
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 93 Backyard Foraging

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/93

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode number 93.

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

Theresa: Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that just means that we talk about preserving the harvest, small space food growing no matter how large or how small your space, 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 more about my online Canning Academy or any of the other things that I have cooking up, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com.

You know how we all have certain plants in our garden that we have planted there just because they're beautiful or they bring us joy. Now, you probably, when you think of those plants, focus more on their beautiful foliage or the beautiful flowers that they provide, but the thing is many of the plants in our gardens are also edible.

Now, I'm not talking about things like flowering herbs or the lovely vegetables that we may grow that are also very ornamental and beautiful. That's fantastic too, but I'm talking about things in our gardens that we may not even realize that we can actually eat safely, and that's what today's podcast is all about.

About a week and a half ago, I went up north to Seattle, Washington to the Northwest Flower and Garden Show. I go every year. It is absolutely one of my most favorite garden shows, and one of the things that's so great about that is that they always have incredible speakers, and I was really excited to hear one particular speaker, Ellen Zachos.

Now, she has several books out, but one that I particularly love is Backyard Foraging: 65 Familiar Plants You Didn't Know You Could Eat. I was really excited to hear Ellen speak, and she's a fantastic speaker. If you are ever in an area where you see her listed, go to her talks. She is so knowledgeable. She is a well-

known expert on foraging. Not just out in nature, but also foraging from your own backyard, and she's written many publications, and she leads forage walks and forage mixology workshops all over the country.

Aside from the backyard foraging book, she also has a book called "Orchid Growing for Wimps," "Growing Healthy Houseplants," and she has a new book coming out called "The Wildcrafted Cocktail." That book is coming out in May of 2017, so right when we were recording this was at the very beginning of March, and I'm going to have her come back when her wildcrafting book comes out and have her talk all about how we can create cocktails from some of our garden ingredients or from some of the ingredients we find when we're out walking around and we're foraging.

She is super talented, and what I love about her backyard foraging book is that it walks you through not only the proper etiquette of what to do when you're foraging, and proper identification, and safety, but it also covers exactly how to harvest and prepare the different plants that she lists in her book. The book covers everything from nuts, and seeds, and roots to leaves and flowers of many different edible plants that you may not even realize were okay to eat. She even has a few recipes in the books like wintergreen sorbet and rosehip soup.

Now, right after Ellen's talk, I marched right up and asked her if she would be interested in coming on the podcast because her information was just so stellar, and she was so lovely, and she agreed to come on right away. We did our interview today, and as we chat, she will mention a lot of different plants and recipes, and I will have links in the show notes of this podcast of everything that Ellen talks about, including information on her book and her website.

To get any of the information that's mentioned in today's episode, just go to livinghomegrown.com/93. With that, let's dive right into my interview with Ellen Zachos of backyardforager.com

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

Ellen: It's my pleasure totally, Theresa. I've been a fan for a long time, and I'm very happy to talk with you.

Theresa: Thank you so much. It was really fun to meet you at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show and to actually go to ... I went to two of your talks, and I was really impressed because there were ... A lot of the things you talked about, I knew, but there were so many that I didn't know when you were talking about edibles, and so I would just love to have you cover this topic, so thank you so much for coming on the show today. What I thought we'd start with is why don't you give everybody a little bit of your background and how you got into foraging in the first place?

Ellen: I fell into it by accident, and I really have never looked back. I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico recently, but for many, many years, my work was in New York City, and I designed, installed, and maintained rooftop gardens. One day, I was working in a garden. Actually, not a rooftop garden, a regular garden, and I had very little for lunch, so I had just put together a cheese sandwich, and one of the people that worked with me, a friend, was a forager, and she said, "That is so boring, Ellen," and she picked some garlic mustard leaves and stuck it inside my sandwich, and it was a transformation. It was spicy, and green, and tasty, and free, and that's all it took. I was hooked from there, so I started taking classes, reading everything I could get my hands on, and really flung myself into the subject.

