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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 91 Using the Harvest

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/91](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/91)

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode number 91.

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. It's 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 means that we talk about things like preserving the harvest, 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 the topics that I cover on the show, or learn about my online canning academy just visit my website, [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

Today's episode is all about the harvest. Now, I don't mean that we're going to talk about how you harvest food or when you harvest food, I'm talking about a new book that just came out called "Harvest" and we're going to talk about all the different things that you can harvest from your garden and why you would want to.

Now, I'm bringing on a guest that I've had on before. It's Stefani Bittner, she is the co-author of the new book "Harvest" and by the way the subtitle of this book is "Unexpected Projects Using 47 Extraordinary Garden Plants".

Stefani was on the show on episode 75, which was all about how to create an epic edible garden. Now, if you didn't listen to that show or you're not familiar with Stefani, she is the owner of Homestead Design Collective which is a landscape design firm up in the San Francisco Bay area.

What they're known for is creating beautiful gardens that provide a harvest. Now, that harvest can be food or that harvest can be flowers. There's all different parts of the plants that are usable and her focus, or her team's focus is to create unique, sophisticated gardens that can also utilize the productiveness of the plants.

She is of course an organic gardener and she has written another book called "The Beautiful Edible Garden" and that book was what we were talking about when she was on before.

Now, Homestead Design Collective will not only design gardens and install them but they also do a full service maintenance, organic maintenance of different gardens. They even will help people with setting up bee keeping, floristry, and composting with their gardens.

As you can imagine, Stefani is pretty well known in the California area but she's also nationally known, because some of her gardens have been featured in many different magazines. Just recently she and her team designed the new test gardens for sunset magazine and there was a whole spread in the October 2016 issue of the gardens that they designed.

They're completely edible and absolutely gorgeous. She's also been featured in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Los Angeles Times, Better Homes and Gardens. She's just been featured all over the place. It's a real honor to have her comeback and talk about this new book.

Now, the reason I wanted her to come back is not just because I think she's awesome which she is, but because this book is right up your alley if you listen to this podcast.

In the book, they feature 47 different more unusual plants, maybe not the typical edible plants but they go into some of the more unusual ones. They show you or talk about how you can use everything from the petals to the leaves, to the roots, and the seeds. Not just the fruit of these plants and that's what I love.

I also love how absolutely beautiful the book is, the photography is exquisite. I want you to remember that as always I will have all the information in the show notes for this episode of everything that Stefani talks about as well as her website links to books, and there is a special recipe that she is sharing from the book that you can get as a PDF download in the show notes. All you have to do to get the show notes is go to [livinghomegrown.com/91](http://livinghomegrown.com/91) and everything will be there for you.

Let me bring on Stefani Bittner and we're going to talk all about harvest. Hey Stefani, thanks so much for coming on the show today.

Stefani: Thanks so much for having me.

Theresa: This is going to be great because you've been on the show before you were on episode 75, and when you were on we were talking about this book Harvest but

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it hadn't come out yet. Now, I've actually had it in my hands and I love it and I just can't wait for you to share more information about it with the listeners because it's right up their alley.

Stefani: I'm really excited to share it as well.

Theresa: Perfect. I guess we should start in case someone hasn't ever heard the first episode that you were on episode 75. Why don't we start with you telling everybody what it is that you do?

Stefani: Sure, so I own a business called Homestead Design Collective and we're located in the San Francisco Bay area, and we specialized in creating very beautiful but also highly productive edible landscapes but that's not mean we're putting farms in people's front yards, although if someone wanted to go there I'd be happy to do it.

It really is focusing on including plants that give you harvest but are also very functional and very beautiful, so why have the fruitless plum as your focal point front yard tree? Why not include a focal point tree that gives you a harvest of some sort.

We also recently designed the new gardens for Sunset Magazine and my co-owner and I have both written multiple books on gardening and floral arts.

Theresa: Yes, and while we're talking about the sunset gardens we talked about that a lot in episode 75, we'll be sure to have a link in the show notes to some of the photographs of that garden. You do a really incredible job of not just making a landscape beautiful but making it really productive and functional.

