
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 110 Backyard Bouquets From Edibles

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/110

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown podcast, episode 110.

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 Lowe.

Theresa: Hey there everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host Theresa Lowe, 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, small steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle.

This week's episode is brought to you by The Living Homegrown Institute, my monthly membership site where you learn from me and many other top experts in the areas of organic gardening, and artisan food crafts. The membership helps you live closer to your food even if you have no garden space at all. As a member you get access to new classes and video trainings each month in everything from growing your own organic produce, to food crafting like making homemade cheese and fermenting your own vegetables and so much more.

We only open enrollment to the institute a couple times a year, but if you'd like to get on the wait list to be notified when we open enrollment again, then just go to LivingHomegrown.com/courses for more information.

Okay. Today's episode is all about how to arrange your backyard flowers like a pro. Now I'm talking about walking into your backyard and picking a bouquet of fresh cut flowers, or herbs, or even flowering vegetables that have gotten away from you and creating a beautiful floral bouquet that you can take into your home. Now, why would you even want to do this? Why do I recommend that you bring flowers in? Well obviously they're beautiful and it's a way of bringing in nature from outside inside so that you can enjoy your garden all day long, not just when you're looking out your window or when you happen to be able to go out there. Also cut flowers from the store can be a little bit expensive, and most of the cut flowers that you find at the grocery store or at your local florist are usually imported.

In fact, about 80% of the flowers sold here in America are imported, and that has a big impact on us as consumers because not only does it have a large carbon footprint to get here, but because those flowers are not considered food products, you'd be pretty surprised at what they spray and use on those imports in order to get them here. When they cross the border, those imported flowers, what matters to get them over the border is not that they are organic. In fact, that's not even on the radar. What is important when they are imported is that they not have bugs or insects.

They are sprayed quite heavily, and then we go and pick them up and we're handling them, we're sticking our noses in them, it actually can be quite shocking. Now, if you don't know about this or this problem with the flower industry, I can highly recommend two sources for you if you want to learn more about that. One is to read the book *The Flower Confidential* by Amy Stewart where she really talks about the entire floral industry and how it has been industrialized, but also exactly how it all works. It's really a fascinating read.

If you're really interested in getting back to locally sourced flowers, which is what I highly recommend if you don't want to grow them yourself, then you want to check out *The Slow Flower* movement, which is spreading across the country and is spearheaded by Debra Prinzing. I will have sources in the show notes for all of that information. Also, I will have in the show notes a PDF download that you can get that contains all of the tips that I'm giving today plus a few extras.

To get that, you just go to LivingHomegrown.com/110. I highly recommend that if you're going to buy flowers that you get them locally sourced because you're doing a lot of different things when you buy something local. You first of all can buy organic. You can get a lot of organic flowers at your local farmers market, and you are supporting the farmers who are doing it right and are not spraying with chemicals and you can feel a lot safer sticking your nose in those flowers. Also, when you either buy locally or you pick from your own backyard, you get a lot higher quality flower that is going to last a lot longer in the vase. It hasn't been shipped from across the country, it hasn't been shipped from outside the country, and you will have the option of picking some really unusual flowers that you just don't see anywhere else in the marketplace.

Now, the reason I wanted to talk today about picking from your own backyard is because there are so many things out there, even as a food grower that you can put together in a beautiful bouquet. It doesn't have to be massive, big, giant bouquet. You can make something really small and have it on your desk, or on your kitchen table and enjoy it. Your whole family can enjoy it for maybe a week to 10 days at a minimum.

That's why I decided to put together this episode. To talk a little bit about how there are things in our backyard that we can cut and bring indoors, and usually

around this time of year, a lot of the garden might be getting away from you, things are starting to bolt and go to flower. Things like your radishes, or maybe your celery, or your carrots are all starting to go to flower if you haven't harvested them. Don't panic because now you can cut those flowers and use them in flower arrangements, and I'm telling you, they can make some of the most gorgeous arrangements.

