



Live farm fresh without the farm®

Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 111 Community Gardens

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/111

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode 111.

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 can mean preserving, small-space food growing, and just taking simple steps towards a more sustainable lifestyle. If you want to learn more about any of these topics, or my online Canning Academy, or membership site, just visit LivingHomegrown.com. Today's episode is made possible by you. Thank you so much to everyone who sponsors the show and allows us to keep producing an award-winning podcast. If you'd like to help us stay on the air and get access to behind-the-scenes and exclusive bonus content, then just visit LivingHomegrown.com/sponsor to help out. Thank you so much for your support.

Today's episode is about community gardening, and it's also about a very special person who works in the community gardening world. I brought on my friend LaManda Joy, and she's from the Peterson Garden Project in Chicago, and I wanted you to hear her story of some of the wonderful things that she is doing through community gardening. It's really impressive, all the things that she's done. I've known her for years and years, way back when she was blogging about gardening, and then watched this transformation of her as it's blossomed into this huge thing that is really impacting people. And not just impacting people in Chicago; she has inspired so many people to take on the same sort of projects in their own communities.

So, let me tell you a little bit about LaManda. LaManda Joy wants to inspire everyone she meets to grow their own food, and she seriously does. She's an author, a national speaker, award-winning Illinois Extension Master Gardener, and considered the best urban farmer in Chicago. Inspired by the massive World War II victory garden movement, she founded a project called the Peterson Garden Project in 2010. Now, this award-winning education community gardening and cooking program utilizes empty urban property to create short-

term organic gardens, and that is where thousands of people have the opportunity to learn how to grow their own food. The Peterson Garden Project also operates a community cooking school to teach people how to cook their own food as well.

She has collaborated on a couple of books, the first being *Fearless Food Gardening in Chicagoland: A Month-by-Month Guide for Beginnings*, and *Start a Community Food Garden: The Essential Handbook*. LaManda has served on the board of the American Community Gardening Association. She has spoken at the Library of Congress, national conferences, gardening shows, festivals, libraries, and she has appeared on our PBS gardening series, *Growing a Greener World*. Also, LaManda's home garden, which she calls the Yarden, has been featured in local and national news outlets, and is the basis for her blog and Facebook presence, *TheYarden.com*.

Now, I think you're really going to enjoy LaManda's story, because it's really interesting how she got into this in the first place, and it's all based on the concept of victory gardens, which if you don't remember what that is, that is what happened during World War I and World War II ... Well, actually, in World War I, I think they were called liberty gardens, and they were originally, in World War I, meant to secure the national food supply. It was when people would grow food at schools, in their own back yards, and in public spaces, to try and help out during the war. Then, in World War II, it wasn't so much about the food supply, but it was mostly about gardening for unity, and victory gardens became a way for people to give service to the nation by growing food.

So LaManda took this little seed of an idea, of creating a community garden that was like a victory garden in her area, and it just exploded massively. So we're going to talk about her story, but we're also going to talk about how you might want to join a community garden in your own area, and LaManda has some great information on that, even about if you would ever want to start your own community garden from scratch. So with that, let's join in on my interview with LaManda Joy from the Peterson Garden Project.

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

LaManda: Oh, I'm really excited to be here.

Theresa: Oh, good. Well, this is going to be a great topic. A lot of people that are listening to this show have either very small, tiny gardens, or they don't have any space to garden at all, so I know this is a topic that they're interested in. They just don't really know how, maybe, a community garden works, or where to find one, and I also really want them to hear your story and all the things that you're working, because you got it going on, man, you've got a lot of things happening, and you're doing some really great things for the world and for the planet, and for people and community in general, so I'm really excited to have you tell your

story.

LaManda: Great. I'm excited to tell it.

Theresa: Okay. Well, let's start off with having you tell everybody a little bit about what it is that you do.

LaManda: Well, I'm LaManda Joy, and I'm the founder of Peterson Garden Project, which is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to recruit, educate, and inspire everyone to grow their own food, and we do that with a series of what we call pop-up victory gardens on the North Side of Chicago. We also have a community cooking school, and our point is to give everybody the lifelong skills of food gardening and food prep, so, food cooking, so they can share that skill with others, and the goodness can keep going.

Theresa: That's what I love about what you do, because it's not just about growing food; you always say you're also growing the gardener, and so community is a huge part of this.

