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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 107 Wildcrafted Cocktails

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Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode number 107.

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. That can mean preserving, small space food growing, and just taking simple steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you want to learn more about any of these topics or my online courses or memberships, just visit my website [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

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Now, today's episode is all about wildcrafting cocktails. This is a real fun one. I think you're going to learn a lot. It was very interesting and kind of made me hungry talking about all the different food. I brought back on Ellen Zachos, who was on episode 93 a few months ago, where she talked about backyard foraging. Well, this time she has a new book out called *The Wildcrafted Cocktail: Make Your Own Foraged Syrups, Bitters, Infusions, and Garnishes*. It has some fantastic recipes, beautiful pictures, but it also was really interesting to read all the different ways that we can preserve all of these different foraged things to save for later and use them in cocktails.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about Ellen. She's not only written the book we're going to talk about today, Wildcrafting Cocktails, but she's also written Backyard Foraging: 65 Familiar Plants You Didn't Know You Could Eat, and Orchid Growing For Wimps. She also wrote Growing Healthy Houseplants, and I think that of all her books the one we're going to talk about today is my favorite. Ellen speaks all over the country, and if you ever get a chance to listen to her, she gives a fantastic talk. I've had the pleasure of listening to her speak at the Northwest Flower & Garden Show, and I would highly recommend getting to listen to her if you ever see her listed at a garden show near you.

She is extremely knowledgeable in all things foraging, and she's written many publications, and she leads forage walks and forage mixology workshops all over the country. I think you'll really love the interesting story that made her decide to write this particular book, The Wildcrafted Cocktail. It was something I didn't know until we were interviewing, and I thought it was really cool, so I won't spoil it. I'll let her tell that story. As always, I will have in the show notes for this episode everything that Ellen talks about, her website, and her books. To get that, you just go to [livinghomegrown.com/107](http://livinghomegrown.com/107). Without further ado, let's go ahead and dive into the interview with Ellen Zachos of The Wildcrafted Cocktail.

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

Ellen: I'm so happy to be here. I had a great time talking with you last time, and this is going to be another fun date.

Theresa: Yeah. You mentioned this book when you were on before, and I have just been waiting, and waiting, and waiting for it to come out. I was so thrilled when I got it. It really is beautiful, and the recipes just look so delicious. I can't wait to make something, so I'm very excited that you're going to talk about it today.

Ellen: Well, take my word for it, because I've tried each cocktail so many times, they really are delicious. Everybody laughs and they say, "Oh, that research must've really killed you," but the fact is, I had to drink a lot of cocktails to write this book. I really did.

Theresa: I bet. I hadn't really thought about that, but I bet you did. That is very funny. Okay. Well, good. It must've been really fun.

Ellen: It was. It was really fun, and a lot of work, but the good kind of work, you know?

Theresa: Yes. Yes, absolutely. Yeah. You're so passionate about what you do, and it's so awesome that you're getting to do something that you're passionate about, so it's fantastic. Well, I guess we should probably back up a little bit, because if anyone missed the episode that you were on before, that was episode 93, and we talked about backyard foraging. For anyone who maybe didn't remember or who missed that episode, could you just tell everyone a little bit about what it is

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that you do?