Theresa: That is so cool. I know you have several books, and Backyard Foraging was the one that I actually had on my shelf. You've been on my radar for a long time, but I know you also have another book coming out. Before we dive into the foraging, I do want to mention that, so can you tell us a little bit about your Wildcrafted Cocktail book?

Ellen: Yes, I can. That one was ... I totally am in love with this book, and I can't wait to hold it in my hot little hands. It's coming out at the end of May called "The Wildcrafted Cocktail," and there are very few people who get to write booze off on their tax returns, and I am one of them. I have to tell you. It was the most fun to research this book, and I had the help of many eager volunteers. People would come over for dinner, and I would say, "Taste this. What do you think? What do you think?"

It was a lot of fun to work on, and what I'm most proud of is I'm not just using a forage ingredient here and a forage ingredient there, but each cocktail is really based on the forage ingredients and includes at least two, sometimes three along with a store-bought spirit like vodka, or gin, or bourbon. These are really things that everybody can do and have a lot of fun with. If you're interested in craft cocktails, it's a way to get unique flavors into those beverages.

Theresa: Yeah. It would be things that no one else would have, and I just have the little flyer that you gave me when we met at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show, and it says right on there that include syrups, bitters, infusions, and garnishes. I am super excited about that book. You will have to come back when that book comes out so we can talk about it.

Ellen: Absolutely. I would love to.

Theresa: Okay. So then, let's talk a little bit about your book Backyard Foraging. Can you explain how that all got started? I understand you had that epiphany moment and that set you down this path. What made you decide to write the book?

Ellen: One of the things I get asked most often is, "How do you know if something is

safe to eat?” because people worry. You read those stories in the newspaper about, “Family of five poisoned when the ...” Somebody goes out and misidentifies a plant.

Theresa: Right.

Ellen: If you start in your own backyard, hence the title “Backyard Foraging,” you take the identification portion out of the equation. You know what you’re growing in your own backyard. You know if you’ve sprayed it with anything dangerous. You know that it’s not being polluted by lead coming out of truck exhaust, so it’s a much safer place to start, and I’d like people to start exploring the idea of foraging in a safe way so that they get to understand all the wonderful things about it without the fear. If they fall in love with it the way I did, then they can start moving the boundaries outward, and going out into the woods, and going out into the fields in their neighborhood, and maybe a little further afield, and really starting to explore this as a hobby.

Theresa: I love that. It’s definitely a great first step and can make people feel a little bit more safe and comfortable with what they’re doing.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: We’re going to dive into some of the things that people have in their backyards that they may not even realize are okay to eat, so we will talk about that, but I also would love for you to tell everybody a little bit about your background because you know your stuff, and so I would like you to tell everybody how you researched the book, how you know what you’re talking about.

Ellen: I did not study this in college. I wish I had, but we come to the things that we’re passionate about through different roots. I was originally a Broadway actor, and I worked in a plants store instead of as a waiter in between gigs. Through my work in the plants store, I met a woman who sent me off to the New York Botanic Garden, and I started studying there. I did four certificates there and actually taught at the botanic garden for many years, and was the coordinator for their Gardening Department and Continuing Ed.

Most of my formal education in botany and in horticulture, ethnobotany and horticulture came from the New York Botanic Garden where I really learned a lot. That’s where I started really understanding how important it was to know as much as possible about different plant families, how they’re related. A plant family can have edible members and non-edible members, and you really have to dive into it and find out what you’re working with. There is no such thing as guessing when it comes to edible plants. Solid research is imperative.

Theresa: Exactly. Yes. I love that you have an acting background. You were so fun to listen to speak at the show that I went to, and I’m really excited about this. The other

thing that you and I had in common which I didn't realize until I got your book was that you also love to preserve, and so you have preserved so many of the things that you are foraging, and so anyone who's interested in your book. I know a lot of my listeners are into preserving. You do talk about preserving at the back of the book, and you do cover that a lot in all that you do, so that's definitely our common ground is that you'll make jams, and jellies, and everything else. Pickles or whatever.

Ellen: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Theresa: You love doing that. We could talk about that all day.

Ellen: I know.

