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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 126 Sourdough Starter And Heirloom Flour

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/126](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/126)

- Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast Episode 126.
- 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: Well, today's episode is a very special treat. I know you guys are going to love my guest Sarah Owens, and the reason I know is because she is one of us. She is someone who gardens and bakes and ferments, and she has a really deep understanding about the connection with our food. I just love her to pieces. I had never met her. I've never met her in person, but I'm a huge fan of her books. I wanted to have her on specifically to talk about her latest book and to talk about sourdough.
- That's what we're talking about today. Sarah is the author of two of my most favorite books. The first one is *Sourdough: Recipes for Rustic Fermented Breads, Sweets, Savories, and More*. Her latest book, which just came out is called *Toast and Jam: Modern Recipes for Rustic Baked Goods and Sweet and Savory Spreads*.
- Now, what we dive into here is we mostly talk about sourdough and how you make sourdough, the advantages or benefits of sourdough. We kind of dive deep into sourdough and what you learn here is not only her methods and techniques, but also you're gonna learn about heirloom grains, stone-milled flour, and we talk about some of the spreads or jams that are in her toast and jam book, specifically an onion jam that just sounds amazing.
- Now, if you've never had onion jam, it is like a sweet and savory combination, and her recipe just sounds really, really great. The cool thing is that you don't water bath this. It's something that you make and keep in the refrigerator, so you don't even have to do any canning to make and enjoy this.
- As always, I will have in the show notes everything that we talk about. I will link to Sarah's website, her books, I'll even list some of her mail order

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resources for some of the heirloom grains that we talk about, and there will be a printable, downloadable PDF of the onion jam recipe that she shares with us today.

You can just print that out. You don't have to write anything down. You can just print it out and use it when you're ready. To get to the show notes, you just go to [livinghomegrown.com/126](http://livinghomegrown.com/126).

Let me tell you a little bit more about Sarah, because I think when you hear her background, you'll understand why I know you're gonna love her. Sarah is a baker and gardener with a thirst for travel and a hunger for creativity in the kitchen. She grew up in Clinton, Tennessee, and after receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Ceramics, she went on to receive a certificate from the New York Botanical Gardens School of Professional Horticulture, and she spent six years as the curator of the historic rose garden at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden.

She is also the owner of BK17 Bakery, which is a subscription, artisan micro bakery that began in Brooklyn, New York. I have her go into exactly what that means, so if you're thinking to yourself, "What is a subscription bakery," well, she dives into that. It's kinda like CSA, but I'll let her explain.

Now, her book Sourdough has won the James Beard award, and it's no doubt when you look at the book why, because she really dives into not only how to make sourdough, but why it works and why she does certain things with certain recipes. It's really a fascinating read.

She also teaches workshops on natural leavening, fermenting, and horticulture worldwide. Her latest book, Toast and Jam, dives into a lot more than just sourdough. She has all different types of bread recipes in here, and then she goes into the jams and spreads that can go with these breads, and the recipes are so creative.

I know you're gonna love her. She's a wealth of information. She really understands the connection between us and our food. I think you'll enjoy this conversation. With that, let's dive into the conversation with Sarah Owens, the author of Toast and Jam, and Sourdough.

Hey Sarah. Thanks so much for comin' on the show today.

Sarah: Thank you so much for having me, Theresa.

Theresa: Yeah, I'm super excited about this because I am a big fan. I have your sourdough book and your toast and jam book, and we're gonna really dive into the Toast and Jam, 'cause that's the latest and greatest. I guess before we dive into the book and everything that you've been doing with that, I'd

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love for you to tell everybody a little bit of a background as to how you got into baking and what it is that you're doing right now.

