



Live farm fresh without the farm®

Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 120 Natural Household Cleaners

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/120

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast episode 120.

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: Hello 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, and that can mean preserving, small space food growing or just taking simple steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. All the different ways that we can live closer to our food and live more organically, even if we have little or no garden space at all. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics or my online courses or even my membership, just visit LivingHomegrown.com.

Today we're gonna be talking about something that probably doesn't sound very exciting. We're gonna be talking about making your own household cleaning products. Now, before you walk away and go, "Ew, I don't wanna talk about that," there's some really important information in this episode. I brought on a friend of mine, Pam Farley of BrownThumbMama.com, and what we dive into in this episode is how easy it is to make really natural cleaning products that work like gangbusters, smell fantastic and eliminate the worry about the chemicals and products that you might be buying in the store to do the same jobs.

It's a super important topic and I thought it was very timely because we do have the holidays coming up. Here in the United States we have Thanksgiving, we have Christmas. There's all the holidays that come up in December for everybody, and New Year's, so you may be having people visit or you may have relatives coming from out of town. You're probably gonna be cleaning your house, and what better way to do it and what better way to show that you care than to do it without a lot of chemicals.

I love making my own household cleaners. There's just a few things that I use,

but Pam has actually taken this to a whole new level, because she really has taken with her blog, gone out and done experimenting on what works and what doesn't, she's done side by side comparisons and she came on today to share some of the recipes that she has on her website that really work. Pam has been blogging for a long time. She lives up in Sacramento, so she's a fellow Californian, and let me tell you just a little bit about her blog and what it is that she does.

Pam lives by the motto, "Make it, don't buy it," and she lives by this motto every single day as the founder of BrownThumbMama.com. Now, this website is dedicated to healthy living, natural eating and attempted gardening, and she explains that in the interview today. She's a former corporate writer and she ditched the cubicle in 2015 to do this blogging gig and this writing gig and now she spends her time working from home with her family, growing vegetables in her front yard, teaching about essential oils and avoiding housework. She has a book out called "Essential Oil Diffuser Recipes: 100 of the Best Aromatherapy Blends for the Home, Health and Family," and that book has actually become quite popular. It's the number one release on Amazon for green housekeeping and it was a 2016 Reader's Favorite from Reader's Favorite Book Reviews, so it has shot out of the gates as soon as she got it out there, and that's really no surprise, because she is very knowledgeable and you'll see in the interview, she's a really good teacher as well.

In this interview, we're gonna talk about what sort of ingredients you have inside your home that you would be able to use as a natural cleaner, things that we already have in our kitchens, and she's gonna show us how to make an all-purpose cleaner, a natural spray air freshener, and she's gonna give us some laundry tips for how we can have fresh smelling laundry, which might come in handy when we have house guests over the next couple months. As always, you can get everything that we talk about in the show notes for this episode, including a printout of some of Pam's recipes for making household cleaners, so if you'd like that PDF or you'd like more information on Pam, her website and what she does, everything will be in the show notes, and to get to that, you just go to LivingHomegrown.com/120, and that will take you to the show notes and you can get everything right there. So, without further ado, let me share my interview with Pam Farley of Brown Thumb Mama.

Hey Pam, thanks so much for coming on the show today.

Pam: Thanks for having me, this is great.

Theresa: This is a really good topic for this time of year. I was telling my husband this morning what the topic was that, "Oh, we're gonna talk about household cleaners," and he just gave me this look, but he doesn't understand that I just don't like having the chemicals and I know you don't either, and so being able to make some of these things ourselves, I think, will make a big difference and I

think this is the perfect time to talk about it with the holidays coming up, because chances are we'll be cleaning our house, so thanks for coming on.

Pam: Exactly.

Theresa: Yeah. Before we dive into that, really, I guess I'd love for you to tell everybody a little bit about your blog, Brown Thumb Mama.