You can still enjoy that produce that maybe is beyond its prime for eating, there's other things you can do with it and still enjoy it. Let's talk a little bit about cutting flowers from your backyard. I want to go through first of all just a few tips that can help you when you do this. If you're going to be cutting flowers from your own garden, I highly recommend that you go out with some clippers and a bucket of cool water and you pick in the morning. The reason for this is that in the morning, the plants are not stressed from the heat of the day, they'll have more water content in their stems, and you are less likely to get wilting. First thing in the morning you go out with your little bucket, or jar, or vase and a pair of clippers and you go around and pick things that you find beautiful.

There are no rules, yes there are rules if you want to be a professional florist, but there are no rules for what appeals to you. I want you to pick things that you find beautiful, and you can create arrangements that way. I don't want you to feel intimidated by doing this, they all turn out gorgeous no matter what you do. I'll just give you some tips to try and hedge your bet so that you can have a really nice arrangement.

Okay, so once you have picked that plant material, you're gonna immediately plunge it into the water and let it sit if you can for an hour or two before you actually make the arrangement. If what you picked has woody stems, like let's say you picked some rosemary, you can either take your clippers and clip up into the stem to kind of open that woody stem a little bit, give it a little bit more surface area for absorbing the water, or you could even take a hammer and hammer the ends and split it a little bit. It gives the plant more places to absorb water.

As you make these cuts of the different things that you're gonna be harvesting, try to always make your cut at about a 45 degree angle or more so that there's more surface area for the plant to take up water. Now let's say you harvest something, you plunge it in the water and you set it aside and you come back ready to make your arrangement and whatever you harvested is wilting. That does happen with several different plants. Different things just go a little bit into shock. There's a couple of things that you can do if that happens to you.

One of the first things I would try is just to take whatever it is that's wilting and just lay it flat in a pan or a sink filled with water so that it can try to absorb water, cool down the leaves, and the stem, and the flower of the plant. Another thing that works really well that I actually learned from Erin Benzakein of Floret

Flower Farm is that if you take a pan and you boil water, and you take whatever is wilting and you stick the stems into the boiling water for just a minute or two and then pull it out and put it back into the cool water, it really revives the plant. It's very counterintuitive, but it actually does work. If you want, you can give that a try to.

A couple tips for when you're making your arrangements. First of all, I do recommend that you add something to the water that the vase is gonna be holding in order to give your plant material a fighting chance. I'm talking about a floral preservative, and yes, you can buy floral preservatives in the store, but you can also make your own. I'm gonna talk about that in a minute, but I do recommend you add something to the water 'cause it does extend the vase life of whatever it is you cut. Also when you are making your arrangement, you're gonna want to strip the leaves off that are below the water line because having leaves down in the water line makes the bacteria level go up a little bit faster. Also like I said, you want to cut the stems at an angle so that you get maximum surface area when you are making your arrangements.

Now, the third area I want to talk about for tips before we dive into actually how to do this is that after you make your arrangement, you want to keep it out of direct sunlight and I recommend that you change the water about every other day on that vase. By doing that, you keep the bacteria level low and that will help the plants to still be able to take up water. Now, if you notice that something in that arrangement is starting to wilt early, you can certainly take it out, recut the stem and stick it back in, and if that doesn't work you could try the boiling water trick, or you could just remove it from your arrangement so the whole arrangement isn't ruined because of one thing looking kind of wilted. All right? Okay.

Let's talk a little bit about what types of things do you have in your backyard that you could use as plant material for arrangements? Well the answer is unless it's poisonous, pretty much anything goes. I think in your backyard if you're one of my listeners you are probably growing a lot of edibles, and edibles make fantastic flower arrangements. Not only can you arrange with any kind of flowers you might have like roses, or dahlias, or sunflowers, but you can also use things like scented geraniums, fennel, bay leaves, flowering herbs, radishes that have gone to seed, celery seed branches, even artichokes. I grow artichokes occasionally and I actually like to let some of them turn into flowers, because they are this beautiful, unusual purple flower that is an artichoke on the outside and a beautiful purple on the inside so it's amazing.