- Sarah: Sure. Absolutely. I actually came into baking sort of from a health perspective, which a lot of people don't always anticipate me saying. Several years ago back in 2009 I started having some pretty severe digestive issues, and it really made me sort of slow down and take a very fine look at what I was doing in terms of my health regimen.
- I think that I was living this life that I thought was really healthy. I was eating a lot of gluten-free foods because I thought that gluten was sort of exacerbating my symptoms, but I think what ended up happening was I was eating a lot of very, very refined, very processed foods that were sort of marketed as being healthy, which were really making my digestive issues a lot more severe than they probably should have been. I think it was in combination with a lot of other lifestyle factors: high stress, not getting enough sleep, but all of these things together sort of made me slow down and take a closer look at how I was living my life.
- I ended up doing sort of an elimination diet and came to realize that a lot of grain, not just wheat, were giving me very severe issues. I started thinking about ways that we traditionally incorporate grain into our diet before we had these more modern takes on processing, and that led me to fermentation.
- Not just fermentation of grain, of wheat, but also of other grains as well. Then sort of taking a closer look at what are the things within these grains that give us more difficulty digesting them, particularly if we have compromised immune systems or other digestive disorders, which is what I ended up having.
- I sort of started taking this roundabout look at how to bake and started baking with sourdough as a solution to these digestive problems, and that just snowballed into a small business, which was my side business at the time. I was working full time at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden and I was finding that there were a lot of other people such as myself having the same issues, but didn't want to give up bread. That's how I started getting into the business of baking.
- Theresa: Wow. Yes, you've said so many things, hit on so many things that I think are so key for a lot of my listeners and a lot of the people who follow this podcast. The whole processed food, a lot of times people do think that they're eating healthy, but when you just walk into a typical grocery store, and even if you're buying something whole wheat, it is still highly processed,

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- Sarah: Right.
- Theresa: And what you're talking about here is working with really high quality flour and creating a fermented bread with sourdough.
- Sarah: Yes. Exactly.
- Theresa: Explain to everybody what makes sourdough so magical when it comes to our gut or our health.
- Sarah: Yeah, there's a lot of mystery and intrigue behind sourdough, and I think a lot of people find it very mysterious to think about, but actually, it's really just water and flour, and when those two things are combined together, it catalyzes this whole process of enzyme activation within the flour which allows the starches to become available as food to the microbes that are naturally occurring or living all around us, particularly on the flour itself.
- That is why it's so important to use really good quality flour, and what I mean "good quality flour," I'm referring to something that's stone-milled. There's the process behind how the grain becomes flour and then also where the grain itself comes from. How it's planted, how it's raised; whether it's organic or not. And also how it's harvested. Then how it gets from the field to the mill to the shelf or the bin that you're buying it from.
- There's a lot of things in between that I don't think we typically consider when we are buying flour. We're used to thinking about vegetables or fruit or produce in a way that we question where it comes from or we question how it's raised, but I'm not quite sure if we really fully understand that whole process behind how grain becomes flour in order to empower ourselves to make good decisions.
- Theresa: Ah. That's so key right there what you just said, but I think what you're really talking about here is us understanding or following the whole story behind our food, like really knowing where our food comes from. We talk a lot on the show about locally sourced, and you're talking about more than that. You're talking about really from the seed in the ground all the way through, and how each part of that can affect what we end up putting in our bodies and how it affects our bodies, though I know you're really into the heirloom stone-milled flours, and while we talk today I would love to talk to you a little bit more about that.
- Before we dive into that, there was something you said that I wanna go back on, and it was when you said "even how it's harvested." How is harvesting making a difference?
- Sarah: I think what a lot of people don't realize is that when something is grown

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organically, it means that there are no pesticides, no fertilizers, but also, traditionally, when wheat or lots of other seed crops are harvested, if they're not organic, than they're blanket-treated with Roundup or another weed killer before they're harvested in order to make sure that other seeds don't get into and sort of taint the crop.

What ends up happening in a nonorganic grain situation is that the whole field is sprayed with Roundup and then it's harvested, so essentially you're buying a whole load of Roundup, or glyphosate, that has been shown through studies to be residual. I think for a long time we assumed that it wasn't, and now are seeing the connection between glyphosate or Roundup and these other weed killers to some pretty serious health problems, including cancer.

I think there's a lot of things around this sort of traditional, conventional processing that we don't fully understand how it affects our health, but we can see the correlation, and correlation is not always causation, but we are seeing the correlation between these highly processed, very pesticide-ridden flours and digestive disease, as well as immune deficiencies.

I just always recommend to people, if you can, buy organic absolutely. That should be a no-brainer. But also to purchase flour that is stone-milled, and this is another part of the process that I think we don't quite understand the difference between something that is bought from the supermarket that sits on the shelf that is shelf-stable for up to one year, and a product that is stone-milled that is highly perishable but much better for us, and it also has much better flavor.