Pam: Well, the reason I called it Brown Thumb Mama is because I'm not a very good gardener, so I don't have a green thumb, but I don't have a black thumb. I'm kinda in the middle and I do my best. I attempt to do gardening. I started my blog in 2009 when I found that a lot of the other ladies at my office job would ask me, "How do you do such and such?" And, "How do you make your own cleaners?" And "How do you bake your own bread?" I thought, well, gosh, if these ladies would like this information, maybe other people could benefit from it, so that was, gosh, what, eight years ago now and here we are.

Theresa: Yeah, and you cover a lot of topics, not just gardening. Like you said, you cover cooking and cleaning and really being a mom, but you have the same angle that my listeners are interested in, which is trying to be natural, trying to be organic and trying to do things the right way for the Earth, so all the things that I know my listeners love, so this is really good. Of all the things that you cover on your blog, what do you think are your most popular topics?

Pam: The number one most popular post is "How to dry and use lemon peel."

Theresa: Really?

Pam: Yes, so you could make your own soft scrub with dry lemon peel, you can actually use it to make a face scrub, like a sugar scrub. You can add it in there, and of course you can add it to your baking. Sugar cookies with a little bit of dried lemon peel, like powdered dried lemon peel, oh my gosh. Super awesome.

Theresa: That sounds really good. That sounds so good. That's fantastic. Okay, well I know you started doing a lot of your own household cleaners, so what made you decide to want to make something that we could go in and buy in the store? I think I know the reason because it's the same reason I like to do it, but I'd love for you to tell everybody why do you like to make your own household cleaners or why did you start?

Pam: Well, when I started, my kids were little and the cleaners that you buy in the store, if you've ever tried to clean your shower and you end up coughing and your lungs are burning and it made me realize that I don't ... When they're little, of course they always want to help and I would never have wanted them to help wipe down anything with those really strong chemical cleaners, so I started trying different combinations and mixing different things together because if

your two year old is using a mixture of vinegar and water and they accidentally lick the wall or whatever it is that two year olds do ...

Theresa: Accidentally.

Pam: Accidentally, right, then it's not going to hurt them. I mean, it'll taste funny, but it's not like if they were licking some chemical cleaner or got it in their eye or something like that, so I wanted the kids to be able to help. It of course saves tons and tons of money when you use natural cleaners, and then if you run out, again, with two little kids, I didn't want to go run to the store on a Saturday afternoon when half the county was there also, but I can just whip up another batch right in my kitchen.

Theresa: Yes. I hadn't even thought of that aspect, but absolutely. So, you did a lot of experimenting? Because I've been following you for years and years. We've known each other for a long time, and I know that you do a lot of experimenting where you test it out to see which is the best combination, so when you're doing the experimenting, then you've found that you could also make it smell good, and that's where you really got my attention, because you use a lot of essential oils in what you create ...

Pam: Yes.

Theresa: ... So could you talk a little bit about that aspect as well?

Pam: I had just been ... I just thought essential oils were for fragrance. I didn't realize the pure, highest quality essential oils have chemical components in them that were used as medicine way, way back since the beginning of history, because they're made from plants, and I didn't realize that they had aspects in them that could be used to help clean, they can be used to help disinfect. That was just a major ah-ha for me, especially if I'm cleaning with something that has vinegar in it and my husband would say, "Why does the kitchen smell like a salad?" Oh goodness, you know?

A few drops of a specific essential oil can help disinfect, it can help just give it a fresh smell, so it's been an amazing addition to help my cleaners cut grease, to smell better, to work better, to kill germs. It's an important booster.

Theresa: Yes, that's a good way to look at it. It's an important booster, and I think a lot of people think of how lavender is very relaxing, like when I do bath products or even when I'm out cutting lavender in my garden, it is very relaxing and people know that it's known for that, but I think you really hit the nail on the head, that people don't realize that there are some anti-bacterial aspects to certain oils, and so just adding those in kind of gives it an extra umph which is so fantastic and so that's what I loved about ... You would put side by side things that you had created and things that you had purchased, and shown how the cleaners

that you were coming up with work just as well, if not better, way better, and that was like, "Oh wow, this is really good, because then you've done it for us. You've done some of the guess work for us."