Theresa: What I think we should talk about first which you and I had ... when we were outlining what we should talk about, we definitely should start with the safety issue, and you do cover that in your book. When you are starting to go into thinking about foraging or eating things that maybe you've never eaten before, there are some things to take into consideration, so why don't we start there?

Ellen: Yeah, there definitely are. One of the things that's most important, and I say this, and it always gets a laugh, but I'm dead serious. Never put anything in your mouth if you're not 100% sure of what it is.

Theresa: Right.

Ellen: It's just too important. You've got to be sure of your plant identification, and that's one reason why you start in your own backyard, but beyond that, there are other things you need to know. You need to be sure that you're harvesting from a clean area. If you are walking down the street in New York City and you see some really fresh-looking chickweed in a tree pit, don't just pop it in your mouth because you know what dogs do in tree pits. That needs to be washed. Okay?

Theresa: Yes, yes.

Ellen: You also don't want to pick from the verge of a busy road because there are heavy metals that can condense out of truck exhaust, and that's another thing that you don't really want to be eating. Leafy vegetables, leafy greens are especially notorious for holding on to those heavy metals, so you just ... That's not something you can wash away. You just do not harvest close to a busy road.

Now, if you're in the country and you're uphill from a road that is not too busy, that's different. I would say if you're uphill and maybe 10 or 15 feet away from the road, that's probably perfectly safe, but the exhaust, the heavy metals downhill close to a road, that's a no, no.

Couple other things you want to remember is you always need to have permission before you do this because different places have different rules. National parks and forests actually allow for some foraging as long as it's not commercial, so you can take up to a gallon per person per day of fruits, mushrooms, and nuts from a national park or a national forest, but state forests and state parks have different rules.

Of course, on private property, you always need to ask. I'm notorious for going up to people's doors, knocking on them, and saying, "I've got some great oyster mushrooms growing on that tree. Would it be all right if I pick them? Of course, I'll share them with you," and they usually look at me like I'm crazy and trying to poison them and just say, "No, take them and never come here again." You really need to be sure of what you're harvesting, know that you have permission, and be clear that it's being harvested from a safe area where there are no pollutants, not from a botanic garden where herbicides or some other thing might have been sprayed on your plant. You want to make sure these are clean, safe, plants to eat.

Theresa: Yes, so that brings in the whole organic issue. If you are harvesting from your own backyard, you know if something has been sprayed or not, but even a friend or a neighbor, you would want to check to see how that was cared for just to make sure, "Oh, yeah. They had just sprayed it for insects yesterday and you're harvesting." That's something to know.

Ellen: Yeah. That would be bad.

Theresa: That would be bad. Right. Also, with identification. Are there any websites that you recommend like if we're unsure how we would look up something?

Ellen: Mm-hmm. There are websites, but I am reluctant to say that you can rely on them for identification. You can use them for confirmation, but the internet is such a malleable thing. People can post anything without very much quality control sometimes, so I have seen a lot of plants misidentified on the internet, but there are some really good wild edible foods groups on Facebook, and they're very active.

I think that most of the best foragers in this country are on those Facebook pages, so you will get a lot of good advice there if you post a photograph asking for help, but people will also be impatient with you if you send in 25 photos and it's clear that you haven't done any of your own homework first. I would say buy a few books that are specific for your region. Take classes, take plant walks if you can, and look at the internet, but don't rely on the internet alone for identification purposes.

Theresa: Good advice. Excellent advice. Now, another thing that you do talk about in your

book when you're first trying something is that there could be an allergy issue, so why don't we mention that real quick?

Ellen: Yeah. Yeah. I'm glad you thought of that. Thank you. I am very fortunate and have no food allergies, whatsoever, but some people do. Any time you eat something new, whether it's from the supermarket or from foraging, you don't know if you're going to have a reaction. If you're trying a new food, try a small quantity first, so that if you have a reaction, it will be a manageable reaction. It also helps if you know what you're foraging for and what it's related to.

