
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 121

Tips for a Farm Fresh Thanksgiving

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/121

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast episode 121.

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. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host Theresa Loe, and this is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm. That can mean preserving, small space food growing, and just taking really simple steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. All the different ways that we can live closer to our food even if we have little or no garden space at all. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics that I talk about on the podcast, or you want to learn more about my online courses, or my membership site then just visit LivingHomegrown.com.

Today's episode is all about having a farm fresh Thanksgiving, and by farm fresh it's not just the food, but also the whole experience, and the ambience that you can create for any kind of Thanksgiving event you might have coming up this month. Now, if you don't live in the United States, and you're not celebrating Thanksgiving with us in the month of November that's totally fine. You can still use these ideas for any kind of fall or winter party that you might be having over the next few months. These are just some really simple ways that you can kind of bump up the experience a little bit for your guests, or some ideas of what you can bring if you are a guest at someone else's party.

I'm going to be about an idea of something that you can bring as a guests, as a hostess gift for someone that would be absolutely delicious, I'm also going to talk about some really simple inexpensive decorations that you can create that will add fragrance, and charm to any kind of a fall table, and I'm also going to talk about what you can do with your guests, or your family at Thanksgiving or any fall party that can make the whole event a lot more meaningful for everybody. Let me just dive right in. The reason I wanted to do this episode is I have written about creating fall tables for many, many years in the past. I wanted to just pull together some of the most popular ideas that I've shared in

articles, or in interviews in the past, and I really feel that there's something special when you connect your Thanksgiving traditions with nature, and with the outdoors.

A lot of this is about bringing the outdoors in during the holidays, and the reason I think this is so important is number one the season is shifting, and so we're going to be starting to spend a lot less time outside. Though, I kind of feel like celebrating the seasons is just as important as celebrating the food. Also, having natural elements on your table or in your decorations they're just so beautiful, and it just kind of keeps the traditions that you might be doing with your family more grounded. There will be less commercialism if you have a lot more natural elements in your decorations.

The other thing is all of this is free. Everything that I'm going to be talking about that you can do for your decorations, it's all free, makes it very inexpensive, and it's something fun to do when you have kids, and absolutely some of these decorations can be very fragrant, and I love adding fragrance to the table because it kind of gets everyone's appetites going for the food that you might be enjoying. It just lets you enjoy your garden, and share your garden with the guests that you might have in your home. Even if your garden is going dormant there is still so much beauty outside even if the temperatures have changed, and things are starting to look a little sparse there's still a lot of beauty out there in the outdoors outside your home, and I want you to bring that inside. That's what I'm trying to encourage you to do.

I'm talking about things like fall colored leaves, and berries that you might have outside, twigs, and pods that you can bring inside, and even evergreen branches. Cedar, and pine, or if you have any herbs like rosemary, or sage. They can all be used in your decorations, and in a celebration of Thanksgiving, and also of the season. I personally love to include herbs whenever I can in my decorations, and I use a lot of rosemary and sage when I'm decorating for both Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and New Year's. But if you don't have herbs just remember you can always substitute any kind of fragrant evergreen like cedar or pine, whatever you might have in your particular area.

But before I talk about the fragrant decorations, I first wanted to share an idea that I've done with my own family that's kind of fun, and I'm actually bringing it back this year. We didn't do it the last couple of years and I want to bring it back, but it's a really fun tradition that was very meaningful to my kids when they were younger, and I think it's even more meaningful as an adult. The tradition that I'm talking about is having a Giving Thanks Tree somewhere in your home when you're having your Thanks Giving events. What this is, is a tree that you create out of a branch or twig that you've collected from outside, and you have it set up either as a centerpiece of your table, or on the buffet table, or somewhere in your home, and you encourage everybody to write notes of what they're thankful for, for that particular year on a manila tag, or those price tags,

or shipping tags, that's what we've used in the past.

Or you can do a decorated color leaf. There's a lot of things you can do, but you have them write it on some sort of paper, and they tie it to the tree. By the end of your celebration you have this tree that's decorated with everybody's things that they're thankful for, and I also include a lot of quotes, and things on the tree, and I collect those, and I save them in an envelope, and it's kind of fun to look back especially when you have a lot of children at the event, and you can pull these out in future years, and look at what they were thankful for. They might've been thankful for their Legos, or something really silly, and it's kind of fun to look back on that.