- Ellen: Well, mostly what I do is I write about wild edible plants and mushrooms and what you can do to make the most of your wild harvest. I started out with backyard foraging because I think a lot of people are afraid of the idea of harvesting wild edible plants and mushrooms because they're afraid they'll identify something incorrectly and they'll poison their entire family.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Ellen: Yeah, nobody wants to do that.
- Theresa: No.
- Ellen: My idea is if you start in your own backyard where you know what you're growing and you know that nothing terrible has been sprayed on the plants that are growing there, that you'll feel a sense of safety and confidence, and the more you do, the braver you'll get, and the more you'll want to explore, and soon you'll be venturing outside of your backyard and foraging even more.
- Theresa: Yes. That is such great advice, because it's a great place to start. Like you said, you know exactly that your garden is safe because you haven't been out there spraying anything. My listeners are all organic gardeners, so you know exactly what's in that plant, and you don't have to worry about someone coming along and putting something on there that you didn't know about.
- Ellen: Right.
- Theresa: That's a great start. Yes. Perfect. Well, I love the back of this book where you say, "Have a drink on the wild side." I thought that was so cute. I wanted to know what made you decide to write this, because I know you have a passion for foraging, but what made you decide to do a cocktail book?
- Ellen: Well, I'm an enthusiastic eater and drinker, and I have been making wild wines and meads for probably 15 years. About four years ago, three or four years ago, I got a call from the people at Rémy USA, and they own a lot of different brands of spirits, including Rémy Martin, which is probably the most familiar one. They had been looking for a forager who was interested in cocktails to do some work with one of their new brands called The Botanist Gin, which is made from 22 foraged botanicals on this remote island in Scotland.
- Theresa: I've seen that.
- Ellen: Yeah. It's the most delicious gin, and the funny thing is that before they ever called me I had been in Scotland for my 25th wedding anniversary, and I'd seen that gin behind the bar, and I thought, "Well, I'm a botanist. I've got to try that,"

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and I loved it. Then they called out of the blue because they had been looking for a forager who had an affinity for spirits, and they found me through my book. I worked with them to develop a program teaching how to make foraged cocktails to different mixologists all over the country, and they sent me all over the country to teach workshops for these bartenders and mixologists. That really got me started and I realized how much there was to play with in the world of spirits. I'd focused mostly on food before, and I still love foraged food, but I had so much to learn as far as cocktails were concerned and I really dove right into it and loved it. That's when the idea of this book came about.

Theresa: I want your job. That just sounds so fun.

Ellen: It was so much fun. They sent me to Scotland twice to visit the distillery.

Theresa: Oh.

Ellen: I know. I know. It was pretty much the best job I ever had.

Theresa: Yeah. I bet.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: That's so cool. Well, the book is so well done, and it's really fun just to read, like even if you're not ready to make a cocktail, you know 8:00 in the morning you can start reading it, because it's really interesting. You have a lot of interesting facts, and there's different techniques that you use in the book. What are some of the techniques that we can use with foraged ingredients, because I'm assuming most of the time people think that the only thing you can do are infusions, and I know you do that a lot in the book.

Ellen: I do a lot of infusions, and there's so many techniques, and especially when you're foraging, it's important to know these because the things that you forage for are only available for a few weeks out of the year. If you're making cocktails with things that you can buy in the grocery store, you can pretty much get them anytime, but if you are making a cocktail with sumac fruit, well if you don't know how to infuse that sumac fruit or dry that sumac fruit, you're only going to be able to use it for a couple of weeks. I talk a lot in the book about making infusions, about making syrups from wild gathered fruits, and leaves, and plants, about making pickles from wild plants, and these are all ways that allow you to preserve those flavors to use them throughout the entire year.

Theresa: That's why I thought this book was so great for my audience, since so many of them are into canning and preserving. This is a form of preservation. We're preserving some really unusual flavors that you can use in the cocktails. Of all the different things that you do in there, what's your favorite thing that you've preserved for later for a cocktail?

- Ellen: Oh god, I have to choose a favorite?
- Theresa: Yeah, it's like choosing your favorite kid, right?
- Ellen: Yeah.
- Theresa: It's hard.
- Ellen: Yeah. Yeah. It is. Now, I would never ask you do that, Theresa. I think my favorite thing to do is to make a syrup, because those are a really great way of preserving the fresh flavor of something and often a cocktail is usually a balance between a spirit, something sweet, and something sour, so almost every cocktail, not every, but many cocktails have a sweet element to them. While you might in a traditional cocktail find yourself using just plain old simple syrup, if you're making a foraged cocktail, you can make that simple syrup infused with the flavor of whatever it is you've foraged, and that gives you so many opportunities to use that flavor, not only year-round, but in different strengths and balances. If you were to look in my pantry, you would see juniper berry syrup, crabapple syrup, prickly pear syrup, pineapple weed syrup, milkweed flower syrup. All of these things, the milkweed flowers are not going to be available next month, but I caught them. I caught them at their prime and I've got that flavor preserved, and I can use it in December if I want to.
- Theresa: That's fantastic. About how long do these things last in the pantry?
- Ellen: I find the syrups last for I'd say 12 to 18 months. I almost always use them up within a year, but I think their shelf life is pretty close to the shelf life for a homemade jelly.
- Theresa: Okay, perfect. Yeah, because really what happens, it's not that they go bad and you poison yourself, it's that the flavors start to kind of dissipate, and the color change-
- Ellen: Changes color, exactly.
- Theresa: Yeah, yeah.
- Ellen: Yeah.
- Theresa: Okay, perfect. That's fantastic. Now, what are the basic parts of a cocktail? Because you were talking about the sweet and the sour, and you have a whole section in the book about the parts or components of a good cocktail.
- Ellen: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, there's so many different categories of cocktails, and some of them have crazy names like flips, and fixes, rickeys, and you know,