For example, if you're allergic to aspirin, you would want to go easy on the wintergreen. One of the active ingredients in wintergreen is salicylic acid which is one of the things that you find in aspirin, so those ... If you have an aspirin allergy, don't eat wintergreen. If you have a cashew allergy, don't eat sumac berries. They're both in the family anacardiaceae, and you've got to be aware that that relationship might not be a good thing for you. If you don't know of any food allergies that you have, just go ahead and start with a small quantity at first.

Theresa: Excellent advice. Okay. Great. All right. I'm excited to have you talk a little bit about some of the more common things that we might be very familiar with either in our gardens or in gardening in general that are actually edible, so what would you like to start talking about first?

Ellen: I want to start with hostas because most people just gasp when you say that they're edible. Plus, they may already be up where you live. Where I live is quite a bit colder, so they're not up yet, but they will be up soon, and I think it's a good thing for people to know about as spring approaches.

Theresa: Yes. I actually heard the audible gasp when you said hostas in your talk.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: That was really fun. Yeah. Let's talk about that.

Ellen: In Japan, hostas are actually often raised as a commercial food crop. They can be eaten green or grown protected from light, the way we sometimes grow asparagus so that they're white and blanched, but honestly, I forage for them and find them to be very delicious when they're green. You want to harvest them just when the stems have poked up from the ground, but before the leaves unfurled. That's when they're at their tender best. It's also a good idea to harvest them at this point because if you just go around the outside of the plant around the circumference and harvest from that outer edge, then when the leaves unfurl, they'll cover where you harvested from and your plant will look just as beautiful as ever, and yet you still got the benefit of the edible crop.

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- Theresa: We're just harvesting and eating the stem part that is coming up out of the ground?
- Ellen: Right. It's the stem and the leaf together, but it's before the leaf has unfurled, so it looks like just a spear coming out of the ground.
- Theresa: Got it.
- Ellen: I don't recommend eating them raw. It's perfectly all right, but the flavor really develops when you roast them, so you would just maybe toss them in a little olive oil with some salt and pepper. Put them on a cookie sheet and roast them in the oven the same way you would roast asparagus. I'm not saying they taste like asparagus, but you'd roast them that same way at 400 or 425 for 5 or 10 minutes, depending on how thick the spear was, and then you can eat that plain, or wrap it in a little prosciutto, or sprinkle some Parmesan cheese on the top of it. It's a very nice green vegetable.
- Theresa: That is so awesome. I have never done that, and I don't have any hostas right now, but I am going to check with my organic friend down the street when ... because I want try this.
- Ellen: You should. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.
- Theresa: Awesome. Okay. What's another one that we could look at foraging?
- Ellen: Another thing that's going to be coming up relatively soon is the daylily. While the daylily flower may not be opening for a few months, the daylily has like so many different edible parts to it. In the spring, when the shoots come up and they are four to six inches tall, you can harvest those greens by cutting them off just above the ground, and chopping that up, and using it in a stir fry, or an egg dish, or a quiche. It's not a spicy flavor. It's mostly just green and crunchy, but it gives you some really nice texture in a dish of mixed greens, and then you can follow it through the season. When the buds are on the plant, before they open, those can be picked and either pickled like you would a dilly bean. You could use your favorite dilly bean pickle recipe, and I bet you have one.
- Theresa: Oh, yes.
- Ellen: That too, or you could just cook them in a little olive oil with some garlic, and serve them up the same way you would green beans. My favorite part is something that I harvest either in the fall or in the spring before the top growth starts, and that's the tubers, which are really wonderful, and like a root vegetable, you just clean them off. Again, toss them in olive oil with salt and pepper, and roast them in the oven until you can easily pierce each tuber with a fork tine, and serve them up the same way you would fingerling potatoes.

