
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 112 Miniature Gardening

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/112

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, Episode 112.

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 small steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you want to learn more about any of these topics or any of my online courses or memberships, just visit livinghomegrown.com.

Okay. This week's episode is Gardening in Miniature. This is about taking all of the design elements that you might use in a large full-scale garden in your backyard or front yard, and take it and make it very, very small and design gardens that would sit on a tabletop. It's table-top gardening with real design.

I wanted to do this because I learned about miniature gardening when my boys were young. I got into it because we built a full G scale train garden in the middle of my herb and vegetable garden. So I gave up a good, gosh, it was almost more than half of my garden. We tore it all out, and we built an entire train set that ran on remote control for the boys. It was really, really fun. I had a fantastic time with them building the garden, but it gave them a way to be playing in the garden while I was working in the garden.

What happened for me, from my perspective, is that I realized very quickly that in order to make the train garden look proper, I had to scale down all of the design elements that I was using elsewhere to make the train look very realistic. I had to use small-sized plants, small elements, so that when the train was moving through the scenery, it looked like it was real, which made it all the more fun for the boys, and it was fun to me to do gardening with them.

To this day, my boys do enjoy getting outside, and they do still help me in the garden. We don't currently have that train garden anymore. I finally did take it out as they got older. Now we plant vegetables there, so I was a little sad when

we took it out. But I still do enjoy making small scapes on the tabletop in containers.

I thought this would be a fun topic to cover here on the podcast. It's a little different from something that we cover usually, where we're just talking about growing vegetables or food or cooking with what we grow. This is something where you get to use creativity and kind of step outside the box. It really does make you use your imagination.

For this week's episode, I brought in Janit Calvo, who is one of the top leading experts in miniature gardening. I just thought it would be really fun to have her teach us everything that we need to know, so that if you are interested in giving this a shot, that you could go out and start your own garden. It could be a tabletop garden. It could be something that you do with your kids. It could be something that maybe you plant in a small corner of your garden, if you want to actually plant it in the ground. You can have it on your coffee table, on your front porch, on your back porch. There's a lot of different ways that you can do gardening in miniature.

Let me tell you a little bit about Janit. Janit Calvo is the world renowned expert on miniature gardening and the author of two best-selling gardening books on the hobby, *Gardening in Miniature: Create Your Own Tiny Living World* and the brand new book, *Gardening in Miniature Prop Shop*, which is about handmade accessories for your tiny living world.

Now since 2001, Janit has been teaching and spreading the joy of gardening in miniature to enthusiasts from around the globe through her newsletter, her websites, she has two. The first one is called twogreenthumbs.com and the second one is miniaturegarden.com. She also writes a lot of articles, and she lectures all across the country.

She has won a lot of garden awards and miniature awards through the years at many, many different shows, and she has demonstrated miniature gardening to thousands at the top garden shows throughout the country. Here's the kicker. Her miniature gardens have appeared in so many magazines, you have probably seen one of her gardens and didn't even realize it. She has been in *Woman's World Magazine*, *Birds in Bloom*, *Pacific Northwest Magazine*, *Country Living*, *Green Profit*, *Seattle Times*, *Dig Magazine*, *Dollhouse Miniature Magazine*. Her gardens have appeared in HGTV and in Martha Stuart's blog. Her work has also been featured in garden magazines in Romania, Japan, England, Finland and the Netherlands. Her first book, *Gardening in Miniature*, has been sold all over the world and translated into many different languages.

She's the real deal folks. I'm just a huge fan of her work. Just remember that everything that we talk about on this show, or that Janit brings up will be in the show notes for this episode, so links to everything including her books, her

website. And she has offered to give listeners a 20% discount coupon over the next 30 days. To get all of that, just go to livinghomegrown.com/112, and I'll have everything there for you.

All right, so let's dive into our interview with Janit, so you can learn all about this really fun hobby of gardening in miniature.

Hey Janit, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

Janit: Hi Theresa. I am delighted to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Theresa: Oh sure. I'm just really thinking this is gonna be really fun for everybody because it's a very different topic for my show. You and I met years and years ago, when my boys were very little. They're now 16 and 18, but I think when I met you, they were like 8 and 10.