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but basically a cocktail ... Well, when it was first created back in 1806, it was a spirit and something tart, something sweet, and some bitters. Today, I think the most important thing to remember is your base spirit, and then a personal balance between sweet and sour, because everybody's tastes are going to be different. I like my cocktails a little more spirit-forward, that is, with a little bit more of the base spirit than my husband does, but I also like mine a little bit sweeter than he does, so my perfect cocktail might be slightly different from his, or slightly different from yours, but I think all three of those elements are necessary, and then you choose your personal balance as you work with the individual drink.

Theresa: That's really nice, because then you're making it for yourself. That's the advantage here. You can customize it until you get just exactly what you like.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: In fact, that would be fun if you had a party and you kind of taught everyone how to make their drinks, and then everyone could kind of make it themselves the way they like it.

Ellen: Oh, I should totally do that, because now, friends come over, and of course they all want me to make them a drink, and I like to, because it's fun, but I usually just say, I make my own, and I say, "Taste this. Do you want it sweeter, or a little less strong?" But I think next time I'm going to say, "Okay, this is how we do it, and now you can make your own according to your own preferences." I love that idea.

Theresa: Right. Yeah.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: Then after the second or third one, they can make it different.

Ellen: Yeah, and they will.

Theresa: Yeah. They'll forget the formula.

Ellen: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Theresa: Yeah, that's good. Well, all right. We've talked before when you were on episode 93 about some of the precautions that we need to take when we're foraging outside of our backyard. Before we dive into some of the exact plants, I did want to mention that, because you and I discussed about identification and things like that. What are some of the precautions if people are going outside their backyard and they see something that they would like to use in a cocktail?

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- Ellen: Okay. Well, there's a couple of basics that are absolutely crucial to remember, and the first one is never eat or drink anything if you're not 100% sure what it is. I actually do get people who sometimes send me photos and they say, "What is this red berry? It was delicious," and I just want to give them a quick smack and say, "Are you crazy? You really shouldn't be eating something if you don't know what it is," because it's very hard sometimes for somebody who's not experienced to tell the difference between a tasty red berry and a toxic red berry.
- Theresa: Yes.
- Ellen: You have to be sure, and if you're not sure, just pass it up. I have passed up superbly delicious mushrooms because I wasn't 100% sure. Did I regret it? Yes, but it's still better that I missed it than that I took it home and ate it and made a mistake.
- Theresa: Right.
- Ellen: That's the first rule.
- Theresa: Okay.
- Ellen: After that, you want to make sure that the place you're harvesting from is safe, and that means not close to a busy highway where heavy metals from the exhaust could settle out into the soil and be absorbed by plants, or not near a golf course or a botanic garden where something might be sprayed on the plants and you don't know what it is, not from a tree pit where dogs may be doing their business. You want to make sure that where you harvest from is clean.
- Theresa: Okay.
- Ellen: Finally, if it's not from your own yard or garden, you want to make sure either that you have permission from the owner. I will go up to people's houses and ask them if it's okay if I can pick this mushroom that's killing their tree, and they look at me like I'm crazy, but they always say yes, or if you're harvesting in a park or national forest, you know the rules. A lot of national parks and state parks do allow you to harvest a certain amount as long as it's not for commercial purposes, but you need to know what those rules are so that if you meet a ranger, and the rangers often do not know the rules, you can say to them, "I'm allowed to take one gallon of nuts, or fruits, or mushrooms per day as long as it's not for commercial use."
- Theresa: Right.
- Ellen: I think that's how you prepare yourself before you go out the first time.