Here's how you create a Giving Thanks Tree, and it's ... First of all, super simple. These are the things that you need. First of all, you need some sort of tag or paper that you're going to use. I've used the manila tags, the ones with the strings before. I like to decorate them, I'll put a stamp maybe of a leaf, or an acorn or something on them. Or you could use a paper punch, and it could be a punch of a leaf, different maple leaves, and you could punch that out of colored construction paper, and punch a hole in it so people can tie them onto the tree. Or you can just go the craft store, and they already have a lot of pre-cute leaves, and tags in different fall colors. You usually find them in the scrap book section, and those are already made for you, and for a couple of bucks you can just buy a pack that's already done.

The second thing you're going to need are some colored pens or markers, and that's just for people to write. I think it's really fun if everyone can pick a color. The kids get really into this by the way. I'll definitely have different colors. Then you need some sort of a branch. I go out, and hike around, and find a branch that is going to be kind of sturdy, has some sturdy branches coming off of it, and then you just want to cut it to the right height for either your table, or your buffet table, wherever you're going to have it. Then I use a large flowerpot or a container, and I fill that container with floral foam. Now, floral foam is the green stuff that you use when you're making flower arrangements. You don't need it wet it down, you actually want to just keep it dry, and you fill the flowerpot with that, and then you press the branch right down into the center, and the floral foam will hold it up right.

I leave about two inches around the top rim of that flowerpot or container, and I add pebbles to the top, and that's just to cover the floral foam, but also to give a little extra weight so that the branch won't tip over. You don't want to make the branch too tall or it'll kind of be tippy, and I like to use river rock. That's what I use, but you could use any kind of stone, and then you can cover it with moss if you want. You can lay some moss on top of the stone. I actually like the way the stone looks, so I leave the stone just the way it is. Then you just set this out wherever you're going to have it on your buffet table, and I already pre-write a couple of quotes that are maybe inspiring quotes, or maybe I'll add my

own personal things that I'm thankful for, and I add them to the tree first so that nobody feels like they have to go first. You already have something there, and everybody really enjoys reading what other people are thankful for.

As guests arrive or they're coming in the door you can have them do this first, so that by the end of the event you have a tree filled with what everybody is thankful for. Now, if you don't have a big event and you just have your family doing Thanksgiving, then you could just make this as part of the tradition. It could be something that you do before desert, something really simple like that. But I'm telling you that kids really do enjoy doing it, and I got a real kick out of what some of the kids wrote that they were thankful for, and some of them were really touching. I think it's something that's a nice thing to add, and also to bring back what we're there for that we're all really being thankful, and that is really what the event is all about aside from the fantastic pie, and everything else.

This is a really fun thing to try with your family. You might want to try that as a fun tradition. Super easy to do. Now, another thing that I love to do on any holiday table is, like I said, incorporate herbs or things that are fragrant into the table setting, and there's a lot of different ways that you can do this. I'm just going to run through a couple of different ideas here. One of my favorite ways is to add edible leaves or flowers around each dinner plate. The leaves can be place directly on the table cloth with the plate in the center, or they could be laid on top of a charger plate with the dinner plate on top. A charger plate is just that larger plate that you might see in some table settings where you have a really large plate, and then a smaller plate on top of that. The charger plate is the one on the bottom.

You can lay the leaves or the flowers on the charger plate, and then you have your dinner plate on top, and it's absolutely gorgeous, and it's so, so easy. You just want to choose plants that lay flat, and it won't look too wilted after several hours sitting out of water. Some of the things that I use are bay leaves, hyssop, nasturtiums, which actually do still ... Are still growing for us here in Southern California, but may not be in your area, rosemary ... If you're doing this on any other time of year you could use things like rose petals, sage, scented geranium, or thyme. Now, thyme, rosemary, and sage work really well because they do not wilt as they're sitting around the plate.