Janit: Wow, that went fast.

Theresa: It was a while ago, and we had a G scale train garden in our backyard, right in the middle of my vegetable/herb garden. I was at the Seattle Northwest Flower and Garden show, and you were there with your booth. I fell in love with what you were doing, and I learned so much from you about working in a small-scale in gardening. So I'm absolutely thrilled to have you, so thanks for coming.

Janit: Thanks for following me, my career. It was nice to meet you 10-12 years ago and keep in touch with you all along on our journeys.

Theresa: Yes, and you've grown quite a bit since I first met you, and now you have books.

Janit: And you.

Theresa: Yeah, it's been really fun. I guess I should have you start by kind of telling everybody how you got into miniature gardening in the first place.

Janit: Well it went back to about 1999-2000. I was working at Swanson's Nursery at the time, and my husband and I were kind of bored. We'd just met. We were kind of like two teenagers that moved together, so we didn't have a lot of money to play with. We actually found out we were both miniaturists after we got married. We ended up creating these dioramas, and so with the dioramas of course, me with always wanting to get into a business, I said, "Well let's create a greeting card line." So we set up these dioramas with the G.I. Joes and G.I. Janes, and they were birthday cards and wedding cards and Halloween cards.

Then while I was at Swanson's, spring came around, and these wonderful little conifers came into stock. So I saw the conifers at the nursery, and I realized I could totally do a really sweet garden greeting card for a garden party or just a

garden birthday party or something like that. Then I figured if I could pair the miniature conifers with some ground covers, I could have some bedding plants. The whole idea started to percolate in my brain, so I got all the plants, went home that weekend, built a miniature garden. I made the box out of some scrap wood, and it went together perfectly. It was really, really fun. I got the greeting card shot.

Then what I did was I brought the photograph back into the nursery when it was developed. Remember, way back, back in the olden days.

Theresa: Oh in the olden days, yes.

Janit: So I had to wait a couple of weeks for the film to fill up and then get developed. But I showed the picture of the diorama to one of the walking encyclopedias, you know those people who know all the plant names.

Theresa: Oh yes.

Janit: You know, walk around the nursery, and I don't know how they do it, but they retain all the information in their brains. I showed it to Candy, and she looked at the photograph for like two seconds and passed it back to me. She said, "That's nice Janit." And it was like she didn't even look at it. And I thought to myself, "She didn't even look at it. She didn't know it was miniature." She thought it was full-size.

So I said, if I can fool Candy into thinking it was a real garden, then I've got something here. So the garden that I made. It stayed together. It grew and wove itself together. I had people friends from Sweden and from Canada come visit. They took more pictures of the garden than they took of me. So it's like, I think I got something here. So I actually kind of figured out how to put it in smaller containers, and then I spent the next few years at the Fremont Market, a bunch of farmers market, the garden shows and stuff like that, just kind of flogging it.

What happened was that I didn't create the idea, although I came across it organically. But what happened when connecting to all these people at the shows and the street markets, was that people came to me and said, "I used to do this with my grandmother." "Oh I used to do this with my mother." "Oh I used to do this all the time." So it was almost like if you build it they will come. So all these miniature gardeners came out of the woodwork.

Then when it was about 2003ish, that Twitter and Facebook kind of kicked up and stuff. So it was the social media that actually brought everyone together, and all of us miniature gardeners found each other online. And it began to snowball from there.

Theresa: Wow. Well, you know, that's really funny about the picture. That's one of the

things on the pictures that you have on your website, and a lot of pictures that I see when you are showing one of your gardens, is you always put a hand in the photograph because if you don't, you cannot tell that that's not a life-size garden. I've just been so amazed at how perfect you are at scale, and we'll talk about that as we go, but that was really one of the things that I think I loved about the idea of gardening in miniature, is ... What we're talking about here is not like fairy gardens like what some people think as fairy gardens. It's really kind of taking all of the elements of gardening and just making it very, very small. Isn't that right?