Theresa: Okay. Perfect. Yes. I remembered you talking about the anything that's along the side of the road, and that was such a good point, so I'm glad you mentioned it again, because that's something people don't think about. They're like, "Oh, it's fine," but it's right along a really busy highway.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: Yeah.

Ellen: And some things you can't wash off. Dirt you can wash off, but if it's a toxin that's been absorbed by the plant roots and is now systemic to the plant itself, that's not something you can wash away, so that's why I mention that.

Theresa: Yeah. That's good. Okay. Now, in the book you have a chapter called Garnishing With a Weed, which is so cute.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: What are some examples of some things that we can use as garnishes, because it's not just making the cocktail. We can also pretty up our drinks with some different things.

Ellen: Yes. It's interesting, I just yesterday made a new patch of pickled daylily buds, which I use in a dirty martini called the Dirty Lily Bud. Depending on where you are in the country, you can pick daylily buds right now, and you want to harvest them when they're at least an inch and a half long up until just before they open, so it should still be tightly closed. I'm sure you have your favorite pickling brines. I sometimes use a dilly bean brine recipe, or a hot and spicy recipe. You can use any brine on these daylily buds and they are such a pretty pickle. They're flushed with orange, orange and green, and that's a gorgeous garnish straight out of the garden.

Theresa: Ah, that's really good, and they last for quite a while in there, and then you can just use them whenever you need them.

Ellen: Yeah. Exactly. You can keep those in the refrigerator if you're doing a refrigerator pickle, or for a couple of weeks, and if you can your pickles, which I do because I want to keep them for longer, you can keep them for a year.

Theresa: Fantastic. Okay. If we're decided that we definitely ... By the way, I love the names. I have to say that. Your names in the book are so cute, so I ...

Ellen: You know, it's so much harder to come up with a drink name than it is with the drink. I have so many cocktails bumping around in my head and I just don't know what to call them, so thank you. I appreciate that, because coming up

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with the titles is really hard.

Theresa: Well, they were very clever and cute, so I loved it.

Ellen: Thank you.

Theresa: If we're decided that we want to make a cocktail, what is probably one of the first things that we should start with? Should we start with a syrup? Should we start with a certain infusion? Where would we start?

Ellen: I think you should start with your favorite spirit, your favorite base spirit, because when you decide what your base spirit is going to be, that will inform the other choices that you have to make. Like what's your favorite? If you were going to just walk into a bar anyplace, what would you be drawn to as far as a cocktail was concerned?

Theresa: I really like vodka, and I really like martinis.

Ellen: Okay, so that's where you'd start. You and my husband are on the same page. I'm not a huge vodka drinker, although I have recently infused some vodka with linden flowers, and it is just delicious. Right now, I'm working on figuring out what kind of cocktail I'll make with that. I think vodka's a great one to start with because it has so little flavor of its own that it really allows the foraged ingredients to shine.

Theresa: That's what I was thinking when you were asking. I was thinking that would probably be a good one to use, because it has the clear color, so if whatever you're using has some color to it, it might take that on, but then also it would really absorb the flavor just like it would with lemon if you're trying to make a limoncello, which I know you have a recipe for. We're going to be talking about a cocktail that has lavender, so lavender would be good in that.

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: I'm sure there's a lot of things that would go well with vodka.

Ellen: There are, and especially if what you're using has a delicate flavor, I think vodka is the way to start, because it doesn't overpower anything. I also like to infuse things in bourbon, and in gin, and in whiskey, but in those cases you have to choose a foraged flavor that you think is going to be compatible with the flavor of the base spirit, until you start doing a lot of drinking. You have to do so much drinking to really become familiar with those flavors. Vodka is a great place to start.