Now, if you want to, you can also include tree leaves like maple, or you could have some sprigs of pine, or Cyprus, or even some berries. But what's most important, and this is really important, you want to make that whatever plant material you are placing on your table is not poisonous, and is pesticide free. This is really important. You don't want to put any berries, or anything on the table that people won't ... You don't want them to get confused and think that it's edible. Make sure whatever you put on the table is edible especially if you're going to have children. Make sure that everything is pesticide free, and there's

nothing on your table that's poisonous. That's one of the reasons why I really like to use herbs, and edible flowers when I'm decorating my tables.

Now, another thing that you can do is to have a little mini bouquet of herbs tucked into a folded napkin. It's super nice, it looks beautiful, and it's a nice memento for your guests to take home. Now, if you're doing a really large party this probably wouldn't be practical, but this is a great thing to do if you only have 6 to 10 or 12 people coming you can make little tiny bouquets, and I usually do little herbal bouquets, and I tie them with rubber bands, and I keep them in water until just before we're going to sit down to eat. Then all you do is you dry off each little bouquet really quickly, and tuck it into the napkin just before everyone sits down, and it's really lovely especially when they're fragrant. It's a very easy thing to do.

Another thing that you can do is to tie sprigs of some sort of herb, or a little piece of pine onto the wine glasses that you're going to be using. I like to use rosemary for this. I'll tie little sprigs of rosemary onto the stem of the wineglasses with ribbon or raffia, and this is actually a great thing to do for New Year's, or Christmas as well. Don't forget to add some herbs, or some sort of edible flowers if you have them to any kind of buffet table or hors d'oeuvres table, anything like that, that you have going. If you have any rosemary, or evergreen herbs in your garden at this time of year, cut a few sprigs, and lay them around just to add some greenery, and to kind of spruce up whatever it is you have on the buffet table. Just that little touch can make such a big difference.

Now, if you're serving other beverages like maybe some sort of mixed drink you can make little herbal stir sticks for your guest drinks. Now, again this is not something I would do if I was having a really large party because it gets a little too fussy for when you're doing a really big crowd, but if you have a very small intimate gathering, or you just have one other couple coming over for dinner, well this can be a really nice thing to do. What you do is you can take some little straws, and you can get some herbs like rosemary, and you just remove the foliage on the bottom half of a two inch sprig of something like parsley, thyme, or rosemary, and you stuff just two or three little bare ends of the herbs into the top of the straw.

Now, that's it. It's really simple. You make these ahead, I keep them all in a little cup in the refrigerators so they stay cool, and then as we make drinks for people you can add the little straw to their drink, and it's a little stir stick with herbs sticking out of the top, and it adds fragrance, and it's charming, and looks really cute. You can use different colored straws, they have all different colored straws now available that could match your party. If you were doing this at Christmas you could use green or red straws, something like that.

Lastly, if you are doing a sit down dinner where everybody is going to be sitting

down at the table, not so much a buffet where people are kind of finding a place to sit, but if they're actually sitting at a table you can do some really simple botanicals for a guest name tag so that everybody knows where to sit. This was something that we always did ... I always did as a child, and I did with my kids, and they love doing this ahead of time, and helping you figure out where everybody is going to sit. One of the things that I do is I will take leaves like bay leaves, or maple leaves, and I will use a gold or silver pen, and I will write the guest names right on the leaf. You can use a paint pen for this, and it works really well.

Another option is to write on acorns. Now, acorns a little tough if you have someone with really long names, but you could also do initials if you wanted to. When the kids help me do this when they were younger, we would make all of the name tags ahead of time. You could do this a week ahead of time, or the weekend before your event, and then on the day of when you're setting your table the kids can help you run around, and place each one of these little leaves or acorns on the plate, or right next to the glass for the person. It's really cute, and it's so easy, and inexpensive. That's another option that you can do. If you want, if you have very large maple leaves, and they are fairly flat, you can use these on the buffet table as well for writing out what each thing is like, "This is grandma's cranberry sauce," or whatever. It's another option too.

The main thing is that I just want to encourage you to think outside the box, and walk around your garden, or in your area when you go for a walk, and look for twigs, and branches, and evergreens that you can bring in, and use in your table decorations. I think most people do think of, "Well, I'll pumpkins, and squash, and I'll have pine cones, and evergreens," but I'm talking about using other things like seed pods, and berries, and fallen leaves in your decorations.