Theresa: It absolutely has better flavor. I agree with you there. But I think you are correct. Most people don't really even know what the term "stone-milled" means, because it's not something that typically when you walk into a grocery store, you're going to see "stone-milled" on the shelf. These really have to come almost from artisan food mills that some of 'em do mail order. I do have one near me here in Los Angeles that does small batching of stone-milled, heirloom flour, but that's not something that everyone can always find. What is exactly stone mill flour? What do you mean by that?

Sarah: It actually refers to the physical process of taking the grain and crushing it into flour. With the more industrial flours, they go through something called a roller mill, and I'm gonna really extremely simplify this, but it's basically two sort of rollers and the grain passes through those two rollers.

The bran and also the germ are sort of cast off to the side, and in the case of something called whole wheat flour, the germ is actually left out, but the bran is often remilled to make it finer and then added back into the starchier part. That's sort of packaged and promoted as "whole wheat," but

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it's actually not even close because we don't have the most important part, which is the germ.

The germ is very volatile, so as soon as it becomes milled and oxidized or exposed to air, then it begins to go rancid, much like if you were buying nuts or seeds. It's really important to keep nuts in a cool, dry place so they don't go rancid. It's the same with the germ oils in the grain.

With roller milling, the germ is left out of the flour so that the flour can be shelf-stable for up to one year, and with stone milling the process is different. The process actually includes the germ oil naturally in the flour. With stone milling, you have two stones. One sits as stable on the bottom and the other moves on the top and the grain passes through, and out comes all of the different parts of the grain: the germ, the endosperm, and the bran.

Now, in the case of stone milling, you can sift out the bran if you want a less coarse flour, and remill it or just leave it out completely, but you're always gonna get the germ oils. The germ oils, that's where our flavor lies ... That's where a lot of our nutritional benefits lie ... But it's really, really important if you're buying this very precious flour that's been stone-milled with the germ to store it properly.

I think that that, a lot of people that I've taught classes to that are of an older generation come to me and they say, "Oh, we went through this whole thing in the '70s, where we were buying really bad flour because we didn't understand how to store it properly or how it should be kept on the shelf." That's something that I really try to get across to people is buy the stone-milled flour for its nutritional and flavor benefits, but make sure you store it in the refrigerator or in the freezer. Seal it up tightly before you use it, and when you are ready to use it, just make sure you bring it out of the freezer or the fridge and let it come to room temperature before you mix your dough.

- Theresa: Ah. I'm so glad you talked about that. That was my next question, 'cause I've always stored it in the freezer, and I was thinking, "Uh-oh. I better make sure that was the proper thing to do."
- Sarah: Yeah, no. It's perfect. It's really great. I recommend people do that with their nuts and their seeds as well.
- Theresa: Yeah. Fantastic. This is so important because it's a world of difference, and I never realized what a world of difference it was until I got ahold of some heirloom stone-milled flour. I actually went and visited somebody who had a mill by them, and I brought it home in my suitcase. It just wasn't something I could just run down the street and get, and oh my gosh. It was

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crazy good. Crazy, crazy good.

That's one of the reasons why I'm so excited about your books, because you are really doing a wonderful job of educating people, but also instantly giving them a way to use these flours to make their bread. You have fantastic instruction in both the books.

One of the things I did want to ask you is I know that you have a bakery, BK17 Bakery, and I think I read that it's like a subscription micro bakery, and I wanted to ask you what exactly that is.

Sarah: It's a business concept that's a little bit out-of-the-box. Basically, I started the business when I was working full time at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, and that was back in 2010. I wanted to do something that didn't involve a brick and mortar or a retail location. Something that I knew that one or two days a week would be devoted to producing bread for my community, and that I would have a very direct relationship so that I would eliminate waste that I might have by going to like a farmers market, that sort of thing.

I actually approached my local CSA, my community-supported agriculture share system, and I asked them if they would be interested in having a bread share. They were fantastic, and I actually credit them with the whole career that I have now as a bread baker.

Theresa: Wow.

Sarah: Because they took the chance and they had me over one day. It was a couple who had started the CSA many years before. It was one of the first CSAs in Brooklyn. They had me over, and I brought a whole array of different breads that I was working on at the time, including a buckwheat bread, and if you've tasted buckwheat, it has a rather strong, earthy flavor.