Theresa: Okay. Okay. Good. If you had something that you know is very strong, then going with one of the stronger spirits would be a better choice?

- Ellen: I think it's a good choice. If you can picture, you know how there's that expression, "I can see it in my mind's eye"?
- Theresa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Ellen: When I'm cooking or creating a cocktail, I often think of tasting it on my mind's palette. When you cook a lot, and I'm sure this is the case for you when you're doing a jam or a jelly, you probably just get an idea for something and you say, "Wow, I bet those flavors would go really well together."
- Theresa: Yes.
- Ellen: You don't always need a recipe. You can just tell when you think about this flavor and that flavor, oh yeah, they're going to be compatible. I just know it.
- Theresa: Yes.
- Ellen: I had some feral pears last year, and I juiced them and I combined them with some lavender syrup not because I had read about it anywhere, but just because I had a feeling it was going to be delicious, and it was. It was delicious. The more experienced you get, the better able you are to put together some of these flavors. Sometimes it doesn't work out. I loved the linden flavor in vodka so much and I thought, "Oh, there's a lot of vanilla in there. I bet that would be good with whiskey," so then I infused some in a nice single malt whiskey, and it's still sitting on my counter and I think the whiskey flavor may just be a little bit too strong and the linden is not really shining the way I thought it would, so now I've learned and I'll go back to ... You know, I've done it in gin. It's very good. I think vodka is probably my favorite, because the linden flavor is so delicate.
- Theresa: Okay. That's actually a good point. If you were going to try something that maybe wasn't in the book that you wanted to experiment with, doing small batches would be the way to go.
- Ellen: Oh, yes. I'm so glad you mentioned that, because the first time I do an infusion I try to do no more than six to eight ounces, because if it's a horrible failure you don't want to have wasted all your booze.
- Theresa: Yeah, that's expensive.
- Ellen: Or all of your foraged ... Yeah. Yeah.
- Theresa: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Perfect. All right. I love that. All right, so you have a recipe in the book that I thought would be really fun to walk everybody through, and it's called the Santa Fe Sundowner, which is another darling name. I love the name,

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but I was really drawn to this one because of the lavender, and I thought that would be such a wonderful flavor in a cocktail.

- Ellen: Yeah. I don't think enough people consider lavender to be a culinary herb, but it really is. I mean, it's been used in French cooking as part of the fines herbes mix for so long, and we kind of forget about it, but it's got a wonderful flavor, and it's very nicely compatible with gin. The thing that you have to remember is it's also a very strong flavor, so you don't want to let it infuse for too long. You just need like a tablespoon of dried lavender or two tablespoons of fresh buds for a whole bottle of gin, and it's only going to need to infuse for between four and eight hours. More than that and it will just start to taste soapy.
- Theresa: That's really fast. Wow. Okay.
- Ellen: It is.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Ellen: It's the fastest of the infusions that I do, and I think it's really important to know. That's why it's also a good one to start with, because you can enjoy the drink very quickly after infusing the gin.
- Theresa: Now, it's probably partly due because the alcohol really pulls the flavor out, maybe opens up the cells quite a bit.
- Ellen: Yeah.
- Theresa: Yeah, and it is true, if you go too far with lavender, like I use lavender in a custard, and I have lavender cookies and scones and things like that that I make, and if you add too much, it definitely starts to taste like soap, so that's a good point.
- Ellen: Yeah. I want your lavender custard recipe. I've been doing a lot of custards and panna cottas this summer, and I didn't even think about using lavender, but that's a great idea.
- Theresa: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'll send it to you.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Theresa: Yeah. Okay, so we take the gin, and we're just going to steep for a very short amount of time. Walk us through how we do it.
- Ellen: Okay. Get a regular size bottle of gin. It's going to be 750 milliliters, so that's like three cups, so I would get a quart jar with a good ... you know, a mason jar. Pour the gin into the jar, and add either a tablespoon of dried lavender buds or two

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tablespoons of fresh. Put it in, seal the jar, give it a good shake, and let it sit. After about four hours, take a sip. If the lavender flavor is good as far as you're concerned, strain off the lavender and throw away the buds, and that's going to be your base spirit. If you think it needs to sit a little bit longer, go ahead and taste it every hour until you're pleased with the flavor of the gin. Once you've done that, you don't have to use all the gin up at once. You can put that gin right back into the bottle that it came from. Use a funnel and get it right back in there, and you can just leave that in your liquor cabinet.