LaManda: It's a huge part. I always say that gardening's the excuse, but community is the reason.

Theresa: That's really good. I love that. Well, when we had you on Growing a Greener World, when we had you on that episode, I loved the story that you told about how this all came together, so could you kind of go back in time and tell everybody how this whole thing got started with you?

LaManda: Sure. Well, let's go back to the early 1970s. I grew up in Oregon, and my dad taught me how to garden. That's something that we did. You know, we weren't hipsters, it's just what people did. They cooked their own food, and they composted, and they grew their own food, and that was something that ... A gift that he gave me that I didn't realize how important it was until much later. So, much later, I moved to Chicago, I lived in a condo with my husband for many years — 10 years, to be exact — and every spring, I was just itching to be able to grow food again, because it was something that I really liked doing, and it was important to me.

So after 10 years of moaning every spring about not having a place to grow food, my husband woke up one morning and said, "Should we buy a house?" "No." "Should we buy a yard?" Like, "Yes, yes." So we joked we bought a yard with a house attached to it, which isn't as easy as you'd think in a city like Chicago, because often, there's giant trees that you don't want to cut down, or an apartment building, or it's just impossible to find a big, sunny yard. So we looked for quite a while, and we found this big, sunny yard, and I started calling it my Yarden.

And that was 2006, so in 2007, we put in our beautiful organic heirloom food garden, and I started blogging at the time. People didn't have their cats writing blogs at the time, so there weren't as many voices out there, but what I really wanted to do was find the food gardeners, because in Oregon, where I grew up, everybody just did that, you know? So I just was trying to tap into the food gardeners in Chicago, and what I discovered is that not many people knew how to grow their own food, or they wanted to, but they didn't have the resources, or just wasn't part of the culture like it had been where I'd grown up. And so, for the first time ever, I felt like I had something that ... A gift that would be useful for people. It was a really interesting thing.

So I spent a lot of time blogging on the Yarden, and teaching classes, and reaching out to people. In the meantime, I'd moved into this new neighborhood less than a year before, year-ish, and I was driving around and acquainting myself with, you know, just the neighborhood, and the local businesses, and I joke because of that big yard that we bought that I developed a medical condition called "lot lust," where I see an empty lot and I lust to put a garden there. So I'd been driving by this big lot on the corner of Peterson and Campbell, lusting after it like, "Wow, wouldn't that be a great garden?"

I didn't do anything about it, though, because it was big, and I was working full-time, and traveling 80% of the time. But one day, I was at our local butcher shop, Muller Meats, and I was talking to Ruben and Erv, and waiting for my chicken, and I looked at the wall, and there's this photograph of victory gardens during World War II. And I didn't put two and two together, but I was like, "Hey, what's this photo?" They're like, "Oh, those are victory gardens." I'm like, I looked closer, I could see the V, I could see the flags, I could see all this stuff, and that really, really sort of jogged me, because my parents are Greatest Generations, and my dad was in the Occupied Forces, and my mom was a Rosie the Riveter, and I grew up with that sort of "God bless America," "we can do it," "if you don't like something, change it," "pull yourself up by your bootstraps," "less talk, more do." So I'd grown up with that sort of "we can do things together" mentality.

So one day, after I'd seen that, I was driving by the lot that I was lusting after with my husband, and, you know, busy city traffic, and it dawned on me, it was like this epiphany, I'm like, "Oh my God, that's one of the lots from the picture." I guess I sort of mumbled it. He's like, "What did you say?" I'm like, "It's the lot from the picture." He's like, "What are you talking about? I don't know what you're talking about." "It's the lot from the picture, the lot from the picture." He's like, "Pull over, you're going to kill us."

So we pulled over, and I explained it to him, and he was like, "Oh, I see, I see something's going to happen." It just seemed like I had this skill that people wanted, there's this big lot, it had been a victory garden. That seemed like an important story, you know? The concern that people had for their food was just

really starting to become evident. It's not even as intense as it is now, but people were starting to be concerned about their food and where it came from, and they wanted their kids to have a skill, and they wanted to learn. So I'm like, "That victory garden story is really relevant to today. You know, it's a different type of victory, but that's important."

So I thought if 20 people wanted to do it, it would be a fun project, so I worked with the alderman, which is our form of city government, to get the land short-term. We knew we weren't going to be on there forever, but, you know, have a place where I could maybe teach 20 people how to grow their own food. And it ended up being the largest organic food garden in the city at the time.