Let's talk, before we dive into the other ingredients, let's talk a little bit more about the essential oils, because I do feel it's super important that people understand the difference between an essential oil and a fragrance oil and I've covered this on my podcast before when I've been talking about maybe a potpourri or a bath product, but there is a big difference between something that is natural and something that's synthetic and they kinda need to understand that before they try to use these.

Pam: Absolutely. The kind of oils that you get at the craft store, like in the candle aisle or the soap aisle, those are fragrance oils or they're synthetic, made in a laboratory, and these are usually used in lotions or perfume, candles and soap. There is a grade that's a little higher than that, and that's food grade, so when you get, like, lemon cake mix or orange cake mix at the grocery store, those have food grade oils in them. Then there's another grade that's higher than that, which is therapeutic grade essential oils, and those are the oils that can be used as medicine, so when you see those oils. Typically those oils are not gonna be at the grocery store because their price point is a little higher because they're super pure and they even will have the FDA label on them that says that they can be ingested, and that's a topic that needs further discussion and you should not ingested oils ever willy-nilly.

Theresa: That's not even like don't experiment with that.

Pam: No, no, that should only be done in consultation with an expert, but if you notice that a lot of times the essential oils at the health food store or the grocery store will say, "Not for internal use" right on them, well anything that you put on your skin is going to go into your body, so just like we're concerned with not having super toxic hand lotions or all the weird things that are in shampoo and cleaners and stuff like that, you don't wanna put anything into your body that might have pesticides or contaminants or synthetics. I always recommend that you use only the highest quality therapeutic grade oils, even if you're just going to be adding a drop or two to your cleaners, because you just don't want to take any chances. You want to use the best stuff so everybody stays safe.

Theresa: Yes, yes, and it's so even more important when you're making a lotion or a bath product, like you said ...

Pam: Absolutely.

Theresa: ... Because you're going to soak that up into your skin. The reason I thought that was really important to cover is because I get the question all the time about,

well, how come this oil is so expensive? That's why, because it's a higher quality oil. It's almost like anything, even olive oil, you can buy the really inexpensive olive oil in the stores. It's not really oil that you want to buy, you want to buy the really expensive olive oil if you really want the olive oil flavor and the qualities of the olive oil, so it's the same thing when you're using essential oils, and essential oils come from the plants.

They're not synthetic in any way, and sometimes the reason one is really expensive, and this is just something that I've learned from my own research, is because sometimes it's hard to extract that oil for that particular thing, and so because it takes so much extra effort, it is expensive. Just so everyone understands, if something's out of your price range, then maybe there's a different oil that you could substitute, correct?

Pam: There is almost always another oil you can substitute because just like you had a headache, you could take an aspirin or you could take acetaminophen or you could take Advil. The chemical properties overlap. The same is true in nature. There are different oils that can be used for the same application.

Theresa: Okay, perfect, good. Alright, so I think that's really good. Everyone understands that, so if they're really got their heart set on a certain fragrance and it's a little out of their price range, they could always try to find a different therapeutic level oil to substitute. I know you have a lot of information on your website which I'll have in the show notes I'll be linking to, so if anyone wants to learn more about that, we will have information in the show notes for this episode, but also, there's so many ingredients that we probably already have in our kitchen that we can use for making these products, so let's talk about some of those.

Pam: Yeah.

Theresa: What are some of the things, like I know vinegar is a big one that you use a lot.

Pam: Vinegar is super ... It's probably what your grandma cleaned with. Vinegar, baking soda and something that's really neat is you can ... Vinegar, when it dries, it doesn't have a smell, but when you're spraying it, it smells like vinegar. Something that I've started doing that the kids get a kick out of it and it makes the vinegar smell good, is after I peel any citrus, I peel an orange, peel a lemon, limes, whatever, just take the peel and put the peel in a mason jar and pour the vinegar over top of it, let it soak for a week if you've got the time, shake it up a little bit, strain the peels out and then you've got citrus vinegar, which smells awesome and the citrus has a little extra grease cutting boost, so that's a great way to get an extra use out of your citrus peels and make your cleaning vinegar smell a lot better.

Theresa: Ah, that's so good. That's a really good tip. I saw you had a post on that. You can

just have it sitting on your counter so you remember to clean, but ...