Janit: Exactly, and that's where the fun part is because you just treat it like a garden, but it's just on a smaller scale.

Theresa: Exactly.

Janit: It's all the full-size garden elements are there, it's just in a 10-inch pot.

Theresa: Yes, and I really like what you say in your book. You say it's like where craft and gardening intersect because sometimes you have to build or make things to go in the garden at that size. We'll talk more about that in a little bit. What do you think draws people to this type of gardening?

Janit: I think miniatures itself are a bit of a draw because it's our own worlds in miniature, and of course, we being kind of ego-based creatures that we love to see ourselves. When we see ourselves in miniature, it's just even sweeter. Then if you add the living garden element, the fact that it is kind of a different world than us. It's the garden world. It's the plant world, and to blend those two elements, it just creates a sweetness like no other hobby can, in my opinion anyway.

Theresa: Yeah, I agree with you. I was into dollhouses when I was little, so I was kind of excited when my kids got into trains because to me it was the next thing. I thought that I was probably the only adult that was into it as much as my kids were because they were playing with the trains, and it gave me a way to garden while they were playing with the trains.

I think, you say in your book that, or maybe it was on your website I saw it, that most of the people who are into this are not children. It's usually people over 45, which made me feel so much better.

Janit: Yeah, it is us. And that's one of the "aha moments" I've had throughout my career, is that when I started my online store, and I was able to track to see the people that were ordering, the customers would come back each season and buy something else for their garden. And they'd come back each year and buy something else for the garden. Then maybe the next year, they'd maybe start another garden, so I realized it was more of a hobby.

What it is as far as us adults, and what it brings to us is the ability to play again. It gives us permission to play again like a kid. Like we can dream and scheme and imagine and grow and make and craft. It really is a sophisticated enough hobby, where it is of adult play.

Theresa: Exactly. Yes. That's it exactly, and the fact that we're just taking all the elements of a garden. We are still designing, but instead of out there with a shovel and on a hot sweaty day and having to dig up and move a tree, we can move it in the pot a lot easier in this little display.

When I first met you, one of the things that my kids and I did with one of your kits, for a pathway, was we created a garden that we had on our kitchen table, inside the house for the whole year. Then it eventually moved out, but we had it on the table, and we changed it through the seasons and decorated it, just like we were decorating our front yard for the holidays.

Janit: Yeah.

Theresa: It was a lot of fun.

Janit: It's a lot of fun, and I bet your kids love gardening now.

Theresa: Yes, they do. Yes. Absolutely.

Janit: Yes, that's awesome. That's awesome. Good job.

Theresa: In fact, just before we were about to record, my son started mowing the lawn. I had to go run out there and say, "Not now. Not now. We're filming. We're recording." But yes, they do love gardening, and they do help me in the garden still. So it's turned out-

Janit: Awesome.

Theresa: Yeah. I've got teenage boys who are very strong and can carry those bags of mulch, which is important.

Janit: Perfect. Perfect.

Theresa: Yeah, and they're always asking if they can do work out in the garden for money, when they want to save up for something. I'm like, "Absolutely. I could use some help."

Janit: That's awesome.

Theresa: What made you decide to write your first book? You've written a couple of

books now, and I'm just fascinated that you got this book out there, and that you wanted to dive into book writing on this topic. What made you decide to do that?

Janit: I think it was because of my quest of trying to find information for myself, when I first started the researching for the hobby. What I did back in 2000-2001, was scour the internet. Back then, the internet was scourable in one sitting. I was able to search all the library systems, and I picked up every book that had miniature or gardening in the title or in the description. It wasn't until a couple of years later, maybe 2003-2004, where I actually stumbled upon Anne Ashbury and her miniature garden books. That's the kind of gardening that I do, the realistic gardening in miniature.

Anne Ashbury's book was 1951, and then she had a couple of other books after that. But they never really boiled it right down to the very essence of what you needed. I'm not sure if you've perused old books like that, but they kind of ramble on. They're kind of vague. She was growing a lot of stuff that we don't grow indoors. Like she was growing her hinoki cypresses indoors and her junipers. I don't know how she did it, but she did it. They're not indoor plants, so I just wanted to clarify some things and also kind of gather what I've learned. I realized that when I started my blog that I can write, and I do have a voice. So I was really tickled when Timber Press found me just as I was looking for a publisher to publish the first book. It was kind of a synergistic kind of thing.