Okay, now what if you're not giving the party, but you are a guest at someone else's party? Well, I want to encourage you to bring something as a hostess gift that would kind of wow the person. Whenever someone is putting on a Thanksgiving party or any holiday party, I always really have to tip my hat to them because it's a lot of work to put on a party, especially at the holidays when everybody is kind of hustling, and bustling already. It kind of takes up the stress level a little bit higher. I really have to tip my hat to anyone who does it, and I always want to bring them something really, really special. I may bake some zucchini bread with some frozen zucchini that I had in the freezer, or some pumpkin bread, or some persimmon bread, and bring that. But one thing that is kind of nice that's a very special, special gift that you can bring is cranberry sauce with balsamic.

First of all, balsamic vinegar adds this little unique tang to the sweet component in any jam, and it really takes this cranberry sauce, and brings it over the top. When someone tastes this they always go, "Whoa, this is so good," and it's really the balsamic vinegar that adds that special something to this recipe. The

reason I think it makes such a fantastic hostess gift is because it is so good on Thanksgiving after turkey sandwiches. The next day when you make sandwiches with the left overs, oh my gosh it is killer on the sandwiches. Usually, when you go to someone's Thanksgiving dinner, the hostess has already made her cranberry sauce. You don't want her to feel like she has to serve this cranberry sauce. What I do is I bring it in a jar, and I tell her that it is special for her to use after Thanksgiving on those turkey sandwiches. Or she can just store the cranberry sauce on the shelf, and use it later whenever she wants to.

But the important thing is to make sure she knows she doesn't need to use it on the Thanksgiving table because she probably already has her cranberry sauce already planned out for the meal. Don't want to upset the cart there, and make her think she has to add yours to the table. It's actually for her special to use later. Always make that really clear. The second thing is that cranberry sauce is essentially a jam. What you're making here is something ... It's fruit, and sugar, and some spices, and that's essentially a jam, but it's a no pectin jam because cranberries, they're packed with their own pectin, so it makes it super easy to make this recipe, and it's kind of fool proof. In fact, it's a great starter jam if you've never made jam before.

But lastly, the last point I wanted to make about my cranberry balsamic recipe is that it's a small batch recipe. That means that you can make it with just one bag of cranberries, and it makes two half pint jars, which is perfect. One for you to keep, and one for you to give away. Or you can horde them both and keep them just for yourself. That's totally fine too. But I think you'll get a lot of benefit out of making this jam especially if you've never made cranberry sauce or jam before because it's so, so easy. Let me tell you, there is nothing like homemade cranberry sauce. It doesn't taste anything like what you get in a can. It has incredible flavor. Once you've made homemade cranberry sauce once, you'll never go back to canned cranberry sauce.

I will have a recipe for this cranberry sauce with balsamic in the show notes for this episode. To get that, you just go to LivingHomegrown.com/121. Alright. Another thing that you could bring as a hostess gift, or you could make for your own event is a pumpkin ginger cheesecake. Now, this is a little outside the realm of what I usually talk about on this podcast where I talk about canning, or preserving the harvest, this is just my own personal recipe that I developed. I developed it years, and years ago right after I got out of cooking school, and it's one of my absolute favorite, favorite recipes, and it's a pumpkin ginger cheesecake using ginger snaps as the crust, it's to die for. I only make it on special occasions because it's like 50 thousand billion calories, but it's so, so good.

At the holidays we all splurge, we go off the rails a little bit, and if you that too you might be interested in this recipe. I'm going to include that recipe also with the show notes just because I wanted to give you a little something extra



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special. Again, you just go to LivingHomegrown.com/121, and I will have both the balsamic cranberry sauce recipe, and the pumpkin ginger cheesecake recipe for you. I hope you enjoyed those ideas. I just wanted to give you a little inspiration, some new ideas for how you might want to spruce up your Thanksgiving table this year. Simple, simple things that can make a very ordinary table look extraordinary. Until next time, I hope you have a fantastic Thanksgiving holiday, and just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and home grown. 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.