Theresa: Okay.

Ellen: The next step to making the cocktail is to do the juniper berry syrup, and this is another ... I called this the Santa Fe Sundowner because I've moved to Santa Fe and these are two things that grow quite abundantly out there, but they also grow all over the country, so these are things that people can find almost everywhere. To make the juniper berry syrup, you're going to take either three tablespoons of fresh berries that you've just picked off of a tree or a tablespoon and a half of dried, and the truth is, if you don't have juniper near you, you can buy these in a good spice market if you want to.

Then just kind of break them up either in a mortar and pestle or give them a few pulses in a spice grinder. You're not trying to make a powder. You just want to crack them open so that you can expose the surface area to the simple syrup, because the next thing you're going to do is put those berries in a sauce pan with a cup of water and a cup of sugar and you're going to bring it all to a boil, then reduce the heat and let it simmer for 20 minutes. Then I would take it off and to really get every ... Take it off the heat and to really get every bit of flavor, I'd cover it and let it sit overnight and then strain it off the next day. That's the other part of the cocktail, is that juniper berry syrup.

Theresa: It sounds so good the two combo. This is one of those things, I can picture this. This sounds really delicious.

Ellen: They're also both really aromatic, so as you lift the glass to your mouth and you breathe in, you get the scent of the lavender and the scent of the juniper berries. Oh, and one other thing you should do in advance, and you don't have to do this, but it makes it so pretty is to make a tray of ice cubes with a lavender flower in each ice cube. It's really beautiful that way, served that way, and then as the ice dissolves, the flower floats in the cocktail.

Theresa: Ah, fantastic. You do talk in your book about making really crystal clear ice cubes, so tell everybody the trick for that.

Ellen: You boil that water first.

Theresa: Fantastic.

Ellen: You boil the water first, and then pour it into the ice cube tray and put a flower in each one. If you're not going to use the ice right away, you're going to want to cover the ice as well so it doesn't take on any smells from the freezer or the refrigerator. Back to making the cocktail, so when you want ... You've got your lavender gin infused. You've made your juniper simple syrup, and now you're going to have to go out and buy yourself a cocktail shaker, because everybody needs to have a cocktail shaker.

Theresa: Yes.

Ellen: It's an essential piece of equipment for the kitchen. You're going to fill that shaker with ice. You're going to put two ounces of the infused gin in there with a half an ounce of the juniper syrup, and you're going to shake it for about 30 seconds. Then strain it into a glass. Put in one lavender ice cube, and I would start off by adding two ounces of seltzer. Then if you like it less strong, you could add a little bit more seltzer. If you want it stronger, you could add a little bit more of the ... This is where we talk about the balance of the gin and the syrup, but I think for most people two ounces of gin, a half ounce of the syrup, and two ounces of seltzer is going to be a nicely-balanced cocktail.

Theresa: Ah, this sounds so good, and it would be so beautiful.

Ellen: It is.

Theresa: Does the lavender color come off at all into the drink, or no?

Ellen: It really doesn't. It's funny, the lavender, you see the lavender in the ice cube as being a purple flower, but in the gin it really just barely gives it sort of a tawny gold, tan-ish color. It doesn't give it any purple at all.

Theresa: Okay. Ah, so good. I really love it.

Ellen: Yeah. I hope you make one.

Theresa: I'm going to. I'm totally going to. I'll take a picture and send it to you.

Ellen: Do.

Theresa: With all the things that you did in this book, was there any flavor that kind of surprised you in a cocktail, anything that you went, "Whoa, I didn't realize this would be so good?"