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- Theresa: Yeah. Now, that was one that surprised me because I knew the flowers were edible, but I was totally unaware that the tuber was edible.
- Ellen: Yeah.
- Theresa: What does the tuber taste like? Does it have a root vegetable type flavor?
- Ellen: It really does taste a lot like a potato. In foraging, you find a lot of people comparing things to potatoes in flavor, but very few things have the texture of a potato. They're either drier or more solid, but the daylily tuber is the closest thing to a potato substitute that I've come across. Although, it certainly has its own charms. Since we have to often divide our clumps of daylilies to make them bloom better, you're actually doing your garden a service by digging up these clumps, dividing them, replanting them, and taking a few tubers into the kitchen with you.
- Theresa: Yeah, that is so awesome. Fantastic. Okay. That's a good one because that was a complete new one to me, and daylilies, just the flower is so beautiful. Many people just use it as an edible flower on a plate or serving something. I one time went to an event where they had like a chicken salad, and it was actually coming out of the flower. It was quite beautiful.
- Ellen: I was just going to say that's ... You can use it as a vessel. You take out the pistils and the stamens in the middle of the flower, and then like you said, you could fill it up with chicken salad or you could put cream cheese in it. I've even had ... One time, somebody put it in like a champagne flute and put ice cream in it, and that was also surprisingly beautiful and very tasty.
- Theresa: Oh, I love that one. That's very good.
- Ellen: Mm-hmm. Yeah.
- Theresa: Okay. Great. Okay, so what's another one?
- Ellen: Another one I love to talk about, and this was something that was really funny because for me, at that Northwest Flower and Garden Show where we met, there's so many dahlia tubers for sale, and I always want to like buy a whole bunch of them and taste them because that is a traditional edible food in much of Central and South America. Dahlias were grown as a food crop.

The flowers you may see here as a garnish, but the tubers are what really have the most flavor, and those can be eaten either raw, sliced really thin, and then chopped up in a salad, or cooked. My favorite way to use them is to peel, clean and peel the tubers, and then grate them, and use them in a quick bread recipe instead of say grated zucchini or anything else you might use to make a quick bread with.

- Theresa: Yes. When you said that, that was something I wrote down in my notes. I thought that was brilliant to try that. When you use it raw and you're just slicing it in a salad, I know it would look like a radish. Does it have any kind of a spicy flavor, or what does it taste like? I know it's hard to describe something if we've never tasted it before.
- Ellen: It is. It's hard to describe new flavors in terms of old flavors, but the truth is that dahlia flavors vary highly from tuber to tuber, so you're right. The texture is somewhat like that of a radish, and some of them do have a little bit of spiciness too the way a radish does. Others are just very mild, almost a little bit sweet, but they're always crunchy and very juicy, so you really have to just taste from plant to plant. You have graze in your garden to experiment with the different flavors. They're all safe to eat. They're all edible, but the flavor varies highly from plant to plant.
- Theresa: Ah, that's fantastic, so we could end up discovering that we have very, very different flavors with the different color dahlias that we may have in our own gardens?
- Ellen: Yes. Yes, you could.
- Theresa: Probably, a good point to note is that you wouldn't want to just buy dahlias from the nursery, and come home, and do something with them because you don't know if they were treated, or if they were organically grown, or anything else, but definitely from your own backyard, that would be a safe thing to do.
- Ellen: Yeah, that's right. I'm glad you pointed that out because somebody asked me after my talk. If they bought a plant from a nursery, how long would they have to wait before it would be safe to eat if they knew that that nursery used inorganic chemicals and sprays? I think a good general rule is ... and they were talking specifically about trees, and I told them you probably want to wait a couple years if they were harvesting something like the leaves or the tips of the tree because that insecticide or herbicide, whatever have been used, might stay in the woody tissue of the plant for a while.
- I think with herbaceous plant, if you're harvesting the top growth, probably the second year within your garden would be safe. With a dahlia tuber, because it's the root growth, I'm going to be real conservative and say go with three. That may be overly safety conscious, but let's say if you inherited a dahlia tuber and you didn't know if it had been grown organically, I'd wait three years before I use it as food.
- Theresa: Yeah. I think that's reasonable. It doesn't take long for things to multiply, and you would be getting brand new shoots, brand new tubers.