I sat down with them and their, at the time, six-year-old son, and I thought, "Oh, gosh. This isn't gonna go very well, 'cause my breads are really crusty and chewy." The buckwheat had this really strong flavor, and we're sitting around and we're tasting them all. The little boy chimes in. He says, "The buckwheat is my favorite!" Then he goes into this whole spiel about the different flavor notes and profiles.

Theresa: No way!

Sarah: First of all, I thought "Oh, gosh. Only in Brooklyn." but it was the beginning of this beautiful relationship where I think that because this family understood the relationships between our food and the farmers and the systems of getting it from the farm to a more urban location, they really

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wanted to encourage that with bread and with grain as well.

I was at the time really still discovering what was available to me in New York and throughout the East Coast in terms of grain and flour, and was really wanting to make a more dedicated sort of effort at promoting and growing those relationships with the millers and farmers here in the Northeast. They were all for it, and that's kind of how I started the business as a subscription. The members of the CSA would sort of pay it forward, just like you would with a ... I called it a CSB, a community-supported bakery, but-

Theresa: Oh, I love it. That's good, yeah.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. They would pay for a month or two months at a time, and every week I would deliver X amount of loaves to the pickup location. I found that that's been a really great way to stay small and to really control the quality of the bread that I make while still having a direct relationship with my community, which is I think one of the most important parts of what I do as a baker.

Then out of that grew the ability to teach classes and offer other types of baked goods, including other naturally leavened cakes and cookies and breads and things that are also in both of my books, Sourdough and Toast and Jam. As I've moved from Brooklyn to Queens to a community near the beach, which is great, that's also shifted the way that I reach my community, because every community's very different, and the urban nature of Brooklyn, where there's a lot more that's available to anybody, is very different than where I live in Queens, which is I would argue kind of a food desert.

The way I've sort of reached out to my community here is quite different and is still evolving, but it's really fascinating, especially as I also travel to promote books or teach workshops, to hear how other people have done similar things to me in terms of starting a CSB or just pop-up events. I think it's a great way to get really good bread into the hands of your neighbors.

Theresa: Yeah. What a great way to build the community, but also to introduce people to unusual grains and unusual breads that they would probably never attempt to make themselves, because they wouldn't even realize the value until they've tasted it. Really, it's one of those things you just have to taste. Man.

Sarah: Yeah. It's true.

Theresa: I wish you lived near me. I would love to be part of that. Man.

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- Sarah: Aww.
- Theresa: That's so awesome. Well, that's really good. I'm so thrilled with what you're doing, 'cause that is just really exciting, and then on top of that, your Sourdough book is something that I recommend it all the time if someone is interested in sourdough, because you really explain what's going on, not just "Here's a recipe," and you explain what's going on and why and why you make the choices that you make, so that book is fantastic if someone's just interested in sourdough.
- But I was very excited about your new book, Toast and Jam, which the subtitle is "Modern Recipes for Rustic Bread Goods and Sweet and Savory Spreads." What I loved is that now you've brought in my other passion, which are preserves and spreads, and you've melded the two in this book. What made you decide that you wanted to make the second book?
- Sarah: Well, I love to cook and I love to be inspired by the seasons, which includes lots of different, delicious produce both vegetables and fruits. Creatively, in the kitchen I love to do things besides baking, but also, I eat a lot of bread by itself with just really good cultured butter. But bread is so wonderful if you can pair it with something else that has the same amount of effort and attention to ingredients.
- It made sense to me to write a book that included some companions to these delicious breads or baked goods, so there's bread, there's also crackers. There is flatbreads, there's a muffin recipe. There is olive oil loaves. There's lots of different things that are sort of meant to be companions to the rest of the book.
- I really tried to use what inspires me, so that includes a lot of traditional foods but also a lot of foraged ingredients that may or may not be available to everyone. I like to sort of be able to provide an excuse for people to become a little more connected to their environment, so not just getting their produce from the grocery store, but encouraging people to go to the market, but also just to get outside and to see what's growing around you each season and what's available to you. 'Cause I think a lot of these foraged foods also have a higher nutritional profile than a lot of the things that we are seeing now that have been highly domesticated, regardless of whether they're organically grown or not.
- There's lots of different recipes. A little bit for everybody.
- Theresa: Yeah, I absolutely agree with that, and I love your flavor combinations. You have really unusual flavor combinations.
- Well, one thing I noticed that you had in the book, which caught me by

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surprise, was you have a very ... In the sourdough book, you have a very unusual way ... Well, it was unusual to me, but it worked great ... Unusual way of started your sourdough where you even use raisins for starting the sourdough. But in the Toast and Jam, you went very basic, which is the flour and the water. I wanted to ask you about why you have the two different approaches in the two different books.