Theresa: I love that.

LaManda: Yeah. That was a surprise.

Theresa: Yeah.

LaManda: So we gardened there for two years. We knew that we couldn't stay there forever; that piece of property was \$900,000, so there was no way we would be able to afford that, or even know how to try and go about having a capital campaign to afford that.

But my lot just had been acting up, and there were other empty lots on the North Side of Chicago, so in 2012, we decided that ... You know, that was the 70th anniversary of the first victory garden season. We decided that that was an auspicious time to come up with this concept of doing pop-up victory gardens, where instead of trying to raise a bunch of money for a piece of property that only a few people could potentially participate in, we were going to go into these empty pieces of property, partner with whomever the property owner was, and teach people for as long as we could. A minimum of two years, but the gardens were purposefully meant to be short-term, so we could teach people, and then they could take that skill and move on, and when the gardens had to go, we would take the garden up and move it to a different location, and teach a different neighborhood. So that's-

Theresa: Ah. I love that, yeah.

LaManda: It was very controversial at the time, if you can believe that, but-

Theresa: Really? What ... So people were upset that you were moving the garden, or what was the controversial part?

LaManda: Well, when you think about community gardens, it's more about land security, you know, it's often a land trust thing, securing property in perpetuity, that sort of thing, and that's not what we were doing. We were just trying to teach as

many people as we possibly could.

Theresa: Right, so that's why you call it a pop-up garden, because it's not permanent. You know it's going to be a temporary situation, and everybody coming in knows that, that they're only going to be gardening there for a short period of time, but what they end up doing is then going off and gardening in their own space. Isn't that right?

LaManda: Oh, yes, all sorts of things happen. We've had people become horticultural therapists, master gardeners, urban farmers. They teach school kids how to garden, they buy condos where they have a sunny yard, and then they're going to teach their neighbors, they buy houses with yards. I mean, it's really had a great ripple effect, just from teaching people this skill, because they can take it anywhere.

Theresa: Exactly, yeah, so you're having a real impact, and that's what I love about this story. And then you're always having events and things, so the whole community kind of gets to know each other. It's just a really beautiful thing that you're doing. I love it.

LaManda: Oh, thanks.

Theresa: Now, you've also been doing other things where, like you said, you're teaching them not just how to grow the food, but what to do with the food, so you have a cooking aspect associated with it.

LaManda: Yes, that's right. It's kind of like lot lust, but not really. There was this culinary center at one of our park facilities that had not been used. It'd been remodeled, and somewhere in the way, the person that was the guiding light for it left. We don't know what happened, but it had been sitting empty. It was done, it was beautiful, it had all the big stuff — you know, the counters, and the big cooking range, and the sinks, and all that stuff — but it didn't have any of the plates or forks or knives, or any of that. So one of our aldermen — again, that type of city government — knew what we are up to in terms of community building and using space, so he approached us about using the kitchen.

So we opened that in 2014 with the hopes of ... For the gardening, we try and make it as simple as possible, so people can just get started. We're not highfalutin in any way. So we really wanted to try to do that in this cooking school, and just bring it down a notch. I believe that people spend so much time watching the Food Network eating a Lean Cuisine, you know, like they're just watching all this stuff that they will never do, but it's entertainment. So we really wanted to have it just be hands-on home cooking. We kicked off that in 2014, and we have chefs some, but mostly home cooks that are passionate about a thing, and we have general public classes where people can learn. We do basics, knife skills, and we do canning. We do all sorts of stuff; we use the

space for a food swap. And then those general public classes fund classes that we do for kids, seniors, and refugees.

Theresa: Ah, that's fantastic, that's fantastic. So now, not only are people learning how to grow, but then they learn what to do with it, which can ... A lot of times, they start growing all these things, they have no idea how to cook with it because they never have. So that's fantastic.

LaManda: Well, that's true, and, you know, there's just a different ... You know, you can be a great recipe cook, and go buy your 12 things, and make your recipe and be done with it, but if you're a garden cook, and you walk out and you're like, "Wow, what do I do with all of that?" It kind of is a different mindset.

Theresa: Yes, and you have to work to the garden. It's not like if you're following a recipe, that you're just going to be happening to grow everything that's in that recipe, so the kind of the garden dictates what you're going to be eating.

