
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 139

The Magic of No Knead Bread with Alexandra Stafford

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/139

Alexandra: More than any other recipe that I make, and anything that's really elaborate, this is the one recipe that they leave asking for. "Can you share this bread recipe? How did you do this?" It's just the easiest thing.

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown podcast, Episode 139.

Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hey there everybody, welcome to the Living Homegrown podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that includes organic small-space food growing, canning and fermenting the harvest, and artisan food crafts, like baking your own bread.

It's all about the different ways that we can live closer to our food and take small, delicious steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics, or my online courses, coaching, or my Living Homegrown membership, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com.

I think you are going to really enjoy today's episode, because it's all about making really simple, delicious, no-knead bread. Now, what a no-knead bread is, is a bread that uses yeast, you're making it completely from scratch, but you don't have to have the step of kneading the bread to get the great texture that you want.

Now, I'm all for making bread from scratch, and trying all the different techniques and kneading bread, but you know what? It's kind of nice to have something that you can make quick and in a simple way that is still delicious and that will still impress your friends.

So that is what today's episode is all about. I get a lot of letters from you, as listeners, who are ... It's so funny to say letters, it's probably emails, right? I'm not getting letter letters. But I'm getting so many emails from you asking for a no-knead recipe that is really awesome.

Well, not only are we going to talk about a really awesome recipe, but there is a great book that will take one recipe and turn it into a whole slew of other bread recipes that you will just love. And the book I'm talking about is "Bread, Toast, Crumbs: Recipes for No-Knead Loaves and Meals to Savor Every Slice," and it's by Alexandra Stafford.

Now, Alexandra also goes by Allie, and she is the brains behind Alexandra's Kitchen. Now, I brought her on because I fell in love with this book. And as you can probably guess, a lot of cookbooks cross my desk, and I'm getting them for review copies, or publishers let me know about new books that are coming out, and this one really piqued my interest, and I only bring you the ones that I fell in love with.

I'm not going to waste your time or my time with a book that I don't love, and I have actually been making recipes out of this book, and I was just so, so impressed. First of all, I already knew about Allie because I had been following her website before, and I would always see her articles over at the blog Food52.

Everything she ever does is always top-notch, and her recipes really work, so I really appreciate that, because I don't have time to waste. And when I started diving into this book, what was so fascinating to me was that it all stems, all the recipes, stem from one base recipe, and it is a no-knead bread that was so easy, and yet so delicious. I was immediately hooked.

And she has on her blog an entire post dedicated to this one recipe called Peasant Bread, and I'm going to link in the show notes to that page, and it has the base recipe, it has videos on all of the different steps and stages so you know what it looks like, but honestly, all you need is the recipe. It is so easy and so quick.

So I was able to immediately put together a delicious bread just a couple of hours before dinner, and my family was really impressed. And from that, I started diving into the other recipes in the book. So in my conversation today with Allie, we walk through the recipe and the ingredients. You'll really see how easy it is to turn this into something even more special by adding different herbs or flavorings, and making it something completely different.

But what I love about this book is that, first it takes you through making the breads, and then it takes you through recipes for using those breads, so it has complete meals built around this one base recipe, and it has desserts. So I just loved it all the way around.

So let me tell you a little bit about Allie before we dive in to the conversation. After graduating from Yale, Alexandra Stafford, also known as Allie, moved to Philadelphia, where she attended cooking school and worked in catering and restaurant kitchens. In 2006, she launched her blog, Alexandra's Kitchen, and last year, she came out with her cookbook "Bread, Toast, Crumbs."

Allie cooks for her husband and four young children, and they get to enjoy all of her experimentations. Now, Allie's new book, I have to tell you, was just nominated for the 2018 Julia Child First Book Award by the International Association of Culinary Professionals, and it so deserves that nomination.

It was also named one of the top five cookbooks of 2017 by Tasting Table, and Food52 featured this particular Peasant Bread, the one that is the foundation of her book, and "Bread, Toast, Crumbs," in a column on the site, and that post ended up being one of the top ten most popular of the entire year of 2017. And Food52 is a big website, they have a lot of content. So, that was a huge accomplishment.

So what I think you will get out of this particular episode is that you will not only learn how easy it is to make this particular recipe, but this can be the cornerstone of a lot of your baking, and it can help you if you've never, ever made bread before, it can get you over any intimidation that you might have about the process, because with this, you're kind of guaranteed a sure-fire win right out of the gate.

So I really think you'll enjoy it. Now, before we dive into the interview, I want to tell you that today's podcast episode is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my membership site. And I really believe that living an organic, farm fresh lifestyle is totally a journey in learning, and as we learn different skills, such as food fermentation, food growing, and even critter keeping, there are three distinct stages of growth.

We all start out with curiosity, and then we move into experimentation, and eventually, we grow into mastery of these skills. Now, if you're working on creating a farm fresh lifestyle of your own, and you're curious where you may fall on that growth scale, I've got a free resource for you. It's my Farm Fresh Success Path, and it's what my students use inside my learning institute.