Pam: Exactly.

Theresa: It's such a great way to use that up and then you can still take those peels and throw them in your compost. You haven't done anything to them that would hurt your garden being in your compost pile, so you can still recycle them.

Pam: Correct.

Theresa: You get the oil out of them and the fragrance, that's fantastic. There's another thing that you use a lot, which this was information I did not know, because I always, when I was making some of my cleaning products, I would always use Castile soap, and you use something different, and you even had post about how much better it was. It was doctor ... What is it?

Pam: Dr. Brunner's Sal Suds.

Theresa: Yeah, so talk about that.

Pam: Sal Suds is, because I had been using Castile soap for ages, and there's a difference between soap and detergent. Soap is natural, it's often made with lye. Detergent is synthetic and so naturally you would think, "Oh my gosh, you can't use something that's synthetic. That's against everything that you are talking about on your blog," however I actually talked with the folks at Dr. Brunners about this. When you mix the vinegar with soap, with the Castile soap, the vinegar wants to turn the soap into curds, like cheese curds, because it's called saponification. You won't have a cleaner anymore, you'll have a spray bottle full of random gunk, and you'll wonder what went wrong and you'll be very frustrated and go back to the store and start buying stinky chemical stuff again. The Sal Suds, because it's a detergent, it mixes with the vinegar, the essential oil and water, and it does not gunk up. It doesn't saponify.

Theresa: That's so good. The other problem, I guess, is if it's gunking up, it can clog up your sprayer, if you don't use it all right away and it sits there, and so this prevents that. Where do you get Dr. Brunners Sal Suds? Is that something we order online? Do you have links on your website for that?

Pam: Yes, you can order it online. We have it here at the natural food co-op, in the health food stores. It's a big part of their product line. It was just something that I didn't know about until I had the gunk problem and emailed them and said, "Hey, what's going on?" They said, "Oh yeah, well, here, try this instead."

Theresa: Ah, that's really good. Yeah, so that can make a big difference, I'm sure. Fantastic. Is there any other ingredients that we typically have in our kitchen that you tend to use a lot?

- Pam: The biggest ones are baking soda and vinegar, and then a little elbow grease in the right combination and you're ready to go.
- Theresa: Fantastic. Okay, well, I know you said you would be happy to share some of your recipes with us, so I'd love to have you tell everyone about your all-purpose cleaner, because I think that's probably the one that we would be using as we're getting ready for Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's over the next couple months.
- Pam: Yes.
- Theresa: How would we go about making something like that?
- Pam: Absolutely, all-purpose cleaner is going to be great for things like kitchen counters, for your wiping down the fridge, little hands can help wipe down ... My little one likes to wipe off light switches and doorknobs because everybody touches those with dirty hands but we don't think to wash them.
- Theresa: Good point, yeah.
- Pam: Because this uses vinegar, if you have marble countertops or cultured stone, you're not gonna wanna use it because those are porous and they can soak up. There's special cleaners for those countertops, and if you have those countertops, you know, but just in case, so for all-purpose cleaner, you'll get an empty spray bottle. You can either get those at the store or you can use an empty Bragg's apple cider vinegar bottle. Those are exactly the right size. You want a 16 ounce spray bottle, which is two cups, and in that you'll put half a cup of white vinegar. Don't use your good apple cider vinegar, just use plain white vinegar. One teaspoon of Sal Suds. You'll only need a little tiny bit of detergent to make this. It's amazing, and then 15 drops of melaleuca essential oil.
- You can also substitute different combinations, but melaleuca is really great. Melaleuca is an oil you might already know as tea tree, and melaleuca has a lot of really great antibacterial properties. It's great for cleaning and it smells yummy. Then you fill the bottle up the rest of the way with water, give it a little swoosh to swirl everything around and start spritzing.
- Theresa: That's fantastic. Yeah, you even had a picture, I think it was your oven.
- Pam: My stove hood.
- Theresa: Your stove, yes, your stove hood, and you know how ... I know at our house, that can get really greasy and yucky, especially when we first moved into this place. Oh my gosh, it was really gross and you were able to spray that and you did it ... I think you put that up against just the Castile soap. I don't remember

what the other side was.