LaManda: Right.

Theresa: Yeah, yeah. That's really fantastic. And then there's another thing that you guys do, which is the Grow2Give. Can you explain what that is?

LaManda: Yes. Well, we started that in our very first garden, and it's been an amazing thing ever since. So each ... We have these large pop-up victory gardens all over the North Side, and 5% of each garden, 5% of the plots, are set aside for Grow2Give. And so volunteers — they could be some of the gardeners, they could be people outside of the gardeners — they tend to those plots. They plant them, they water them, they harvest them, and then each garden has a sort of a sister food pantry that that food is then grown and donated to those food pantries on a weekly basis. So last year, we gave just shy of 3,000 pounds of fresh herbs, and everything that you grow, which, when you think about it, a lot of it's greens, herbs, which can fill a whole huge ... 3,000 pounds of that stuff is a lot, you know what I mean?

Theresa: That's a lot, yeah. It's not like you're growing heavy giant pumpkins, you're growing things that are really lightweight, so that's a lot of ... In a physical space, that's a lot of food.

LaManda: It's a lot of food, and it's stuff that food pantries don't get. You know, they're getting government cheese and canned goods. So it's really been a great thing, and we do it throughout the season, and then when we close the gardens in November — this year, we're closing them November 5th — we then go in with everything that's left, and we do a big gleaning, and we get that stuff to people just in time for Thanksgiving.

Theresa: Oh, that's fantastic. What a great thing. I love that.

- LaManda: Yeah, it's great. It's wonderful.
- Theresa: So how many gardens right now ... I know it kind of fluctuates all the time. How many gardens do you have right now?
- LaManda: We have six of the pop-up victory gardens, and we have one garden which is a workplace garden at the Field Museum.
- Theresa: Okay, and so the ... And the Field Museum one, that one is not going away? That one's there all the time?
- LaManda: That one, you know, yes, it's going to be there for a long time, I believe.
- Theresa: Yeah, so it's just not going to be a two-year thing, it'll be longer than that.
- LaManda: Yes. It's very different from our other gardens. It's a lot nicer. It's a world-class institution, so we had to build it in a different way.
- Theresa: Yes, I remember seeing the pictures when you guys were working on that. And then how many volunteers do you estimate that you have?
- LaManda: Well, we keep track, and last year ... It's pretty consistent. We have about 1,500 people that come out.
- Theresa: Wow, that's a lot.
- LaManda: Yeah, it's a lot of people. And some of them of are gardeners, some of them are not. They might just be ... We have a lot of corporate groups who want to help, or Boy Scout troops, or whomever. And it's not just in the gardens, you know, people help in the kitchens, they help with all the classes, we have volunteers that serve on our board, or they help with accounting, you know, boring stuff too. So it's always been, from the very beginning, a very community-based thing.
- Theresa: Yeah. So when you first start a garden, like you have a new lot, and you're just getting started, how is it that you get the word out to everybody? Because I'm sure they're just thinking, "What are these people doing coming in, making these rectangular things on the ground?" You know, they don't know. They're like, "What kind of building is that going to be?"
- LaManda: Well, at first, especially in 2012, when I was talking to all these aldermen and business owners about their empty lots, people were like, "You're doing what?" Like, they thought I was pretty insane. But now, we have a lot of demand. Like, we have neighborhoods coming to us saying, "We have this big empty lot. Can you do your thing?"