A garden can be so much more than just pretty, and when you talk about harvest you're not just talking about harvesting fruits and vegetables, you're also talking about flowers and fragrance and useful plants. Is that actually what made you want to do this book Harvest?

Stefani: It is, when I think about how I live in a garden and in the gardens that we create, it really is about creating a space that gives back to you. Gardens take resources and not only of money to create and also water to help them grow but also the resource of our time. The idea behind having a harvest to a garden is that as you give to your garden you're able to also have a garden that gives back to you.

Of course, that includes our fruits and vegetables but it also includes herbs, our cut flowers, and other aspects of the plants to really bring into your homes on a weekly basis and really enjoy them.

Theresa: Yeah, and you cover in this book not just the fruit of a plant but you cover the roots and the leaves and the flowers that it's nose to tail. It's like the whole

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plant and that's what so awesome. One of the things I noticed when you did the book was that, the photographs are absolutely gorgeous by the way, I love the pictures but it was definitely photographed in real time. One of the questions I've been wanting to ask you was, did you have to write the book over an entire season or entire year in the garden?

Stefani: The book actually was a complete labor of love and took two years to produce, so we shot every single plant and its moment of harvest and then harvested it and then did the project all within that moment. The book is actually organized as you're harvesting through the season and the plants are not listed in order of trees, shrubs, crown cover that kind of a thing.

It's actually listed in order of that moment of harvest. If you flip through the book you can actually even see the change of light happening to the photos.

Theresa: The idea of the way you did the timing is really cool, most books would just say summer, spring, winter, fall, and you had a different kind of a take. You had three main seasons in the book. Can you explain that?

Stefani: Sure. The book is separated by the gardening terms early, mid, and late, and that really is so that folks who live anywhere can jump into the book where that season begins. For instance, I happen to live in Northern California, my early season is much earlier than someone who lives in Minnesota.

For me, I might be harvesting those plants in February but early might begin, someone lives in Minnesota in May. It really doesn't matter the month, I didn't want to say you harvest this in February or you harvest this in early spring. It was really more define these seasons in those gardening terms.

Theresa: I thought that was so brilliant because that's exactly one of the problems that people have with some of the books when they say spring, well spring for me would definitely be different for someone in another part of the country. I loved that. That is when you're planting fruit trees for example, there are early fruit trees and there are late fruit trees. That was a great, that was really brilliant the way you did that. I love it.

Stefani: The idea is that you want to have a good variety of things that give you an early, mid, and late harvest because we're gardening with these plants we're not farming. We want to as one plant finishes its season, we want the next one to begin so that we just always have something to go out and harvest from in the garden.

Theresa: That's so great, yes, and that's what we want. We want to have every available space giving us something that sometime in the year. The other thing that you use in the book are the USDA Hardiness Zones, it's hard to say. The Hardiness Zones, and I think that's very standard for gardeners but if someone is listening

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and they have never gardened before and they're just getting started, could you explain how they could figure out what zone they're in so that they know if you're saying, "Well, this is a great plant for zone five through seven," they don't know what their zone is. How do they figure that out?

Stefani: Sure, basically and I find that a lot of folks think that the US Hardiness Zones are a little intimidating and really is a guide to let you know where a plant typically succeeds and does really well. The first thing to do is, I do give the link in the book but you could just Google, US Gardening Hardiness Zones and there's a map and you find where you live and it will actually show you what zone you are. It is really helpful.

Again, to someone who lives in zone three and those would be folks who live on the US Canadian border, they have a much colder winter than folks that live in Southern California. It's really important to know what plants can handle going down to -30 degrees and will still come back and be perennial for you and your garden.

We did also include a lot of annuals though, in the book, and every person in the country no matter where you live, from Alaska to Florida can grow annuals. There's definitely a little something for everyone in this book.