- Pam: I did a side by side, yeah, and showed how the all-purpose cleaner cut through the gunk.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Pam: Yep, I hope my mom doesn't read that post. She would be so horrified to see my dirty stove hood.
- Theresa: It totally worked. It totally worked.
- Pam: It did.
- Theresa: Yeah, but that's one of those places that you don't really pay attention to and the dust gets stuck in there and then it's just, oh ...
- Pam: Yeah I don't see it.
- Theresa: No, I'm short too. I totally understand, but it works. It really works, and I love that you include tea tree oil because that is something that is ... People hear about that all the time and it is a really wonderful oil to use for things like this, especially if someone's sick in the house, because I know it does really help with that, keeping the germs down.
- Pam: Yes.
- Theresa: Fantastic, well that's a pretty easy one, so we just keep it in the spray bottle and shake it up maybe before we use it and that's it?
- Pam: Exactly, and it will last just as long as the chemical stuff because it doesn't have anything in it that would spoil.
- Theresa: Great, and if we wanted to, could we substitute the plain white vinegar for the citrus vinegar?
- Pam: Absolutely.
- Theresa: Okay, okay, cool. Alright, and then you have this other recipe that I love, this, like an air freshener spray, which would be another one that we'd probably want to use around the holidays when people are coming over. Can you tell us about that one?
- Pam: Exactly. I found out that there is a lot of chemicals in the store bought air fresheners that we don't know about, and that's because there is a Federal Hazardous Substances Act that says that the manufacturers don't have to list all

of the ingredients in those air freshener sprays because that would give their secrets away and then there would be ... That would prevent healthy competition.

Theresa: That's actually very scary.

Pam: It is, and that's a whole other discussion, but I do not want to spray mystery stuff around ... At the time I had an infant and a little one, and, no, I'm just not gonna spray that stuff in the air, so I started trying different combinations. There's different stuff online about, "Oh, mix up some fabric softener and spray that in the air with water," but fabric softener has weird stuff in it too, so I actually got down to just the basics and it's so easy to make your own air freshener spray that's safe around kids and it's safe around pets and you can mix up any combination of fragrance that you like by using essential oils.

This is super easy. You're gonna use your 16 ounce spray bottle. In this case you will use two cups of distilled water. The difference between distilled water and tap water is, if you remember from chemistry class, distilled water is the stuff that, when it boils, it turns to steam and it rises up and it goes through a little squiggly thing, so it's absolutely pure and it doesn't have any of the stuff that might be in our water that's treated by the water treatment plant.

Theresa: Right, like the chlorine and things like that are not in the steam. Okay, got it.

Pam: Yes, exactly. Yes, so you're gonna use distilled water and then you're gonna use a tablespoon of baking soda. You'll put that in the spray bottle and then you'll add 10 drops of essential oil, so you can add a single oil, you can add a combination of oils. One of the, around the holiday time, you might want to put in wild orange and cinnamon and clove because then it would smell like spiced cider ...

Theresa: Love that.

Pam: Yeah, there's so many yummy combinations, or maybe some cinnamon and white fur to smell like a Christmas tree. There's all different combinations that you can use. Maybe you just have some lemon essential oil, it'll give you a nice, bright, fresh smell.

Theresa: I love that. What I'm thinking here when I'm looking at the ingredients, so, the baking soda probably helps remove the smell and then the essential oil puts in a new fragrance.

Pam: Correct.

Theresa: Yeah. Okay.