- Theresa: Oh, that's nice. Yeah, that's a good problem to have. Yeah.
- LaManda: Yeah, so that's good. Yeah, I mean, people know what it's about, and they're like, "When are you going to have a garden in Uptown? When are you going to have a garden in Logan Square? When are you ..." So it's easier now, but at first, people thought I was nuts.
- Theresa: Well, I know there's a lot of benefits to participating in a community garden, so if someone listening is thinking, "Hm, this might sound interesting," can you explain kind of how a typical community garden works? Maybe not necessarily how yours is, because it's only for two years, but how, typically, does a community garden work in a neighborhood?
- LaManda: I'm not sure there's an easy answer to that, but generally speaking, it's a piece of land, it's divided up. Some gardens are in-ground, some gardens are raised beds. They're not all just food gardens; some people have community gardens where they're growing perennials, or they're growing annual flowers, so if you're interested in a food garden, you should make sure that the garden you want to be part of allows that or supports that. There's generally some sort of leadership or rules that people have to follow. I wouldn't say that most garden organizations are as ... I don't think the word "strict" is right, but as organized, maybe, as we like to have our stuff, so different gardens have different personalities. They may have requirements that you have to weed or you get kicked out, or they may have requirements where you have to do a ... Which I think is such a funny term, Theresa, "mandatory volunteer hours." So, you know-
- Theresa: That is funny.
- LaManda: It is funny, yes. So they all sort of have their own requirements.
- Theresa: Yeah, so if you see one in your area, that particular one, if there's more than one, they may have different requirements, they may not be related, so you can kind of seek out one in your area, it could be ... Have its own rules.
- LaManda: Yeah, it'll have its own rules, it'll have its own personality. All of our gardens have different personalities, depending on the neighborhoods. They'll have different missions, potentially. A lot of organizations use gardens to advance their social mission, like they may be working with at-risk youth, or they may be working with homeless, or they may be working with people with PTSD, veterans, what have you. So if you're participating in a garden like that, there's going to be a motive for that garden that you have to feel comfortable and support.
- Theresa: Yeah, that's a good point. Yes, absolutely. So if someone's thinking about this,

what are some of the benefits of participating in a community garden?

LaManda: Well, the best part is that gardeners are amazing people, amazing, generous, lovely people, so you're among a community of nice people. It's a great way to interact with everybody, people you may not normally rub shoulders with in your day-to-day life. You may find a wide variety of individuals, a cross-section of whatever community you're in, in a community garden, so that's wonderful. And if you're a new gardener, it's a great place to learn, because you'll very quickly see who the people are that know what they're doing, and you can make them your friends, and have an opportunity there. And the other nice thing about community gardens is just you're part of something. It's sort of like, you know, Starbucks is the third place, you know?

Theresa: Yes.

LaManda: Community gardens are kind of the third place. It's a place where your kids can play safely, it's a place where you can help people out, you can volunteer in a Grow2Give program, or you can teach someone else, or you can learn from someone else. It's just a great microcosm of humanity, I think.

Theresa: I agree, and I think the learning part is so huge, because definitely, you know, you could get an insect or a bug or a fungus problem on whatever you're growing, and man, there will be someone there that can help you, and look right at that plant and know exactly what you need to do. So, a fantastic place to learn how to garden.

LaManda: Yes, I think that that's really true.

Theresa: So if someone is thinking of doing this, where could they seek them out? Are there any resources on the Internet that they could look at, or any place you would suggest they go to try and find if there are any community gardens in their area?

LaManda: Yes. You can always just start with city government, like call City Hall or whoever, and see if there are any community garden programs. They generally know about that. If you're in a city like Chicago that has neighborhood-based government, we have wards and aldermen. Your local political representative will know, so that's another way. The American Community Gardening Association, CommunityGarden.org, they have a map, so if your town, whoever the community garden leaders are, have put their garden on a map, they could potentially find it that way. And I guess just word of mouth, just asking around.

Theresa: Yes, yeah, that's a very good way. I love those tips, that's fantastic.

LaManda: Garden centers may also know.

Theresa: Oh, sure, garden centers, especially an independent.

LaManda: Especially the beloved IGCs, yes.

Theresa: Yes, yes.

LaManda: They are very in tune with the community.

Theresa: Yeah. They might even know of one outside the city limits that you would probably not be able to find.

LaManda: That's correct.

Theresa: Yeah. Well, I know you wrote a book, *Start a Community Food Garden: The Essential Handbook*, and it's such a great one for if someone is wanting to do this, and there just aren't many choices for them, and they're thinking of starting one, kind of like what you did, but on a very much smaller scale. And I think that maybe we should talk a little bit about what it would be, what were some of the things that people have to think about if they can't find one and they're thinking of starting one, because I know it's a big deal. It's not like, "Oh, I'll just go do this." There's a lot involved.

LaManda: Yes, there's a lot involved, and I have to tell you a little secret. The original title for this book was *The Community Food Gardener's Handbook*. That's the title that I wanted it to be, and they wanted to call it *Start a Community Food Garden*, but my piece of advice is, don't start a community food garden unless you've participated in a community garden. That's the best way to learn. However, not everybody has that opportunity, so I suppose the title is okay the way it is, but ... You know, the most important part is to think about the community, because if you don't, then you're just left with a big infrastructure that you and a couple friends probably can't take care of.