Theresa: Yes, and if someone doesn't know, an annual is something that goes through its entire life cycle in one season. It sprouts, it grows up, it gives harvest and then it dies. That's why it's great because you don't have to try and keep it alive during winter because it's not supposed to.

Here in Southern California, we have a lot of things that are supposed to be annual that end up coming back regularly, but normally in any other part of the country they would not. Perennial is when you have a plant that comes back here after year, it should survive winter and knowing your zone will determine if you have to put it in the green house to keep it alive, so that it doesn't get too cold and it can survive the temperatures.

All of that you have in the book which is fantastic about the zones and how to grow and what things grow best in the different zones. That's just a great foundation for whatever you want to grow. Another thing that you have in the book is a little bit about safety when you're first starting out planting a garden. This is so important for someone who lives in the city like I do.

We talked about it, the last time you were on and I thought it was really important to mention again, could you talk just for a minute some of the things that, if you're going to be growing food in your backyard and you live in an urban area, some of the things that you should think about as far as food safety?

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Stefani: Sure. I'm a bit obsessed with this topic, so anytime you want to discuss it. The basic principle is that when we choose to grow food in our gardens we really want to make sure that we're growing it safely. For so many of us were growing food in our gardens because we're concerned about what our food source is. You want to think about contaminants that are below and above the garden, below the garden the number one thing is lead.

If you live in the city or in older home there are very good chances that your home at some point may have been painted with lead paint. It's a super easy test to find out if you have lead in your soil, typically it's only within about 18 inches to two-feet from the structure of your home.

What you do is you do a simple soil test, you locate, and you see where that lead is and then you plant an ornamental plant, you can still harvest from that plant because you can use it for flower arrangements, but you just don't want to eat food that is grown and medium to high levels of lead.

Other contaminants could include exposure to pressure treated wood before about seven, 10 years ago, all pressure treated wood was made with our sneak. Our sneak also will sit and contaminate the soil. It doesn't mean that you cannot grow food in your garden again just looking in your garden and if you know that you have an old fence and you see that it has a pressure treated post, choose that spot to put an ornamental plant.

Again you can harvest as for flower arrangements and then go out to three-feet from it and then start growing your food producing food. Then above the ground, the number one contaminants tend to be our pets. Creating safe spots for our pets for them to be able to dig in the garden or use the garden.

Then in the front yard thinking about the fact that you share your front yard with your community unless you fence off where your front yard meets the sidewalk. More than likely, when people pass by you should assume that their dogs may use the restroom on that part of your garden. Just don't put anything there that you eat.

Theresa: Yeah, not a good idea to grow lettuce along the sidewalk.

Stefani: I cannot agree more.

Theresa: Great, okay. Good. I wanted to dive in to some of the things that you cover in the book and we're going to mostly talk about some of the edibles, but I did just want to mention that you have a lot of things in the book that you're not talking about edibles, that you talk about other things that you can do and one of them was lilacs, you even have a recipe for like a hand salve or a cream?

Stefani: Yeah, so the book is about 47 plants they all are edible plants. They're all plants

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that you can eat but what we're trying to do is really open everyone's eyes up to this new plant pallet that you can utilize these plants in your landscape, they're incredibly beautiful. You can eat them but they're harvestable for other things.

With the lilac, a lot of few people actually don't realize that lilac blooms are edible, so I would highly encourage you to harvest your lilacs and add some to your salad, or make a cordial which would be really fun or a homemade soda. The project that we did for the book is actually a flower cream, and it uses the very traditional way of making perfume called enfleurage. I hope I said that correctly.

What it is, is that you infuse the scent of the lilac blooms into a fat. Now, back in the day, in France, they used to use the lard, we chose to use coconut oil. We infuse coconut oil over a period of time, the coconut oil takes in the scent of the lilac and what you have is this beautiful cream that you can use to moisturize your hands, your elbows, you can use it as a lilac based perfume and because it's made out of coconut oil you actually also cook with it.

Theresa: Okay, so that's fantastic and I think you did open up everybody's eyes to some different uses of the plants. Now, one of the plants that you had in there was a whole section on elderberries. I was really interested in this because I'm just now planting elderberries at our 1892 farmstead up in Northern California.