Then I'm actually delighted that they wanted to actually pursue the gardening in miniature hobby because it really validated the whole idea in being a serious hobby, serious way to garden even though people can see it as kind of trite at times. It's not. You're actually gardening. You're actually-

Theresa: Yeah. You are gardening. Absolutely.

Janit: You are gardening.

Theresa: Yeah. I'm so glad that it was Timber Press too because any of the listeners who may not know, Timber Press is a very well-respected publisher. They publish the real high-end thinking and design books as well as the how-to books. So the fact that they were interested in this is fantastic. And you are the go-to person, as far as I'm concerned, for doing this sort of thing and learning from you. The book is excellent. You go through so much, which we're going to talk about some of that stuff in today's podcast, but you really do dive into a lot of detail. More detail than I thought you would until I had that book in my hands, and I was like, wow this is so good.

It was kind of the book I wish I had when I was doing the train garden because there's a lot that you have to think about in the way you design. It wasn't until I was actually out there and trying to garden in miniature, that I realized it was

the same thing that I had done in my front yard, but just I had to think smaller. You did a very good job with the book.

Janit: Get your fork out, do some raking.

Theresa: Yeah.

Janit: Use a spoon as a shovel, bend at the knuckles. You know.

Theresa: Exactly. Exactly. I think one of the things that was always fun for me, whenever I go to the Northwest Flower and Garden Show, and you have a display up, where you've done several different tiny gardens, and they're out on display. There's always a crowd, and I think one of the reasons, from my perspective as just a fan of yours, is that every garden that I've ever seen you do tells a story. I'm assuming that's very intentional.

Janit: For me actually, when I design a garden, the garden kind of designs itself. There's very few gardens where I've actually gone at it with a deliberate intention or a theme. Most of the time the trigger's the idea, or the pot triggers the idea. I think that's part of the fun of it, is to kind of bury a story in there. So not only plunk down a bird bath, but maybe hide a little squirrel in the shrubbery and create some mess around him, so it looks like he's been munching away at something. You know? Just some sort of action or some sort of little mess or something just to tell the viewer that something's happening or something happened.

Theresa: Yes. It's so realistic because there's always something in there that catches your eye, maybe something hidden in the bushes or towards the back. There'll be leaves underneath the tree, garden gloves laying out, or boots, and one of the boots is tipped over as if someone had just dropped off their boots and had gone in the house. Very, very cool that you do that.

Let's talk a little bit about some of the things that we can do if we want to get into this. I know one of the things that's really important is picking the container, if you're going to do this in a container rather than actually in the garden, which is probably what you recommend. Right? To start maybe with a container? What kind of containers would we want to use?

Janit: I've seen miniature gardens done in a variety of containers, and people have actually used like old drawers or suitcases for them as well. My thing is that these gardens can stay together for years, like years. There was one garden that I had together for 10 years, and I finally pulled it apart to find out what was going on underneath the soil. Why wasn't my conifer complaining that it needed re-potting. Then when I pulled it apart, my dwarf spruce did not need re-potting at all.

So when I tell people when they pick a container, pick one that you like. Invest in a decent container because the garden's going to be with you for maybe ... It can be with you for up to 12 years, so invest in something that you like, something that will last. If you are going to do a miniature garden in any sort of recycled container like a drawer or suitcase, just know that you're going to be probably taking apart the garden in a couple of years because the drawer's going to fall apart or the suitcase is going to fall apart.

Theresa: Right. That's a really good point.

Theresa: Although it's really charming, you have to realize you're going to have to redo it sooner.

Janit: Yeah because it is a garden. It's going to grow, and you're going to have to get in there and switch out the bedding plants or the ground covers and prune up the little tree. But the thing is that when the trees have all that time to settle in and grow some wood, the trunks thicken. The branches thicken, and it starts to begin to look like a real tree in miniature. That's after several years of being grown in a container. So if you keep disturbing the tree every two or three years, you're just going to slow down that growth. The tree will still grow, but if you want it to get there faster, I would pick a nice, nice container and just leave the garden intact.