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- Ellen: Mm-hmm.
- Theresa: I think that time would go really fast.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Theresa: Yeah. I think that's very, very safe to do. One of the things you mentioned in your talk, which was another one that made me raise my eyebrows and I thought was so exciting was when you mentioned spruce, that we can eat spruce.
- Ellen: Yeah. I love spruce tips for both food and drink. Interestingly, when early colonists came to the United States and didn't have vitamin C in their diet, they were being affected by scurvy, which is such a miserable disease. A lot of native people on the continent gave them a spruce tip or a pine needle tea because many of our evergreens are very high in vitamin C and that. Not only that cured their scurvy, but it also has a very pleasant flavor to it because the vitamin C, the acids give this citrusy, lemony flavor to the food and the drink that those evergreen tips are used in.
- Spruce tips can be added to several different things to give it a really fresh, citrusy flavor. I love to chop them up in sugar, and then bake with them. If you have your favorite shortbread cookie recipe, it's a great addition because that freshness balances the heavy texture and buttery richness of the cookie. It's also really good chopped up in a food processor with salt, and then sprinkled on root vegetables, but I will confess that my favorite way to use it is infused in gin or vodka to make a really interesting ... It's a great cocktail mixer.
- Theresa: Oh, that's really cool. All right, so what we do is we are just harvesting the very tips of the spruce branch, so like the new growth, correct?
- Ellen: Yes. It's very easy. I don't know if they're out already where you are. I do know that I have harvested them in Northern California in April and as late as August in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, so it really depends on where you are, but wherever you are, it's very easy both visually and by touching them to see where the new growth is because the new growth will be soft and pliable. It will be a paler green, and that's where the flavor is most concentrated, so that's what you want to be, and you can just break them off with your hands.
- If you're doing it from your own tree, work your way around the tree. Don't just like take all the tips from one section because then your tree is going to grow in a little bit funny that year. You want to spread your harvest around the tree from top to bottom and all the way around the circumference so that the tree grows in evenly.
- Theresa: That's a good point. I hadn't even thought about that, but yes. You want to do it

evenly. That would be very important, and yes. I do think it's very easy to see because it's this lighter green. When you're stepping back, you can see from far away where the new growth is coming in.

Ellen: Yeah. Yeah, and you can also use Douglas fir. Pine, I don't find to be quite as flavorful, but spruce, and fir, and even hemlock are very tasty. I just want to be clear. This is not poison hemlock. Poison hemlock is an herbaceous plant with a finely cut pinnate leaf that grows near water. It is not the hemlock tree that is very, very separate. The only evergreen that is definitely one you should not harvest from is the yew taxus, which is poisonous, and it gets us back to that whole idea of really knowing your plants before you harvest them.

Theresa: Yeah, which is another reason why harvesting from your own backyard where you may have planted the plant yourself or you're very clear on the identification.

Ellen: Mm-hmm .

Theresa: It's a great place to start. Absolutely.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: Okay. What's another one that we might know of that would be an edible?

Ellen: You know how mothers are supposed to not have ... not supposed to have their favorite kids?

Theresa: Yes.

Ellen: Okay. I'm assuming you do because you're a mother.

Theresa: Yes.

Ellen: There's no such rule for foragers, so whenever anybody asks me, "What is your favorite forage plant?" I always, always come back to milkweed because milkweed is not only a beautiful plant, but it is plentiful. In my part of the country, it's considered a rampant weed, and it has three ... four. Let's go with four distinct, delicious parts to it, so milkweed for president. I love that one.

Theresa: Okay. What are the four parts that we can eat off of it?

Ellen: Okay. The first part is spring is the shoot, and you want to harvest those when the plant is only six to eight inches tall and before the leaves really open up. Now, any part of milkweed that you harvest is going to ooze a milky white sap when it's broken. Some people get an itchy reaction when they touch the sap. I do not, but if you have sensitive skin, you might want to harvest with latex

gloves on. Any time you eat a part of the milkweed, you're always going to give it a quick blanch first, and that's going to take away the white milky sap, so you don't have to worry about that when you're eating it.

Those young shoots, those spears, you're going to take home. Remove the leaves from the stem, and give it a blanch, and then treat that the way you would asparagus. The flavor is not like asparagus. It's more like that of a green bean, but you're going to either stir fry it, or roast it, or steam it, and then eat that long spear either as a spear or chop it up and use it in a dish.