Sarah: Okay. This may not be a super-simplified answer, but as you pointed out, I do like to explain sort of the theory or the process behind something so that you can understand how to make decisions for yourself as opposed to just following a recipe.

Sourdough, if we think about what it is, it's basically flour and water and then we're using those two things to culture microbes. In terms of the microbes, we have both wild yeast in the case of sourdough, but also bacteria, and I think a lot of people don't quite realize that it's both of those microbes that we're culturing in a sourdough starter.

Now, with the case of the starter recipe in the book Sourdough, it uses what I refer to as a yeast water to get your sourdough culture going, and basically what that means is using raisins or the yeast that's naturally occurring on the raisins to sort of inoculate your flour. Now, there's already yeast that's on the flour itself, but the benefit of using a yeast water is it's much more vigorous, particularly in the beginning stages of creating that starter. As a beginning sourdough baker myself, I found that very, very encouraging.

It is an extra step, and it does produce a sourdough starter that's a little sweeter because you have the sugar that's naturally occurring from the raisins but you also use a little bit of sugar and honey to get it going.

Theresa: That's probably why I liked it so much. It was sweeter.

Sarah: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. It functions, it works just like any other starter will, but it has just a little bit of a different character.

However, all you need is flour and water, and when you combine that together, you sort of catalyze the process of fermentation, and after a few days you will start to smell fermentation, and you'll also start to see it in the form of these bubbles that are breaking the surface of the flour that's been mixed with the water. Once you see that, really all you have to keep doing is feeding the starter with more flour and more water, and I give the proportions for that in Toast and Jam, because you have to make sure that you're giving enough flour and water to keep the culture going.

It takes a little while. It takes about a week. Sometimes for other people, if

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you have a cold kitchen it can take a little bit longer, especially in the winter, but it takes about a week for that culture to kind of stabilize. You have to remember again it's a symbiotic relationship between yeast and bacteria, and they kind of have to figure out their relationship to each other. It takes a little bit of time for that to happen, but once you get it going, after about a week, a week and a half, then you have this culture that as long as you keep feeding it flour and water, will perpetuate itself for as long as you feed it.

It's really this kind of amazing thing. It doesn't require a lot of work to maintain. I think a lot of people expect ...

I keep my starter in the refrigerator. I also bake quite often, but I keep it in the refrigerator. If I'm gonna make leaven at night, I pull it out in the morning and I feed it and make the leaven at night, and then I make the dough the next day. I think once you get into kind of a rhythm, you realize that sourdough has a lot of flexibility and you can change that according to what your particular schedule is.

That's what I try to teach in classes. It's a little harder to teach that through a book, because I think a lot of people when they pick up a book they want very clearly defined directions, but there is something about sourdough that's very intuitive and very flexible. I think as long as you're open to that, then it can become a really beautiful part of your life that's very giving.

Theresa: Yes. You know, it's the rhythm part of it that I love the most, I think for me. It's the same with making my yogurt. It's become like a routine in my week to make my yogurt for the week, and when I don't do it I feel like something's off. Just part of my regular routine, and when you have sourdough, it is kinda like having a pet when you talking about feeding it and everything. You do have to care for it, but it's not like a real pet, 'cause you go on a trip, you can put it in the refrigerator and it's gonna be okay. You can't do that with your dog. It totally ... it's very forgiving, like you said.

Sarah: Right. Exactly.

Theresa: Do you notice when you're making your sourdough ... Could you explain what the difference is between when we use an heirloom milled flour for our sourdough vs if we just go into the grocery store and buy regular white processed flour?

Sarah: Yeah, that's a great question. I'm sure you can imagine if a flour isn't highly processed, it's just not gonna have the same bioactivity as a stone-milled flour will. When you're creating a starter, and I mentioned this in Toast and Jam, if you're creating a starter, particularly of just flour and water, it's really, really important to use flour that's gonna be highly active. That

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would be your stone-milled flour.