Then it is a garden, so it does require you to come in and swap out the ground covers because the ground covers follow the same full-sized rules. The first year they sleep. The second year they creep, third year they leave. So every three years, you're probably going to have to swap out the ground covers and just try something new.

And every three year's you're probably gonna want to try something new, just like your full-size garden. You don't just plant your garden and walk away. You're pruning it. You're swapping out plants. You're getting some seasonal plants in there every four months or so, and you're gardening. And that's what a miniature garden is, so don't expect it to stay miniature. It'll grow slow, but it still needs you to garden with it.

Theresa: Got it.

Janit: Yeah.

Theresa: What about a drainage hole. They should drainage holes, correct? You have to be careful otherwise.

Janit: Yeah, definitely. I have heard of people that don't use drainage holes, but then it's just so tricky because you might forget that you water it, or your spouse might water it. Then you go and water it. There's just no room for the excess

water if you mess up, or if it gets stuck in the rain, and you forget to pull it in. It just makes it that much easier to have a drainage hole.

Theresa: Sure, okay.

Janit: The other thing you want to do is put a piece of screen mesh or a piece of landscape cloth over the drainage hole. That'll keep the soil in the pot for a longer amount of time because the garden's going to stay together for years. So by covering the drainage hole with the mesh, the soil level on the top of the pot won't sink because it sinks gradually.

Theresa: Perfect. Yeah.

Janit: If you don't do it, you'll get kind of a sinkhole in your miniature garden.

Theresa: Yeah, we don't want that.

Janit: Which is kind of eventful in itself.

Theresa: Yeah. That's not what we're going for there. Yeah. Okay. That's a really good point. No, I like that. One of the other things I wanted to talk about that I love, that I learned about from you, was how to do pathways. You have some wonderful ways of doing paths where they're actually like mortared in, and I bought one of your kits years and years ago. My kids and I just had such a blast. We basically made a cobblestone pathway in one of our miniature gardens, and it was so easy to do, and a pathway can make such a difference.

Of course, people could just use pebbles, but making the pathway so it looks permanent is one of the things that makes it look so real. Could you talk about different ways that people can do pathways in these miniature gardens?

Janit: Sure. I find the pathway is one of the three components that really cinched the miniature scale, because we stand on the pathways. We know what size they're supposed to be, so when we see it in miniature, our brain immediately translates the size into miniature. And you get that, "Ah! Isn't that cute!", kind of response. My mini patio mix kit, it's different than any sort of cement or grout based product in the fact that it goes together dry. So you do have time to create a mosaic path, to kind of a border around with pebbles, then maybe something different happening in the middle. Then you brush in the mini patio mix, and then just mist it to activate the cement. So it goes together dry, so you have all that time to get crafty with it.

Theresa: Yeah, I have to say that was what was so brilliant because if you do it any other way, first of all, it doesn't have the right texture if you use something like you just use regular mortar. The other thing is that this gave us a chance to lay it out and re-lay it out until we had it just the way we wanted. And you have little

edgers that we put in that bend, so that we had a curved path. We could bend it any way we wanted. It was almost like if you were laying out your hose in your real garden and figuring out where you wanted the pathway. We could play with it a little bit til we had it just the way we wanted.

That was so great because then you put in the powder. Then we just took a spray bottle and sprayed it on, and then it hardened up. It just took a few days for it to be really, really hard before we touched anything. But it was so easy.

Janit: It's very, very fun. It's one of the joys of creating the whole garden is actually laying your own path. It's something that you can't do in full size. You can't just whip out a path.

Theresa: No. I wish we could.

Janit: I wish I could too. So yes. It's empowering. It's satisfying.

Theresa: Yes.

Janit: Very satisfying. Yeah.