So it's easy to get excited about what you see, the tangible, physical thing or the vision that you might have for what this garden could look like, but if everybody else isn't in on it, or have bought in, or somebody knows how to garden, those types of things, it's really sort of a ... It's a problem. So that's actually why I wrote this book, because I was on the board for the American Community Garden Association for many years, so I got to see what was happening all over the country, and I saw this disturbing trend of people just wanting to put in a garden because it's fun. You know, they wanted to do it because a company paid for it, so they had some money, or they wanted to do it because it was a college project, or whatever, which is great, but there's a big abandonment rate when you don't do the upfront work of finding the true believers, making people feel like part of a community, teaching people. I went off on a little tangent, I'm sorry about that.

-
- Theresa: That's perfect. No, no, no, don't ... Keep going, I love it. I love the tangent.
- LaManda: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of hidden work that you don't see when you're looking at the infrastructure, you know? There's how are you going to get people signed up, how are you going to get people to know what the organizational mission is, or what the rules are? How are you going to enforce rules? How many rules should you have? What's going to work for everybody that's gardening? You really realize that people have different motivations, and different times that they want to garden, and different ways that they want to garden, and if you don't take that into account, then you could have conflict down the road.
- So it's really just important to get people together and talk about what they'd like. You're not going to get everything that everybody likes, certainly, but at least people have had a chance to voice what's important to them, voice their dreams and their visions for this space. So it's just really key that people spend a lot of time talking to each other and finding out who's interested, and what it could be, and how it could serve the neighborhood, and ... Yeah, that.
- Theresa: Yeah, I can see why it would be so important to participate in one first, because there's so many nuances. And there's a lot of fun things, too, that you can learn from participating in one, but understanding kind of how the whole system works, and ... You know, everyone kind of has their own opinion, so I'm sure that it can be tricky. You kind of have to have a board or a group that helps guide everything.
- LaManda: Yeah, and you're still going to have issues. Whenever people are together, there's issues. But it's better to have 80% of it figured out, and then 20% be just sort of the personality quirks, versus it all being personality quirks. You know, there's that proverb, "Where there is no vision, the people perish"? If you have a simple system that everybody understands and buys into, it just makes it a lot easier.
- Theresa: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. That sounds really, really good. Well, one of the things I know you do in building the community is you have the events, so I would love for you just to mention some of the events that you put on, some of the kind of ideas ... Like, potlucks is what I always hear people do with community gardens, and that would be really fun, but you've even done little concerts, and then you have your classes. So what are some of the things that people could do to build community if they were participating?
- LaManda: Well, one thing that everybody loves, especially ... You know, people think that gardening starts in the spring, but I really think it starts around January, when we all wish we were gardening. People are getting their seed catalogs, and they're thinking about their garden, and they're wishing for spring to be here. I think it's a perfect time to get people together for something, either it's a class

on indoor sowing, or it's seed-starting, or ... We do a seed swap every year, and we sort of mash all those things together, where people can get together and bring the excessive seeds that they've bought online, and maybe they want to share with someone. That's a great, great, easy opportunity for people to get together and start getting excited.

We do that every year, and it's really fun, because the new gardeners are all excited, they don't know anything, and the older gardeners ... You know, not older, but people with some experience, they're there, and they're sharing their wisdom, so it's a great icebreaker, in a way, because you're focusing on seeds, beautiful seed pictures, and hope, and all that. So that's a great thing that you can do. We do a series of ... Well, when the gardens start, we do a class called Grewbie 101. We call our brand-new gardeners our Grewbies, our growing newbies.

Theresa: I love that. That's a great name.

LaManda: Yeah, we love them. But that class is really basic, you know, like, "Does this soil look good?" "How do you plant a seed?" "How do you plant a transplant?" "How do you plant a tomato?" You know, like just basic stuff to get them familiarized. And so we have those classes. We have a lot of other stuff too; I'm just trying to hit some of the highlights. We do a series of Expert Gardener Nights. We're actually doing those this week, where once a month, we'll get a master gardener, an expert gardener, someone that's a leader in the garden to show up, and have one-on-one time with people, walk to their plot, see what might be happening, give them a little positive reinforcement. Especially with gardeners, it's very important. I call it "garden therapy." But we have those Expert Gardener Nights.