Anything that you have in your garden will work. What I recommend you do is you walk around your garden with a new set of eyes and just look at the colors, the forms, the shapes of everything growing and imagine how some of those things would look in a flower arrangement. You'll be surprised what you end up picking. I have picked little branches of my kumquat tree with kumquats on it.

I've picked branches off my apple tree with apple flowers on it, and those things in a small little vase with a couple little flowers and maybe a sprig of rosemary create a gorgeous, fragrant, and very enticing arrangement to have on your desk.

All right, so let's go through some of the steps. Once you have walked through your garden, you're sort of inspired and you're ready to dive in, let's walk through some of the steps of what you would do to create a long lasting bouquet that you could bring into your house. Step number one for me is to figure out what I want to pick for that particular arrangement. I may want to pick all one type of flower with just some greenery, or maybe I want a monochromatic arrangement where everything is like silver and white and that is gonna be my arrangement. Or I might want to have a mix of colors.

If you do decide that you want to have a mix of colors, try to go with complimentary colors. Things like yellows and oranges that go really well together, or pinks and blues, or pinks and burgundies look really gorgeous. At the very end, you just want to pick what is pleasing to you and to your eye. This is your arrangement, and although if you were being a commercial designer there would be some set rules that you need to follow, but I find that by kind of throwing all those rules out and going with what looks pretty to me and what I just love when I'm standing in the garden, I want to bring that inside and enjoy it. Sometimes I get some of the best arrangements just by kind of being a little whimsical.

I'll talk about being a little whimsical here as we talk about the different parts of the arrangement. For my arrangements I do it this way: I have three main parts to my arrangement. I have some greenery, which is kind of the basis of my arrangement. That can be things like herbs, and twigs, and branches, maybe something off one of my trees, or I might just pick some ferns. Then the second component for me is a main colorful flower. Typically things like roses, or hydrangeas, or cosmos is what would come to mind, but you could also have something like a flowering vegetable or flowering herb be your main colorful flowers.

Then I have for my third component delicate accent flowers. These are things that are lacy, delicate, kind of feathery. Things like celery flowers, or carrot flowers, or dill, or fennel. This is kind of the equivalent to what the commercial florist would use where they would put in baby's breath, or something delicate and white and fluffy to the arrangement. That's what I like to put into my arrangements too, but I pick something from my own garden.

Then a fourth component, which is optional is if there's something that catches my eye that's in the garden, I like to add something whimsical to the arrangement. That could be an apple twig with flowers, or even an apple on it if it's something that I have so many I don't mind cutting one off. It could be some

berries, or grapes that can drape over the edge of the vase, or if it's winter time I might wire up some pine cones or rose hips and put those into the arrangement as well. If I can, I'll add something whimsical, but it's certainly not necessary, I just wanted to throw that out there in case you see something catch your eye, it's kind of fun to put that in.

The second step is to pick your container. Some people pick their container first and that's fine. If you have a container and you're like, "Ah, I want to build something to go in this." Then go with your container first and pick plants that will work. Typically, I'm going with what's available in my backyard, and then I bring that in and I try to pick a vase or a container that will work for it. Your container could be a vase, but it could also be a pitcher, it could be something that's antique that you've picked up at a garage sale or a swap meet. It could also be just a really pretty bowl if you want to do a centerpiece that would sit in the middle of your kitchen table or your dining room table, or it could be something that's a little bit more rustic like a watertight bucket. Those are kind of fun to do arrangements in. It can also just be as simple as a mason jar. Pick your container as your second step.