Theresa: Yeah. Okay, great. Just so everybody knows, you do sell those little kits on your website, so I'll have a link in the show notes for that if someone's like, "Oh I totally want to do that. Where do I find the kit?" We'll have a link for that, and I'm not saying that because it's a sales pitch. I really thought it was the most brilliant thing because it was so easy, and it was so fun. It took my little display garden that we were creating to this whole new level.

I guess we should talk a little bit about scale while we're at here, when you mention scale and how it's like a trick of the eye when you see that path. When we are designing a garden, how do we go about picking things, so that we're at the proper scale?

Janit: When you're designing a garden in-ground, I normally advise to keep to the bigger scales because if it's in-ground, you're already five to six feet away from seeing the garden because you're standing up and viewing it from a standing up position. The bigger scales are more visible in the in-ground garden. In containers, my kind of rule is maybe about 10 inches. If it's bigger than 10 inches, get the one-inch scale or the large size accessories. If it's less than 10 inches, get the medium-scale or half-inch scale accessories. What happens is if you put a big accessory in a small pot, it just looks too clunky, and it doesn't fit within the stage setting.

Theresa: Right.

Janit: And if you have too many small things in a big pot, it tends to look too sketchy,

too splayed out. Yeah.

Theresa: Okay, and you're talking about like when we're either looking in a store, the scale, or if we were ordering online like on your website or someplace else. Just like with the train gardens, they kind of give you a scale of what that is.

Janit: Yeah.

Theresa: Okay.

Janit: The trick is that it doesn't matter what scale you choose, just make sure that all of your accessories match. There's a lot of accessories that we're seeing out in the craft stores, JoAnn's, Michael's, and Hobby Lobby, and there's not much attention paid to the scale of these accessories. So if you're out there choosing those kind of accessories, just make sure that the accessories match each other in scale.

Theresa: Okay. Good point.

Janit: In my store, I have all the accessories broken down into the sizes, so you can stay within that department and get all your accessories to match, same scale.

Theresa: Yeah. That makes a world of difference. It really does because if you have one thing off, the whole thing looks off. One of the things I do, when my kids and I were doing this, is we kind of sat back, and then we looked through you know like if you take your hand and you try to make it look like a telescope. We would look through the telescope of our hands at the garden and imagine ourselves in it. That was something my kids and I did when we were creating it, and that would help us like, "Well we want to put this flower pot over here, or this plant over here." When we did that, we could always tell when something was kind of out of whack. It just didn't fit. Sometimes just you have to go with your gut if you're not sure.

Janit: Yeah. That's a good idea.

Theresa: Yeah. Where would we find miniature plants? I was lucky enough that my local nursery had quite a few miniature plants, things that had small leaves that we could use in our gardens. Is that typically what you find, that people can find it at their local nursery?

Janit: There's a lot of independent garden centers now that have a fairy garden section, but some of the nursery owners haven't quite grasped the idea of a miniature garden plant. When I kind of set up the whole hobby and brought it to the marketplace, I just chose plants from the nursery. They were called alpine plants, small leaf ground covers, slow growing rockery plants, miniature and dwarf conifers. Those terms are what the nursery people are familiar with.

When you go into a nursery, and you can see that they're not kind of getting it, ask for alpine, rockery, ground covers, and miniature and dwarf plants. That's the language they speak. If you ask for a miniature garden plant, they're going to bring you to the fairy garden section.

Theresa: Yeah.

Janit: In fact, they sell the four-inch potted herbs as fairy garden plants, but they're herbs. They're going to explode and grow. They're meant to be eaten, so by the end of the season they're going to be 18 by 18 inches wide and tall. They're not going to stay small and grow slow. I found that if you translate for the nursery owner or the nursery person when you go into your local nursery, just make sure you speak their language so to speak.

Theresa: Yeah, that's a really good tip because their eyes kind of glaze over if you say that. At least now, they maybe, because this is becoming more and more popular, you know you might get lucky, and they do kind of understand what you're talking about. But chances are, and I know five-six years ago, they would not understand what I was talking about at all. That's really good information.

Janit: Then in our Two Green Thumbs Miniature Garden Center store, we actually try to carry the best and widest selection of miniature trees, plants, and shrubs ever, at all time.

Theresa: Great.