I'm just learning about elderberries about growing elderberries. I definitely know all the wonderful things that you can do with them, or at least some of the things that you can do with them. I'd love you to talk first a little bit about growing elderberries.

Stefani: Sure, elderberries are just a fantastic shrub to have in your landscape. I think they're incredibly beautiful, they're deer resistant which is always very important for folks. They're also a low water shrub once they're establish and that means that they need regular water for that first year of growth, but once they're establish and their roots are pretty deep they actually can go on to a low water regimen which is very exciting for folks that live in more drought stricken areas.

They are a plant that also happily lives in full sun to shade. What that means as well from a landscaping point of view is that you can repeat this plant throughout your garden transitioning from spots that are sunny to partial shade to shade and use it as a plant that's being repeated.

The plants that are in the sun are going to produce a lot more berries and the ones that are in the shade, but they will happily grow and the foliage of elderberries are actually one of our favorites to add to flower arrangements. Just because you don't have the berries it doesn't mean that you can't be harvesting from this plant.

A couple things to know about this plant though, it is one of the berry few plants in the book that has some toxicity to it, the flowers which are our spring harvest, and the berries which are our fall harvest are edible and are actually super high in nutrients, antioxidants, the whole works. The bark and the unripened berries and the foliage are considered toxics, so you do not want to consume them.

Theresa: Yeah, that's really important I'm glad you brought that up. This is important if someone is harvesting the berries, let's say, and they are cutting off the berries on a stem, you can't just throw the whole thing into something edible because the stems and the leaves and everything, the berries have to be removed from the plant.

Stefani: Exactly, and our rule of thumb and we're harvesting the berries is, so first of all the elder flowers and elderberries grow in clusters. You look at the shrub and you have this big cluster of umbels of either flowers or berries. When we're harvesting the berries we look for a cluster that actually has what I refer to as an elderberry reason.

Meaning that some of the berries have actually aged the plant where they're drying out and that typically has given all the rest of the berries a chance to ripen. That's kind of my clue, my visual clue that I can go ahead and harvest that group.

Harvesting, taking the berries off the stems are a little tedious, I'm not going to lie, I typically will put on a podcast like this one, and listen and start taking them off but it's really worth it. The elderberry is something that you can't easily get in a grocery store, let's say, it's really one of the special treats that you really grow your own, or forage for.

Theresa: Yes, so you can use even the umbrels and flowers, you could use those in flower arrangements as well. Did they hold up pretty well?

Stefani: They do. Also, I should say in the book I'm talking about utilizing the full plant. Some of the plants we actually include a secondary, we put the point of harvest as actually like the first harvest. In the book, we're harvesting the flowers to infuse honey.

One of my favorite infusions to do with edible flowers is tonic water, that makes the most beautiful gin and tonics if you happen to partaking that. You could use the flowers in flower arrangement but the flowers are so incredible to eat or to infuse with. I would say harvest all the flowers cut off the stems of that and then use the foliage in the flower arrangement.

Theresa: Okay, good point and I noticed in the book you even mentioned, "But don't go

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crazy with the flowers and then pull them all off and not get any fruit."

Stefani: Oh yeah. The whole thing to keep in mind is if you eat all of your flowers that means that you will not have a berry harvest, so keeping that in mind harvest a third of the plant or a half of a plant depending on how much you like the berries. You're going to have its one of those things as you're living with this plant. What so great about plants that come back every year, the perennials is that we live with them.

Maybe one year you're traveling and you missed the flower harvest, not a big deal because you'll have more berries. Then the next year maybe you harvest half of your flowers. It's really something that you can experiment with each year, and elderberries will become a large shrub. I typically like to keep mine at about eight feet, but they will happily grow to 12 feet if you let them. If you want to push your winter pruning, I do this a lot, when you're gardening and not farming you can get away with this.

Sometimes I'll actually let the shrub go ahead in flower and then do some really deep cuts, to restrict the height so that I'm harvesting and pruning at the same time.