You've probably heard of something called flower frogs. A flower frog is something that a florist will put down inside of their container to help hold the plant material up. You can certainly use a flower frog if you have it, but I personally prefer to do one of two things when I'm doing an arrangement. I will either take a piece of chicken wire and kind of wad that up and stick it down into the container and that gives me something stable to hold the tall pieces of plant material up in a real straight fashion, or if I'm doing a low bowl that will set in the middle of the table, then what I do is I take waterproof floral tape and I will make crisscross pieces of tape across that bowl. Then your plant material can be held up. It's kind of a really simple, easy trick for making a mounded arrangement in a bowl without having any other structure inside there.

One of those two things is usually what I will do. Now you can certainly use what's called floral foam, which is that green stuff that you see the florist use where it kind of feels like Styrofoam, but it absorbs water. I rarely use it simply because two reasons: one, I'm usually just grabbing something and coming in and I want to arrange it quickly in the vase, and the floral foam usually has to soak for a while first. The second reason I don't use it so much anymore is because the floral foam is full of a lot of chemicals and I prefer to have my arrangements not have those chemicals, so I'll typically just place them inside vases with either chicken wire or with some waterproof tape.

Okay, so you have your plant material, you have picked out your vase and some sort of stabilizer inside either with chicken wire or with tape, or if it's a small bouquet you don't need to add anything like that. Then you want to make sure for your third step that you gather up any other tools that you need. That would be maybe scissors, your floral tape, your chicken wire, anything like that. If you

have all of those things already, then you want to gather up a preservative as your next tool.

I talked to you a little bit about preservative a minute ago, and let me go a little bit deeper into that. You know those little packets of floral preservative that you get when you buy flowers? Well it actually does work. It is actually making the vase life longer for your plant material. The reason is that it has three things in those packets that help your cut flowers. It has some sort of sugar to keep and feed the flowers so that they don't start to get sad looking. Second, it has an acidifier in it so that the water is on the acidic side and that helps the plants uptake the water. Third, it has a biocide in it, which helps keep the bacteria levels down so that it doesn't clog up your flowers ability to soak up water.

When you buy that, you can buy that flower preservative at the store or online, but I just like to make up my own because I don't really know what's in the flower preservatives other than those three components. I don't know what chemicals that they actually use. They all have their proprietary chemicals that they use. They're probably fine, but for me it just seems easier to just mix something together as a preservative. If you go online, there are a lot of little formulations and people's tricks for creating a preservative for their cut flowers. I'm sure that most of them work, but this is one that I use that is pretty easy to remember and I typically have all these ingredients on hand at any time.

Let me give you the recipe. What I do is I take one quart of water and I'll add one teaspoon of sugar, 1/2 teaspoon of household bleach, just standard household bleach, and that's to keep the bacteria down, and then I add two teaspoons of either lemon juice or lime juice. Yes, if you are a canner, you have bottled juice probably in your refrigerator and that works great. I just stir that up and that's it. That's what I use to water my flowers in their vase and that will keep the bacteria down and keep the flowers happy so that they last longer in the vase. It's pretty easy to do.

One thing to remember, if you only have one or two of those three ingredients then just go with that. It's better to have just a little bit of bleach in the water and nothing else than to not put anything in the water. Of those three components, each component adds a little bit more of a shelf life to your vase. I definitely, if you only have one or two of the things, then go for what you have and put it in with the quart of water and it'll help a lot.

The next step, step four is to decide on the shape of your arrangement. You kind of have to think about this before you start. Are you making something that is going to be sitting up against the wall, like a tall vase that's up against the wall of your entry by your front door? Or are you making a round, short arrangement that would sit in the middle of your dining room table? They have two very different shapes, so you kind of want to know that in your head before you start taking your plant material and cutting it to go into the vase. I do recommend

that as you pull out each piece of plant material from your buckets which have been sitting over getting soaked up with the water for an hour or two. As you pull each one out, just give it a fresh cut before you put it into the vase and it'll soak up even more water.

Once you have a general idea of the shape you're going to be doing for your arrangement, you're going to take your vase or your container and you're going to fill it with your preservative water, and you're gonna start arranging. That's step five. We're gonna start arranging. Typically what I do is I start with the greenery first. This is how I learned when I took classes on how to do flower arranging was to use the greenery material to kind of set up the structure of the overall arrangement. Remember, you are not trying to be perfect here, we're just trying to make something that we enjoy. To me there's no right or wrong if you start out doing this a little bit differently than I do.