Janit: Yeah.

Theresa: So people can order online.

Janit: Yes, and we understand you, if you come to us.

Theresa: Yeah, and that's really helpful if you're looking for something specific. Like I need a tall plant that fits in with this scale that's going to go right here. You can help them with that, so that's really important. Yeah.

Janit: Yeah, and to match it to your zone because that's one of my pet peeves, is that some of these garden centers will sell you anything, especially if you go to the Home Depot garden center. They don't really care, it seems, about right plant, right place. But that's why we have a whole section in our online store where we categorize all the plants by zone to make sure that you get the plants that are great for your zone. That just makes gardening easy.

Theresa: Yes. Absolutely. That's really good. That takes a lot of the weight off our shoulders. Okay, one of the things I think we should probably say here is, what is a good place for people to begin. If we are just getting started, so now we

have a container idea, we kind of know where we can head to get plants. What's the first thing that we should do when we want to start planting this garden or creating a garden?

Janit: I think the first thing is to choose where the garden will live because a miniature garden can be any size, any shape, in-ground, inside, outdoors, in a pot, in a large pot. To narrow down the variables, decide where you want your miniature garden to live. On the back deck in the corner, do you want it in-ground by the front door? And then go after your plants and choose the plants to suit that spot. That will narrow down your choices tremendously, and you'll be able to find a way in to deciding your tree and your shrub and your budding plants.

Then just design it like a full-size garden. If you stop to consider a full-size garden, you already have elements in the garden that you start with, like a big tree, or a garden shed. Then you design your garden from there, from the elements that can't be moved. That's how you design your full-size gardens, or starting point, or one of the starting points designing a full-size garden. But because you're designing your own little world from scratch in a miniature garden, you've gotta decide on your anchor point, which is usually a tree in my books.

If you wanted to get into your miniature houses, then it would be a miniature house. Then start designing from there and layer it down like a full-size garden. Mix up your textures, match your colors and compliment your colors, it ticks all the boxes of your full-size garden design rules.

Theresa: Okay. What's the difference then between an anchor point and a focal point? Because I think people get confused about that, and you explain that really well in your book.

Janit: The anchor point is basically what anchors the garden. In the full-size garden, your anchor point would be the garden shed or that big tree that can't be moved. It's immovable, but with a miniature garden, it would be a tree. That's what I start with is a tree or a shrub, and then I'm layering down from there.

Then the focal point is the birdbath or the bench or the squirrel on the birdbath. Then with the miniature garden, it's the focal point. It's that man-made element. It's that accessory that cinches the scale. And you only need one accessory to tell the scale, so you can keep it really simple and just do a shrub with some ground covers, a nice patio, and a birdbath, and you've got yourself a sweet little scene that doesn't cost a lot. It's a great way to start into the hobby, and you can watch it grow together. Go to work on Monday morning and go, "Yeah. I worked in my garden this weekend. I just raked it all out too. Took about a minute."

Theresa: And boy am I tired.

- Janit: Boy am I tired. Where is my cup of coffee?
- Theresa: That is really funny. Yeah, and the thing is when you do this, if you have it sitting on your coffee table, if it's an indoor one. Or you know I had ours on our front porch for a long time. It's such a conversation piece. People just are so endeared to seeing this and looking at it and studying it. It is actually kind of fun to go work in the garden with your fork or with your spoon or little tiny tweezers. You can even get those bonsai clippers. Those work really well.
- Janit: Yeah. It's a lot of fun, and it really takes you away. It grounds you. It takes you away from your troubles. You cannot be in a bad mood and work in a miniature garden.
- Theresa: No.
- Janit: It's physically impossible.
- Theresa: That's true. That's really good. Once we've created this garden, are there any special tips you would give for how we care for it? Are we supposed to be careful with feeding it, so it doesn't take off too fast? Or anything like that?
- Janit: That's a great question, Theresa. What I have found is that there's enough nutrients in fresh potting soil, and get just plain organic potting soil. Don't use any potting soil with extra fertilizers, nor those water retaining polymers. Save that for your heavy feeders like your annuals and your vegetables. Just use plain potting soil, and if needed add some extra perlite or vermiculite for drainage because you know that pot's going to stay together for years.
- So there's enough nutrients in the potting soil for the garden for the first two or three years. Then after that just apply it like a mild fertilizer maybe in the beginning of the spring and maybe in the middle. Just lightly because again, you don't want your plants growing too fast.
- Then after a couple of years, maybe two or three times a year, I stick a rod into the pot, and aerate the soil because the soil becomes compacted over time. So I poke holes in the whole root ball going right down to the bottom of the pot just to introduce some more air into the potting soil. I don't know if you've noticed, over time, the top layer of your potting soil gets a bit crusty.
- Theresa: Yes.
- Janit: Then when you water, it redirects the water to the outside of the pot. Just get your fork out, and just mix up that crusty layer and break it up so when you water, the water can go straight down to the roots.