If you have the germ that's included in the stone-milled flour, there's naturally just gonna be more microbes that are living on that flour because there's more of a food source, and when you catalyze all that with the addition of water, then you're gonna end up having this very responsive culture, whereas with store-bought flour it's totally possible to create a starter with store-bought, processed flour, but it's not gonna be as responsive. It's gonna take a little more effort to get it going and also to maintain it.

I just recommend that if you're going through the effort of creating your starter, you might as well use good flour. If it's not available to you locally, there are lots of these mills that are doing mail order now. If you're just baking a couple of loaves for yourself or your family a week, then I think it's a wonderful resource to use to mail order the flour.

Now some people, they find that they don't have the budget to do that, and I always encourage people to cook within their means. If you think that it's gonna take you a long time and a lot of flour to understand and master the process of sourdough baking, then make that decision for yourself to use the store-bought flour.

I don't want to food-shame anyone at all, but if you have the means and you have the resource to buy really, really good flour, it's gonna taste so much better. It's gonna feel so much better. You'll really see a big different I think in your life. I know that sounds like ...

Theresa: No. I don't think your-

Sarah: Pretty extreme.

Theresa: No no. I don't think you're exaggerating at all, especially on the flavor aspect, because there's like this depth of flavor that is just not in the processed flour.

Sarah: That's true.

Theresa: If you've ever tasted artisan bread that you've picked up at the farmers market or something like that that was made with a stoneground flour, it's worlds apart. It's kind of like a store-bought tomato vs a homegrown tomato. They're like two completely different things, apples and oranges really.

Sarah: Completely. Yes.

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- Theresa: I don't think you're exaggerating it at all.
- Sarah: Yeah. And I think it's important to understand that we have the power to change our food systems and that buying stone-milled flour that's being processed by a small mill, most of these stone mills have very direct relationships with their farmers. A lot of them that are using heirloom grains are sort of commissioning those fields with their farmers directly. Buying this type of flour is sort of completely changing our food system, and it's saying, "I don't want pesticides used on my food, let alone on the land that's around me." I think it's a lot more than just a loaf of bread.
- Theresa: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's a statement. It really is a statement.
- Sarah: Yeah, and I love being able to ... I just ordered some flour from a mill last night in Pasadena.
- Theresa: Oh, that's the one that's by me. Yeah. Yes.
- Sarah: Yeah, that's some of my favorite flour.
- Theresa: Yeah, they're good. Yeah.
- Sarah: I was able to ask her "Where did you source your Einkorn? Who's growing the Rouge de Bordeaux?" Being able to ask those questions and to get specific answers is something that we can't do with a lot of our food. I think it's really, really a beautiful opportunity to participate. Then of course one loaf of bread can feed yourself. It can also feed your family. It can feed a whole community. It can make your boss really happy who might be really cranky. A really good loaf of bread can do a lot.
- Theresa: Oh yeah. You can build bridges with that. Yeah.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Theresa: Well, I love that what you're saying about it's an opportunity to participate in our food, and that's really the way I feel about everything from doing preserves to growing my own food. I'm participating my food, and I'm teaching my kids to participate.
- Sarah: Exactly.
- Theresa: It's hugely popular. And I did just want to reiterate it that your Toast and Jam book covers so much more than sourdough. You have your whole book Sourdough which covers sourdough, but Toast and Jam you do have quick leavened products and yeast breads, so there's a lot more in there.

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We haven't even touched on the spreads, but there is one in particular jam that you had in there that I would love to talk to you about, because I've had onion jam before. I haven't made this particular one before, but I have tasted onion jam before and it's to die for. It's so good. So when I saw this recipe I wanted to talk about it. You have a recipe called Onion, Thyme, and Date Jam. Can you tell me about that?

Sarah: Sure. I personally love the combination of sweet and sour, and there is a little bit of that in this jam, but it's very, very savory. It uses onions that are cooked down with dates, and if you've ever baked with dates or if you've ever cooked with dates, you know that they can act as sort of a thickener or a binder. That's also how they sort of function in this jam. Basically, you cook down the onions and then you caramelize them with the dates, and then you include other things as well.

You can use savory thyme ... I suggest you use thyme. Other people have told me they've used rosemary, but the recipe itself calls for thyme. And black pepper, a little bit of honey, and then I like to use both apple cider vinegar and some orange zest just to give it a little brightness, because you have that really savory flavor of the onions and then you have the thick sort of caramelized sweetness of the dates, but the acidity just cuts through it enough that it brightens it up and then the addition of the orange zest really makes it very warm and delicious.