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- Pam: Just like we put baking soda in the fridge to ... A little dish of baking soda in the fridge to take out the smells.
- Theresa: Yes, and there's nothing in there that I would be upset about. The thing you said about the ingredients list, I had seen that post on your blog as well and that was a little upsetting when I saw that, and sure enough, I went and grabbed one of my sprays that I had in the back of the cupboard and I actually don't really use it but it was something that we bought, I think, when we first got our house. I looked on the ingredients and it was very generic sounding. It didn't sound scary at all, but then I'm like, "But it doesn't really say what it was."
- Pam: Yeah, it'll say something like "water, alcohol, odor eliminator derived from corn and fragrance."
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Pam: Well, that doesn't really say anything.
- Theresa: Yes, yes.
- Pam: Yeah, a little unnerving.
- Theresa: Yes, and I'm gonna link to that post on your blog because you go through some of the chemicals that could be in there and that are probably in there and they're a little scary, so I think it's good for people to know.
- Pam: You can make your own air freshener spray for, what, 25 cents?
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Pam: 50 cents at the outside, and it's gonna cost you three dollars, easy, to buy the brand name stuff at the store.
- Theresa: Oh, absolutely, and if you wanted to and it wasn't the holidays, you could put in lavender and that would be a great one for in the bedroom and bathroom because it would be very fresh and relaxing smelling. Oh my gosh, there's like a million possibilities for this, so I think it's a great, great thing to have on hand and so easy to make.
- Pam: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Theresa: We can go to the 99 cent store and get a bunch of those spray bottles and have different fragrances.
- Pam: Yes you can. We do.

Theresa: Yeah, that's great. Alright, so the other thing that we were gonna talk about was laundry, and we have kids.

Pam: Dun-dun-dun.

Theresa: Yeah, dun-dun-dun. Not our favorite thing to do, but we both have kids and I was talking to you earlier about how my kids, my boys, my teenage boys play soccer, so I'm always looking for ways to try and get those sports smells out of their soccer clothes and their soccer socks.

Pam: Oh, yes.

Theresa: You have some good ones for that, so what can we do with our laundry?

Pam: On those extremely rare occasions when you forget a load in the washer and it sits there for an extra day and it starts to smell funky or sometimes the soccer clothes or the towels or even after you wash them, they've still kinda got the gunk or your towels are not drying well anymore because they're just full of who knows what, there's a little natural secret that you can use that will kind of get the gunk and the buildup off, and that is to first of all take half of the load out of the washer.

We're only gonna fill up the washer half full so that everything has room to wiggle around and get nice and clean and rinsed off. Use the hottest water that your laundry can handle, and this is gonna depend on what you're washing and if it's delicate and things like that, but for towels, towels can handle the hottest water your heater can cook up. Put in one cup of white vinegar, either in the fabric softener dispenser, or put it in the rinse cycle, and a cup of baking soda. Just sprinkle that baking soda all over the clothes, right there in the washer. Turn on the washer and let it go until it gets all the way filled up but before it starts to agitate, and turn it off and let it soak. If it can soak for a half an hour, that's great. Don't forget it again. Put a timer on your phone.

Theresa: Yeah.

Pam: Then after that half an hour after it's soaked and soaked in the baking soda water, turn it back on because then when the rinse cycle comes, the white vinegar will hit the baking soda water and if your kids have ever made that volcano experiment, you know that you get a reaction with bubbles and foam and even more chemical agitation and it helps strip all the gunk out of your laundry.

Theresa: Really, really good. Okay, very, very nice. By doing this, we're kind of stripping out that icky, awful smell and the vinegar combination is like the magic that helps make that happen.

Pam: Yes, exactly.

Theresa: Ah, that's really good. Well, I just can't thank you enough, Pam, for coming on. This has been so great.

Pam: Thanks for having me.

Theresa: Oh yeah, this is really good. I think everyone's gonna really enjoy trying to make some of these themselves because they're so easy. This is the perfect time to be doing this, and to start getting rid of those chemicals that we might have sitting under our sink or in our cupboard where we have our cleaning supplies. I'm gonna share ... All the information that we've talked about will be in the show notes for this episode and links to your website and everything, so I just can't thank you enough for coming on. Thank you.

Pam: Thank you.

Theresa: I hope you enjoyed my interview with Pam Farley of Brown Thumb Mama. As always, I have everything that we talked about in the show notes for today's episode, including a PDF printable download that you can get of some of Pam's household cleaning recipes. To get to that and all the other information, just go to the show notes at LivingHomeGrown.com/120. With that, just try to live a little more local, seasonal and homegrown. Take care.

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