Theresa: Okay, that's a really good tip. Very good. Why don't you tell everybody if we had elder flowers and we had them ready. How would we make the elder flower honey?

Stefani: Sure, so it's a pretty simple technique with any of your edible flowers when you harvest them, when you bring them inside. I highly recommend that you do not run them underneath a faucet of water but instead get a small ball with some cool cold water and you simply just dip the flower heads into the water and then take them out.

What you're doing is just loosening any dirt and we say in the book but it's really important to grow these plants organically. When you do, what's so wonderful is that you don't have pesticides in your garden. You're not having to wash them to remove pesticides.

You dip your flowers in the cool water and you lay it out on a cool cloth and you just let mother nature dry it, let air dry it, once they're dry you remove all the blooms and they're small. Again, it's a little tedious but you just remove the flowers off the stem. It'll probably take you 10, 15 minutes it's not too bad. I collect them in a small mason canning jar.

Once you do that, you take your honey and you pour the honey in, and you just want to cover the flowers. I use a chopstick to actually stir it during this process to release any air bubbles that might collect at the bottom of the jar. You cover the flowers or honey, you seal it, you let it sit for about a week.

At that point, you strain out the flowers and then you have a beautiful infused honey. What's also nice is that you don't want to throw away those honeyed elder flowers, you can actually dry them and then you can throw that into a tea mix.

- Theresa: Okay, fantastic. What we're doing is we're just infusing the elder flower flavor into the honey and when we're letting it sit, we just can let it sit on the countertop. We don't have to put it in the refrigerator.
- Stefani: Yeah, I usually say a cool dark place, so a pantry is really great. I just wouldn't leave it in a window, where you're getting direct sunlight but a cool dark place is the best place to do it. What's great is that you're not only infusing the flavor, you're also infusing the honey with also all of the great properties of the flower which includes all those antioxidants.
- Theresa: Oh, fantastic. Yes. Honey can sit at room temperature because it's so high sugar. It's actually a preservative so it's perfectly fine for this to be sitting on the counter. Okay, that's fantastic. Another thing that you have in the book was the huckleberry. I'd love to talk about the huckleberry for a few minutes because that's another thing that is kind of unusual. A lot of people don't just run out and put a huckleberry in their front yard. It's a great plant. Could you talk about that?
- Stefani: It is, and evergreen shrub that is highly ornamental, the new growth on the huckleberry is just really beautiful, burgundy toned, like bronzy color and then in the spring you get flowers and then you have in the early late, so really in the transition from summer to fall you have these beautiful and small bluish blackberries.
- They're super sweet, they packed a lot of punch in those little berries. You can do a lot with huckleberries in the landscape. It's the perfect plant to use in transition, if you have a space where you're going for more manicured part of your garden and then you want to let it go into more of a native natural escape. The huckleberry can be used in both circumstances and so it's a great transitional plant to use.
- Theresa: I didn't know that. Now, how big does a huckleberry plant get?
- Stefani: It depends on where you live and also what kind of gardener you are. Here in the bay area in San Francisco where I live, there are a little bit slower growing than let's say if you lived in the Pacific Northwest. I have seen huckleberries 10 feet tall in Oregon but I can tell you where I live they do not get that tall. We typically like to keep our huckleberries at about three feet and mask them out in large group.

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Typically, I'm planting them in 25, in groups of 30, and they almost look like a carpet, and it kind of like a mid size ground cover if you want to think of it that way. When we do our pruning, we're utilizing the branches in our flower arrangements.

Theresa: Okay, wow. 25 plants, you plant 25 plants in one section.

Stefani: Oh, yeah. You can also do seven, you don't want to plant just one.

Theresa: Got it.

Stefani: Huckleberries are definitely a plant that you want to plant in groups of like three, five, sevens. I tend to be a bit huckleberry obsessed, so I go for 25 typically. I think it's a plant that's well worth it. It is also a plant that really supports the wildlife in your garden. You should realize when you grow this plant that you are going to be really lucky if you get half of your berry harvest.

