate your heart when you're gardening. I do that too and I think a lot of gardeners do. Now, I love everything that you're sharing with us, Doug. Thank you so, so very much for coming on the show. I think this will really inspire people to get out there and make some little changes. Yeah.

Doug: Yeah.

Theresa: Thank you so much for coming on the show today.

Doug: You're welcome. Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Theresa: I hope you enjoyed that episode. Everything that Doug talked about including a really cool photo of his awesome chicken coop and links to his website, and an article about his chicken coop will be in the show notes for this episode. You can get that by going to livinghomegrown.com/86. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

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.

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