Theresa: You have a YouTube video on doing that, so I'll link to the YouTube video.

Ellen: Yes, I do. I totally forgot about that. You're right.

Theresa: Yeah.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: Okay. Okay, so keep going. This sounds great.

Ellen: Okay, so the next part that you want to harvest are the unripe flower buds, which look like little broccoli florets at the top of the plant, and you're going to just pick these any time they're about the size of a quarter. Again, to prepare them for eating, as with the stems, you give them a quick blanch in boiling water, and it's going to be just 30 to 60 seconds, and you'll see they'll turn bright, bright green, and then scoop them out.

Rinse them out in cold water or have a bowl of ice water nearby, and you do that to stop the cooking, and then you can take those florets, and you can sauté them, and serve them the way you would broccoli, or they make a really tasty pickle, or you can just chop them up and add them to an egg dish or something else that you're making. I like to serve them pretty much just plain. Maybe with a little bit of soy sauce or tamari and some garlic.

Theresa: Awesome, and you would blanch them even if you were going to pickle them just so that you're getting rid of that milky substance?

Ellen: Yes. I always blanch. The only piece ... except for the one I'm about to talk about next.

Theresa: Okay.

Ellen: I usually blanch milkweed just to get rid of that sap.

Theresa: Okay.

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- Ellen: The next thing I like to do, and we're getting into the cocktail area now, is the ripe flowers of milkweed, which are a beautiful pink color, produce a nectar that has a very distinctive flavor to it. It is not just sweet. It actually has a flavor, and I like to make a simple syrup with those flowers, and then you can use that as a sorbet base. You can turn it into ice cream. You can combine it with seltzer for a non-alcoholic drink, or you can mix it with vodka or with gin for a cocktail, and it's got a beautiful pink color as well as a really lovely flavor.
- Theresa: Okay, and you don't have to blanch the flowers? You just use them straight?
- Ellen: Yes, and you want to try to harvest them early in the day. If you can harvest them while each one has a big fat drop of nectar on the flower, you'll get even more flavor.
- Theresa: Okay. Perfect, and then what's the fourth, the fourth part?
- Ellen: The fourth one might be the most delicious one of all, and these are the immature pods. We've all seen how the milkweed pods split open and fall, and they produce those feathery, white, floating seed things.
- Theresa: Mm-hmm.
- Ellen: Before they get to that stage, when they're about an inch and a half, maybe two inches long, they make a wonderful vegetable. It should still be soft, and you're going to want to open one up to make sure that it's completely white inside. If you see any of the brown seeds beginning to develop, those pods are too mature, but when they're completely white, you take them home.
- Again, blanch them just very briefly, and then what I do is I coat them the way some people might coat okra. I do flour, egg, and breadcrumbs, and then you can either pan fry them or plop them in a deep fryer. They make a really tasty vegetable. The inside, white, immature seeds get a little melty, and the green stays very fresh-tasting. Nobody knows what the heck you're serving them on the plate, but it's a really nice surprise, and it's got a lot of different flavors all in there together.
- Theresa: That's fantastic, and a lot of people are growing milkweed on purpose even though some people would consider it a weed, but it is also something that people are adding to their gardens because of the monarch butterfly, and I'll be sure to link to some information on that in the show notes, but milkweed, people will plant because they want to attract or help support monarchs.
- Ellen: Mm-hmm.
- Theresa: Then, they have no idea that they can do this.