Theresa: That's right. Mine does do that. That's true. Okay, that's really good. I love that. If you have kids, I also highly recommend that you decorate it for the seasons. That was the really fun things for my kids. We looked everywhere for Halloween decorations, and you were the only one who had little gravestones. And you had like little pumpkins and things like that, that I got when we were at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show. Oh my gosh. They had so much fun with all of the little decorating things that they could do with it, so definitely something if you have children.

But you don't have to have kids, and it's even something that is very therapeutic. If you have someone who is going to be house-bound for a while, or who is house-bound, this is a great way for a gardener to continue gardening. You just recently did something where I saw on your blog, where you guys created a therapy garden. It was in a big metal tub.

Janit: Yes, we're just starting to get into community outreach through our Miniature Garden Society, and this was our first project, we were still very excited about it. It's at the old soldiers home down here in Orting, Washington just south of Seattle, and our mission was to spark joy. We connected with a big garden club that's in the area, and they got the trough together. We brought the plants, and we had a big planting party.

The guys just love it, and we went back to decorate it for July 4th, and to check up on the garden. And Gus, who's now the guardian of the garden, he comes wheeling out and goes, "Get your hands off the garden. Get out of the garden." So he didn't quite know who we were. Every time we go back to care for it, we meet someone new, which is very fun. They love it. They love it. They love making sure that the guests don't play with it, like the kids that come to visit. So they've got something to do, and also something to take their imaginations away.

When we got there, there was an empty chair right in front of it, so someone obviously kind of camped out there and just kind of sat there watching the garden. So it was very sweet.

Theresa: Yeah. I'll have to link to that post because it was a really great garden. I loved how you guys had done it in this big metal trough, and it was a little high up, so that if someone's in a wheelchair, they could still enjoy it, and it was really charming. I love that. And it is, it's one of those you kind of go get taken away into that world, and it does use our creativity and our imagination. Yet, we're still getting to garden and use all of the design elements. It's a lot easier, like I said, than doing something on a large scale. You can experiment, and if you don't like something it's a lot easier to tear out and move it, so that's always good.

I just love that you came on the show today Janit and talked about this. This was

really fun, and I hope that everybody is kind of inspired to try it. I will have in the show notes, links to everything about you and your books and all of the things that they can get and learn from you. I just wanted to say thanks so much for coming on today. It was really fun.

Janit: Not a problem. Thank you Theresa. Anytime you want to talk about miniature gardening, you know where to find me. Thank you for helping to spread the joy of miniature gardening.

Theresa: Thanks, I'm happy to.

Wasn't that a fun interview? I thought that would just be kind of whimsical to talk about. It's kind of off the path of our usual talking about vegetables or cooking with your food, but it's also really fun. I think having some balance so that you can have a way to de-stress, and just doing something purely for the fun of it is a great idea.

So remember, everything that we talked about in the show is in the show notes for this episode. You just go to livinghomegrown.com/112, and I'll have everything there for you including a coupon code that Janit has offered to all of you. She has been generous enough to include for the next 30 days a 20% discount, so just go to the show notes. You can find out all about that, if you're interested in starting your own miniature garden at home.

Thanks so much everybody. Until next time, just try to be a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of The Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit livinghomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on The Living Homegrown Podcast.