It happens to be the favorites of many of the birds that are visiting your garden. I think that's a great thing, encouraging birds to live and go have it take with you in your garden. It's a really important aspect of gardening.

I don't mind that I'm sharing my harvest with the birds that is at my garden, but if you are looking for each single berry plant those shrubs a little bit closer to your house, so that you can really watch when those berries turn ripe.

Theresa: Good point, yeah. So that you can run out and grab them before the birds do.

Stefani: Exactly.

Theresa: Yeah, okay. Now, in the book you give a recipe for making a huckleberry shrub which if someone isn't used to what that means, you don't mean the shrub that is in the garden, it's a drink.

Stefani: It is.

Theresa: Could you tell everybody what a shrub is and how we could do that with the huckleberry?

Stefani: I can, so very similar you'll see that there's a theme that's happening here in this book, as we're encouraging people to grow these really beautiful productive plants, we're also trying to teach some skills that are really nice to have when you live with an edible garden.

We're teaching folks to preserve with honey and then a shrub is simply preserving fruit with vinegar. Back in the day, shrubs were actually extremely popular method of preserving a fruit harvest. It had a really big resurgence

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lately and so you will see shrubs at very fancy restaurants these days and they're actually one of my favorite ways to have a really refreshing summer cocktail, non-alcoholic.

Also they're very good for you, anything with vinegar you're adding lots of good qualities of fermentation into your gut. It's actually very good for you. It's a great way to preserve your harvest and it's a fun drink to serve to your guests.

Theresa: Yes, I love it in the summer too, and I've been doing shrubs for years and years because I've always been an herb gardener and herbs were my gateway to all the other edibles.

Stefani: I should say, you can do shrubs with herbs too, sorry.

Theresa: Yes.

Stefani: I was thinking about huckleberries and beans.

Theresa: Oh yeah. Yeah, you can preserve with vinegar on any of the edibles but it's mostly done with fruit and that's, what's really popular right now. Yes, it's so refreshing on a hot, hot summer day to have a shrub. People turn their nose up at first and say-, because you're putting vinegar in a drink it's vinegar and water where you could use carbonated water. It doesn't taste like you're drinking vinegar it just has a little tangy, fruity, it's even hard to describe. Why don't you tell everyone, how would we make one of these?

Stefani: Sure, it's a pretty simple and again in the book we give the recipe, but really you want to think about your ratios. If you've just harvested when the half cups of huckleberries let's say, you would then use an equal amount of vinegar. I use champagne vinegar with my shrubs only because I'd like that just that lighter thing as you described it. When it comes to the huckleberries so that I can really taste the huckleberry.

You can use apple cider vinegar, there's many different types of vinegars of course that you can use, but the ratio is one cup of the huckleberries to one cup of the champagne vinegar and then also one and a half cups of organic cane sugar. Again, you're doing an infusion, in a small saucepan you will just bring the sugar and the vinegar to a breathe boil and then you pour the hot vinegar mixture over the berries and you seal them in a jar, you can gently macerate or crash the berries to help release the flavor.

Then you're just going to let that sit for four to five days. I do find that when I make the other time a year that we harvest our huckleberries it tends to be a very hot time a year where I live. It's hard to find a cool dark place in my house in September. I have many occasion actually put my shrub at that point into the refrigerator and left it there longer. That's not a traditional way to make a

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shrub, and Theresa you may tell me that that's wrong.

Theresa: No, it's not.

Stefani: I do find it, it's really it's hard sometimes it's a common sense like if you don't have that cool place you need to create it, and I just let it sit a little bit longer. Then when you serve it I use carbonated water, I often will put a nice piece a bit of lemon verbena or scented geranium as a garnish. It is really is just such a refreshing drink on a hot full day.

Theresa: Yes, and no there's nothing wrong with what you're doing putting it in the refrigerator, that's totally fine. The longer it sits it just gets more of the fruit flavor so there's no like set time like, "Oh, my gosh if you let it go over a certain number of days it's ruined." It just gets stronger.