Ellen: Well, there was one thing that surprised me, but it wasn't the flavor. I'll try and think about the flavor. Oh yeah, that's another one too. Oh god, see you ask me this question and I think of all these different answers. There's a weed that

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grows maybe not in your part of the country, but all along the East Coast and in the Pacific Northwest, there's a plant called Japanese knotweed, and it's highly invasive. It's a very aggressive weed. Some people think it's a bamboo, but it's not. It's a green plant, but when you juice it, the juice is a very pretty pink, and that surprised the heck out of me, to have this ...

Theresa: Wow.

Ellen: ... It's a nice, tart juice, and it's got this beautiful pink color, so that was a visual surprise. I think the biggest flavor surprise for me may have been making nocino from unripe black walnuts, because I like black walnuts very much, and they have a very specific flavor. If you've ever eaten black walnuts, they're much sort of winey or darker flavor than regular walnuts, and I expected the nocino, which is a liquor made from them, to be like that, but it really isn't. It's awfully hard to describe, but it's tart, and spicy, and delicious on its own or as a cocktail ingredient, and it's a very classic Italian liquor.

Theresa: So you've actually made it? Do you have that recipe in the book?

Ellen: I do have that recipe in the book.

Theresa: Oh, good.

Ellen: I have the recipe for the nocino itself, and I also have a couple of different cocktails that use nocino as an ingredient. Although I'll say it's also just really good a little bit of it poured over some vanilla ice cream, so you don't have to make the cocktail with it. It's a spicy, dark, strongly alcoholic liquor.

Theresa: Now, when you made the liquor, because it has that ... It's like that coating on it where your fingers will turn dark from ...

Ellen: Yeah.

Theresa: ... Is there a special process so you don't end up with black fingers?

Ellen: Yes. You wear gloves, that's what you do, because even though when you are harvesting black walnuts for the nuts or if you want to make a dye with the hulls, which is what gives you that color, those are from mature nuts, which can be almost the size of a tennis ball. When you're making the nocino, you're harvesting the immature nuts, which are smaller than the size, or ... They're smaller than the size of a ping pong ball. They're much smaller, and the shell, which is right underneath the hull, has not formed yet, and that's how you know that these nuts are sort of eligible to be made into nocino. You need to be able to cut them in half with a knife without meeting any resistance. If the shell has already formed inside, it's too late.

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- Theresa: Ah, okay. Well, that makes sense. Fantastic.
- Ellen: But they will still stain your hands, so I wear a pair of those latex gloves. Yeah.
- Theresa: Okay. Yeah. If you didn't know that, it might be a big ... That would be the surprise.
- Ellen: It would be, and the stain lasts for like a week to 10 days. It doesn't wash, and ask me how I know this, but you know.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Ellen: Yeah.
- Theresa: Well, the way I knew was because my mother was a spinner and a weaver, and so she would use it as a dye. It's used in dying fabric and things like that.
- Ellen: Yeah. Yeah.
- Theresa: Ah, fantastic. Well, Ellen, I can't thank you enough for coming on the show and talking about this. It was really fascinating all the different things that you have in the book and all the ... I mean, everything from stuff that we think is totally just a weed that is actually edible, I think that's what will surprise people the most, but you also have fantastic recipes and really cute, clever names. I really love that, so I really appreciate you coming on and sharing all this information today.
- Ellen: Well, I wish that we were in the same place, Theresa, so that we could put down the microphone and you could come into my kitchen and I could make you a cocktail. I know it's a little early in California. It's not the cocktail hour, but I really would love to make you a drink sometime. I hope we can do that.
- Theresa: Oh, I do too, and I'm sure we will, because we always end up at the same event, so we'll have to do that for sure.
- Ellen: Yeah.
- Theresa: Thank you so much, Ellen.
- Ellen: Thank you.
- Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Ellen Zachos of The Wildcrafted Cocktail. As always, I will have in the show notes for this episode links to Ellen's website, her books, and everything else that is mentioned in the show. All you do is go to [livinghomegrown.com/107](http://livinghomegrown.com/107) and I'll have everything right there for you. Thank you so much to all of our sponsors. If you're interested in becoming



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