You basically just cook this down until it becomes as thick as you want it to be. I like this jam really, really thick so it's sort of like a jammy spread, but you can cook it down as much as you want to or as little as you want to. Then I like to use just a little bit of brandy or bourbon. Other people have told me they've used rum. Just a little bit of liquor at the very end just to give it kind of a deeper sort of caramelized note.

It keeps really well once you've finished. It keeps really well in the refrigerator. It goes really well with both sweet and savory things. I've paired this jam with soft sort of salty cheeses. I've paired it with grilled eggplant. I've paired it with really good bacon.

Theresa: Mm. Sounds so good.

Sarah: Yeah. There's a lot of ... Sautéed Brussels sprouts and an egg go really with this jam. There's a lot of different directions that you can use this jam as a condiment. I've used it in replace of mayonnaise or mustard on a sandwich.

Theresa: Yeah. That sounds good.

Sarah: There's so many different ways you can use this jam, but it's also just really easy, and it uses what most people have in their cupboards already. Almost

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everybody has onions, and if you don't have dates, they're pretty easy to get ahold of. It's one of my favorites, absolutely.

Theresa: You know, another thing is that ... First of all, it's a very small batch. It ends up making three fourths of a pint, so you're gonna eat it up before you ... You don't have to worry about like you're gonna have leftovers, 'cause you're gonna eat it all up. Also, it's not water bathed. We're not talking about water bathing here. We're talking about just putting it in the refrigerator and using it as a fresh spread, but it still lasts because you've got the vinegar in there and you've got the sugars and even that little bit of brandy. It's lasts for a month.

This is such a great thing to make when you're gonna have company over and then have a cheese board or something with this, or I think one of the things you listed that I thought sounded really good that you could have it with soft pretzels, and I went, "Oh, that would be so good!" Yeah, that's really good. Glass of wine, it just ... So many of the things that you have in the book I really felt like I could just make a meal out of a loaf of bread and the spread. I would live on that.

Sarah: That's kind of what I live on.

Theresa: Yeah. Really good stuff.

Sarah: Absolutely. And there's a great recipe for the pretzels as well in Toast and Jam.

Theresa: Yeah, fantastic. The flavors that you conjure up, this is one of those books that I read like a novel. I don't do that all the time with every cookbook that crosses my desk, but when I'm looking at your flavor combinations and what you were doing, I was literally sitting in bed at night with the book and my husband's like, "What are you reading," thinking I'm reading some fantastic story, and I'm like, "Toast and Jam." He's like, "Why does that not surprise me?"

Sarah: I love to tell stories and I love to sort of communicate what inspires me and why. I'm so glad to hear you like to read the headnotes.

Theresa: Yep, I did. It is one of those books that will make your mouth water, but this is definitely a recipe I'm gonna be trying. Probably the first one that I'll be trying to go with the breads, because it just sounds so delicious, and having company over I would love to serve this. I think it's good.

Sarah, I just cannot tell you how thankful I am that you came on the show, because this is a wealth of information for my listeners. Really, you covered so much, and I know that you kind of put the little bug in their ear to want

to make sourdough and to want to investigate heirloom grains and stone-milled grains, which is so, so important. Even just wanted to investigate their community to see what might be available at their farmers markets

Sarah: Absolutely.

Theresa: Or if there is any local mills. This will really open up their eyes. I just wanted to thank you for coming on, 'cause this was really, really good. Thank you so much.

Sarah: Oh, I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you Theresa.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that conversation as much as I did. I know she is just a wealth of knowledge and we only scratched the surface, so I really highly encourage you to go to the show notes so that you can dive even deeper.

Now, as always, I will have in the show notes everything that Sarah talked about, including links to her website, her books, and a full PDF download that you can print of the recipe for Onion, Thyme, and Date Jam, so you don't have to worry about a thing. You can just print it out and make it when you're ready. To get all of that just go to the show notes at [livinghomegrown.com/126](http://livinghomegrown.com/126).

That's it for this week. Thank you so much for joining me. I know how busy you are and I really appreciate that you took time out of your day to listen to this podcast. Until next time, 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](http://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.