Stefani: It just gets stronger. It really is its tasting. After the first four or five days if you taste it and you feel like you don't have that essence of huckleberry that you want, you just let it sit longer and just get the juices flowing and you'll get to the point of taste that you like.

Theresa: Yeah, exactly. Then to make your shrub you just put a few table spoons of the vinegar in a glass and fill it up with your sparkling water and ta-da, it's done. It's really easy.

Stefani: It's really easy. Again, in the back of the book we have a project ingredient list, so over half the plants in this book you can make a shrub with but we only give quince cube just the one shrub recipe but the idea again is that you're learning how to make a shrub and then you do the huckleberry maybe next time you want to do a quince shrub, or an apricot shrub or a lemon verbena shrub. Again, you're just building upon that skill.

Theresa: Exactly, perfect. Since you mentioned quince, I have to ask you about that, because that was the third plant I really want you to talk about. I was a little bit familiar with quince because it's my mom's favorite fruit. She always made quince jelly as I grew up but most of my friends when I show them a quince they have no idea, they're like, is it a pear? Is it an apple? It looks so different but it is actually a really beautiful tree and it's a really fantastic fruit, so I'd love for you to talk a little bit about what is a quince and how could we grow that.

Stefani: Sure, I'm a bit also obsessed with quince. It's one of those trees that really has falling out of favor, and in gardens it is something that my grandmother had in her garden, and I would imagine that generation. It was something that was concluded, the quinces are relative of the apple and many people actually believe that it was the quince that you've offered to Adam and actually not an apple, but that is to be debated if you want to.

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It's a beautiful tree, the fruit is really knobby and just so beautifully imperfect, and so different looking and so highly fragrant. I cannot say enough about the fragrance of this fruit. When I do my harvest often, when they ripe you've got to pick them so sometimes my counter for a good week or two before I can get around to making something with them.

My entire kitchen will be filled with the most heavenly scent. I really like the pineapple, the variety of the pineapple quince. It also it's the variety of quince that is least likely to get blight. The pineapple variety is not blight resistant completely but it's very easy to manage, so I highly encourage folks to search it out.

There's also a fantastic website where you can buy berry fruit trees, all across the tree. It's called trees of antiquity and the gentleman who owns this organic heirloom orchard and salsa vermouth. Trees from it grow some of the most beautiful varieties of quince.

Theresa: Yeah, if you're looking for anything unusual that is a great place to go, I know I've ordered some trees from him before and they've been top quality and things that I couldn't find anywhere else. One of the things with quince that people don't usually know, one of the more unusual aspects of it is that you really have to cook it to eat it. It's not like an apple that you pick off the tree and then just bite into it because it's rather hard.

Stefani: And inedible.

Theresa: Yes.

Stefani: It's not just hard, it taste horrible if you don't cook it.

Theresa: Yes, so you have to cook it so I think that might be another reason probably why it had fallen out of favors, people don't realize that and they get one and try and bite into it. They're like, "This is terrible, why would anyone want with this." It has really high pectin and so it works fantastic in jellies and jam making and a lot of people, a lot of the old-fashioned recipes and a lot of people who grew up making jams and jellies know of quince because it would be use just like apples would because they're high in pectin as well.

I know in your book you have a recipe for quince paste, and it's a great thing to serve with cheese and crackers, it's almost like a Jell-O, because it's so firm it's got so much pectin that it's really, really firm. I would love to be able to include in the show notes for this episode where people could go and get that recipe, because it would be too hard to talk people through how to make it. I'd love to be able to include the recipe in the show notes so people could go there and get it.

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Stefani: That would be great and I will say, quince paste is in Spain they called an embryo is a traditional compliment to a cheese platter. When you follow my recipe or any quince paste recipe you're making a jelly that is very firm like you're saying. If you stop at that point and you actually just cool it off in a square Pyrex container, you can cut from it and cut squares or traditionally what folks will do is after they have made the jelly actually dry it out and then done, so that you get that really hard almost like gelatin-like texture.