We do potlucks in the gardens. We call them "plotlucks" sometimes, you know-

Theresa: That's cute.

LaManda: ... if we hold them in the fall where people can bring stuff for their garden, sometimes they'll share recipes from the thing that they've grown and prepared, so that's fun. You know, gardens are full of creative, interesting people. I've never seen a garden, ours or otherwise, where there weren't artists or musicians or something. So we have a space in each garden where people can do their thing, play music, or ...

Theresa: Or paint.

LaManda: Yeah, we did a paper-making thing in one of our gardens once.

Theresa: Oh, that's fun.

-
- LaManda: Yeah. So it's just another place where people can get together.
- Theresa: I love the idea of having a master gardener walk out to your plot with you and talk to you about where you can improve, or where you might have questions. That is a great one.
- LaManda: Well, new gardeners are afraid, you know? Like, we live in this world where you have to be perfect, and none of us except Martha Stewart are Martha Stewart, you know? But those are the expectations we put on ourselves.
- Theresa: Right. Yeah.
- LaManda: Let me tell you a little story. So, one year, I was doing Master Gardener Night — this was probably three years ago — and we were in one of the gardens, and there was this woman standing all humped over and dejected by her plot, and I'm like, "What's going on? Why are you ... What's up?" She's like, "My pepper plant." And I looked at it, and it had so many peppers on it. I'm like, "Well, what's wrong with your pepper plant?" She's like, "Well, look at the leaves." I'm like, "Look at the peppers! Look how many peppers you have on that plant. You have succeeded." She was like, "Oh." She hadn't thought of it that way. Like, you're not going to eat the leaves, you're going to eat the peppers.
- Theresa: Yeah, she'd had success, and she was missing it.
- LaManda: She was missing it, because she had some weird expectation that she had to have this perfect-looking plant.
- Theresa: Yeah, it doesn't have to be magazine-ready, it only has to be delicious.
- LaManda: Exactly, exactly.
- Theresa: Yeah. What things do you have coming up now? I know you've always got some stuff in the works, so what sort of things do you see in the future for the Peterson Project?
- LaManda: Well, you know, Peterson Garden Project, we actually ... I'm getting off this call with you and going over to talk about some new gardens that we're going to put in in 2018, so that's good. We haven't put any new gardens in for a couple years because we'd opened up the kitchen, and we wanted to be able to focus on that, so we've got some new gardens coming up. And I think it's sort of rinse-and-repeat with that, because the gardens go away and new gardens come, so I want to make sure that the organization's really solid and can get those new gardens and new communities online in a good way. I'm really proud of that. So I think that's going to just continue as it is.

I'm working on my own little project. It's not such a little project, but, you know,

I believe that there's not enough support for food gardening in the garden center industry, if you will. I feel like it's sort of an also-ran to everything else, the annuals and the perennials, and the trees and all that, and so I'm working on a project that's going to be an education-based garden center.

Theresa: Oh, that's so exciting. That's really exciting.

LaManda: Yeah, and really-

Theresa: I'll have to watch when you make any announcements on it, and add it to this post, to the show notes, because it sounds really exciting.

LaManda: Well, I think there's just a real need for it, you know? Like, people just don't know, and if you go to a big box store, you walk in and someone ... You ask a question, they're like, "I don't know, let's read the label." It's like, "I could read the label myself. I really need some expertise on this thing that I'm asking you." And I think that it's just not out there, so I just want to take what we've done from an education perspective in the community garden realm and take that into the garden center world.

Theresa: I love it. Well, LaManda, I cannot thank you enough for coming on the show. I love all that you do. You're just doing some really wonderful things out there, and I'm glad that I could share you with my audience, so thank you so much for coming on the show today.

LaManda: Oh, the pleasure was all mine.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with LaManda Joy from the Peterson Garden Project in Chicago. Now, as always, I will have information in the show notes about everything that we talked about, and I will link to all of her resources and her books, and even the Peterson Garden Project website. So to get to the show notes, you just go to LivingHomegrown.com/111. And thank you so much to everyone who sponsors the show, because it allows me to bring these stories to you. If you're interested in becoming a sponsor of this show and getting access to behind-the-scenes and other exclusive bonus content, then just visit LivingHomegrown.com/sponsor. So, until next time, just remember to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care, everybody.

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.