If you really don't want to start with greenery that's fine. I just find for me that starting with the greenery as the foundation makes it really easy for me to know what the shape is gonna be before I add the flowers and I don't have to do too much rearranging once I get all done. If I'm doing a tall arrangement up against the wall, then I place some tall greenery in the back, and I make the arrangement asymmetrical so it's not perfectly even on both sides. I like to have one side be a little bit heavier looking than the other, almost like an L or an odd shaped triangle, upside down triangle. That's the shape that I go for.

If you're looking for inspiration then I highly recommend you go to Pinterest, or you google flower arrangement shapes, and you get some really beautiful inspiring pictures that you can look at before you get started. As you place each one of your pieces of greenery in, you just recut the stem. One mistake that I do find I always used to make at the beginning when I was first starting to do flower arranging is that I would add too much greenery. You don't need to add that much. You just need to have enough to give you the basic structure, and you want to leave a lot of open space so that you can fill that with your flowers. You can always tuck in a little bit more greenery at the end, but you're gonna have so many other things in there that the greenery is just your framework, then your flowers are your stars.

You start with the greenery, you lay that in so that you have your basic outline of your shape, and then you start placing your largest most important flowers next so that you can place them in the best possible spots so that they really shine. The next step after that is just to add your smaller flowers or your feathery whimsical flowers. Anything that is light and fluffy, fill in the blank spaces with that. As you're working, stop every once in a while and step back and look at the arrangement. We get down in there and you forget to look at the forest for the trees, you know what I mean?

You're looking so deep at the little, tiny, minute things that you need to step

back and look at the overall picture because it's funny. When you step back you go, "Oh wow. I have this big blank spot right there. I should move that one flower over two or three inches." Step back every once in a while, take a look at what you're doing, and then dive back in with your arrangements. Make it fun, relaxing, don't over think it. Just go with what feels good to you. There's no test, there's nothing that should make you feel intimidated at all because you're doing this for yourself.

Once you have arranged it in a way that you really love, then take any of your left over plant material and make a smaller arrangement. It can be a complimentary arrangement, or something that you just set on your desk so that you can enjoy it there. Go place your arrangement, and enjoy it, and absolutely check the water level in the first 24 hours because I find that many times it will almost suck up all the water in that first 24 hours and you don't realize it until things start looking a little sad. In that first 24 hours, keep your eye on the water level and then after that completely change out the water about every other day. You should get your arrangement to last anywhere from 7 to 10 days.

I've had arrangements last up to two weeks when I've used things from my own backyard because they're so, so fresh. They really, really want to last. Now, in the show notes for today's episode, I will have a complete listing of tips for flower arranging that you can download. To get that just go to LivingHomegrown.com/110 and you can get the tips as well as all the information about the Slow Flowers Movement and The Flower Confidential book by Amy Stewart that is really interesting to read.

In the meantime, I really hope you'll consider making a flower fresh cut bouquet from your own backyard. It really is a simple thing to do, even if you just go out and pick a few flowers and put them on a vase on your desk, or in your bathroom so that you can enjoy some of your garden all day long. I thought this would be a good topic to do now when so many of us maybe have taken a vacation and came back to something bolting, or going to flower before we were ready to eat it, and you start to feel bad because you feel like it went to waste. Well, those flowers are beautiful, so you can enjoy them this way.

That's it for this week. I just wanted to thank our listeners, sponsors, because this podcast is made possible in part by the listeners like you. For just a few dollars each month, our listener sponsors get access to behind the scenes, blooper outtakes, and extra exclusive bonus content. If you'd like to become a sponsor of this podcast, just go to LivingHomegrown.com/sponsor to learn more. Thank you so much for your support. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal and homegrown. Take care.

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