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- Ellen: Right, and I've had a few people ask me, "But if you harvest the milkweed, is there going to be enough left for the monarchs?" The answer is yes, and I'm making a note to myself now to send you. There's a really good scientific study about this, and I'm going to send you the link so you can post that too. It's important to remember that the mature monarchs feed on the nectar of the flowers, so if you are concern about the monarchs, wait and harvest the pods, which are like the best part anyway after the monarch adults have already fed on the flowers.
- The young larva, the caterpillar stage tends to feed on the leaves, which is not a part that you're going to eat in the first place, so there is plenty of milkweed and plenty of different parts of the milkweed to go around for both humans and the various stages of the monarch.
- Theresa: Fantastic. That is great. There was also a berry that you mentioned in your talk, and I want to make sure that we include that too. It was the serviceberry, and that was not a berry that I was familiar with. It's probably in my area, but I'm not familiar with it, and I'd love for you to include some information about that. Can you tell us a little bit about the serviceberry?
- Ellen: Yeah. It has different names in different parts of the country. The botanical name is ... The genus is amelanchier. In the East, we have amelanchier canadensis. In the West, people tend to grow amelanchier alnifolia. In the West, specifically in the Northwest, it's sometimes known as Saskatoon. In the East, it's known as serviceberry or Juneberry because the fruit ripens in June. It is actually in the Pacific Northwest and in the western parts of Canada grown as a commercial crop, and the fruit looks a lot like a blueberry, a large blueberry, but because it's on a tree, people just walk right by it and assume it's not edible.
- It's really one of the most delicious fruits I know. I make wine from it, jams, jellies, syrups, just eat it straight off the tree, pies. You do have to compete with the birds for the fruit because they know how tasty it is, but it's a really wonderful native plant with a very tasty berry.
- Theresa: Fantastic. Okay. I'll be sure to include some information on that. I think you had a YouTube video on that too because I was looking at your YouTube this week, and I think you had something on the Juneberry or serviceberry. If so, I will include information and links to that too.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Theresa: Now, before we close, we should probably like recap the safety information because we are talking ... We're trying to encourage people to forage in their own backyard, so why don't we go over real quick the safety of doing any kind of foraging.

Ellen: Yeah, so starting in your own backyard is a great way to do it because first of all, you know what's growing there, so you don't have to worry about identification, but if you do venture off into the fields and the woodlands, be sure you're 100% certain of the plant's identity before you eat it. That is rule number one. After that, be sure it's growing in a clean area without pollutants from truck exhaust or from any chemicals that might be sprayed if it were next to or part of a golf course or a botanic garden.

You also want to be sure you have permission if you're harvesting on private property, and you brought up the topic of food allergies, which is a very good one. If you know you're allergic to something, make sure that what you're foraging for is not related to that allergen. If you're not sure, start out by eating a very small quantity of any new plant, so that if you have a reaction, it's a small manageable reaction.

Theresa: Excellent. Excellent advice. Ellen, thank you so, so much for coming on. I'm going to have information in the show notes all about your book, and your website, and where people can find out more information about you, and then when you're Wildcrafted Cocktail book comes out, you absolutely have got to come back so that we can talk about that.

Ellen: I would love to.

Theresa: Yeah.

Ellen: Yup. That will be a pleasure.

Theresa: Great. Thank you so much for coming on. This has been awesome information.

Ellen: Thank you, Theresa.

Theresa: Wasn't that a great interview? Ellen is just so knowledgeable and so free and giving of her information. I just really, really enjoyed her talks. I cannot stress enough that if you ever see her listed somewhere as a speaker, by all means, go to her talks. She has beautiful photographs of all the different plants that she shows how to forage them, the different parts that you would be using, and how to actually use them in different recipes. My mouth was watering the whole time I was talking to her. She's really, really good.

As I mentioned before, in the show notes for today's episode, I will have information of everything that Ellen talked about. We'll have all the links, including the links about monarch butterflies, everything, and links to her books and website in the show notes for today's show. To get that, just go to livinghomegrown.com/93, and I'll have everything right there for you.

Now, I also wanted to mention really quickly that I have something in the works



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that I'm going to be announcing in the next month or so. If you are at all a fan of the Living Homegrown Podcast, you will definitely want to be on my mailing list because I have some free workshops and master classes that are going to be coming out that are directly related to the subjects that I cover here on the podcast.

Go to my website, livinghomegrown.com, and just sign up to download a PDF or the canning resource guide, anything on the website where you need to enter your email, and you will be on my email list, and I will be sure to keep you notified because that's the best way for you to get the heads-up before I make any announcements to the public of any of the free content that I'm putting together right now. That's it for this week. 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.