I happen to really love paste, the paste is more of a jelly so that you have the structure but you're not eating quince Jell-O basically. I walked folks through that as far as the different textures and really experimenting with what kind of texture is best for your pallet.

You don't have to finish it off and make it completely hard. Again, it's one of those great things when you're growing at yourself, when you're making it yourself you can really experiment with.

Theresa: Yeah, and go by what texture you prefer, that's fantastic because by not drying it out it would definitely be more spreadable and that would be nice. You could spread it on the cracker better than you could, when it's really hard, it's more like you're having a slice of it on a cracker.

Stefani: Exactly, but it has so much pectin in it, even if you don't dry it out when it cools you can cut it into squares and still slice it. It's just that it will then become spreadable which I actually think is very nice.

Theresa: Yeah, but the flavor is incredible, so even though it doesn't have fantastic flavor if you were to try and bite into it off the tree, it does have a fantastic flavor when it's cooked and that's why people make jelly with it because it really is delicious.

Stefani: If I'm making homemade apple sauce I'll typically throw in one quince with the apples, and it just enhances the flavor of the apples and it's so beautiful. Of all the jams that I'm making, I make a lot of jam. The quince paste is the first thing to go in my house, everyone from the smallest kid to the oldest it is the first when they want to eat, and the flavor is just so unlike other things. It's almost like this garden honeyed sweet flavor. It is so beautiful and it's also something that's more unique. We really love it.

I should say also about the tree, one of the reasons why I love to include it in gardens is I think in my opinion it's one of the well-behaved fruit trees for a garden. They tend to stay naturally dwarf. It's really something that's easy to put by a garden path and know that it's not going to shade out other trees. It is an extremely well-behaved fruit tree.

Theresa: That makes a lot of sense to me because we did plant some quince trees in our

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heirloom orchard and I have to say I agree with you, because of all the trees I hardly have to prune it. It has really stayed really nice, has fantastic shape, where my apple trees even the heirloom apple trees, some years I have to do a harder prune than others, but the quince has been the shape is just beautiful it grows evenly and just minor pruning, cutting out any dead wood things like that but it's been doing really well.

Stefani: I will say the flowers on it are just, you want it near pathway because when the quince blooms in spring it is such a beautiful scent, just as the fruit is highly scented, the flowers are as well. You want to be able to interact with it so you don't want to put it in a very back of the garden.

You do want to watch when the fruit does form because the fruit is very heavy, if you have a fruit that's forming at the end of the branch that maybe has three of other fruits on it, when you're thinning out your fruit maybe that's the one that you're going to thin because the quince too become very heavy. They are big fruit.

Theresa: They are, yes. You don't want to break your branch as what you're leading up to.

Stefani: That's exactly where I'm going.

Theresa: Yeah. Stefani, I can't thank you enough for coming back on the show for a second time and talking all about your book. I really, really love it. I think it is exactly the type of book that my listeners would totally get into because so many of them are growing food, and you just take it to a whole another level. I really appreciate you come in here and taking the time to share all the information with us. Thank you.

Stefani: Oh, thank you, Theresa. It's been such a pleasure to be here and also I love your passion for preserving and so that really speaks to me as a gardener and encouraging folks to grow things that they can preserve is fantastic.

Theresa: I hope you enjoy that interview with Stefani Bittner of Homestead Design Collective. She really is a wealth of knowledge but she has also an incredible talent. If you get a chance to go to the show notes for this episode at [livinghomegrown.com/91](http://livinghomegrown.com/91), you will have links to her website to the gardens that she has designed, some of the beautiful photography, as well as links to her book.

Everything that we talked about and the link to the quince paste recipe. She was generous enough to let us add that in to the show notes, so I will have that in the show notes for you.

I hope you enjoy this and it gave you a little bit of inspiration to maybe plant some more unusable edibles in your own garden. Until next time. Just try to live



*Live farm fresh without the farm®*

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a little bit more local seasonal and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit [livinghomegrown.com](http://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.