And it'll help you decide where you are on your own journey. The characteristics of that particular stage, and some action steps and some information that you can take to get to the next level. To get the Success Path PDF that I've prepared for you, just go to livinghomegrown.com/path and you can download it there for free.

Okay, so are you ready to dive into today's interview and learn all about making no-knead bread? I thought so. Okay, let's dive into my interview with Allie Stafford, the author of "Bread, Toast, Crumbs."

Hey Allie, thanks so much for coming on the show.

Alexandra: Thank you for having me.

Theresa: Well, I'm excited about this because I've been actually using your book, and my son, who's 17, has gotten very interested in, I was telling you before we started, I'm going to make him make the next batch of bread because he's been watching me, and he's very, very interested, so I love that what you're doing is spreading the word about the joys of bread-making, so thanks for coming on today.

Alexandra: Oh, thank you. That makes me so happy. I hope your son enjoys the process.

Theresa: Oh, I know he will, I know he will. Well, I guess we should start off by starting with your origin story, because we all grow into our passions differently, and so I'd love to know, how did you dive into the love of food?

Alexandra: Really, my mother. She is an excellent cook, and I always remember her in the kitchen, either making bread ... There was always a bowl of bread rising on the countertop, she was always looking at her cookbooks, always talking with her sister, who lived in Vermont, about recipes. Family dinners were always ... She really enjoyed being in the kitchen and making family dinners, and holidays were a big deal.

So really, my mother, my aunt Mercy, and my grandmother, when I knew her, did like to cook, though I think for a lot of her life, did not, it was more later in life. She's Greek, and I think when she ... She's from the generation that was trying to assimilate, so they weren't ... She wasn't making a lot of the Greek recipes. But later in life, my mom and my aunt sort of made it their mission to recreate these Greek dishes that they had learned from their grandmother.

I was always just interested in whatever they were making and cooking.

Theresa: I love that, yeah. So you grew up around it. And it's so cool that your family was trying to preserve some of the food history with your family, I think that's really cool.

Alexandra: It is, it's really nice, because I wouldn't have known ... My mom and my aunt still talk about how they learned to cook from their grandmother, and if they hadn't, these family recipes really would be lost.

Theresa: Yeah, absolutely. I think with your book, you're going to be creating a lot of new traditions, and the foundation of your new book "Bread, Toast, Crumbs" is this no-knead bread recipe that you call Peasant Bread.

Alexandra: Yes.

Theresa: And from that recipe, the whole book just evolves into these different variations and ... Like, complete meals from this one basic base recipe, and so I would love to have you tell the story of where this recipe came from, because I just love the story, of where the whole origin of the actual recipe is.

Alexandra: Sure. So my mom as been making this bread recipe for over 40 years. And she had adapted it from some French bread recipe that was sort of fussy, you had to coat it in cornmeal and free form it. Similar proportions, but it was a much more difficult process. And my mom adapted the recipe because she hated, she hates the feeling of flour on a board. She hates the feeling of sand on her feet.

So she didn't want to have to touch the dough, so she ... And she also had a small kitchen, so she just decided she was going to adapt the recipe, forget the kneading, forget the shaping, and just bake it in buttered Pyrex bowls. And it worked, and so she just, that's what she did. And any time friends came over for dinner, they raved about the bread, and it sort of became her signature dish, and people would ask for the recipe, and she would tell them that it was the recipe on the back of the King Arthur Flour bag.

And she never shared the recipe, and people would try to make it and they would say, "Liza, it didn't come out," and she would say "I don't know, I'm not sure why it didn't come out." She was very protective of this recipe, and I grew up eating the bread, and I grew up loving to cook. After college, I went to culinary school, and then I worked in restaurants and catering companies, and then I started my blog, and I really wanted to share the bread recipe, but I knew it was off-limits.

So for five years I didn't even think about sharing the bread recipe. I made other breads, I blogged about other bread recipes, but all the while I was still making the Peasant Bread, and would see the reactions of friends. They would say, "How did you make this? This is the best bread." And after a number of years, I just thought, gosh, it would be so great if we could share this recipe with other people, because it's so simple and so easy.

And I called my mom one day and I said, "Mom, can I please share your Peasant Bread recipe with my blog readers? Everybody needs to know how simple bread baking can be." And she thought about it for a day, and she said, "Sure. Go for it. Why not?" So, yeah.

Theresa: Ah, that's so good, yeah. I'm so glad she did. Oh man. Yeah, it's really good. What is so magical about it is ... Really, what surprised me was how easy it was to make a really good bread.

Alexandra: Yes.

Theresa: I've tried no-knead breads before and been kind of disappointed, but I was not disappointed with this one, and my whole family was like, "Really?" You know?

Alexandra: Yeah.

Theresa: It's such a great place to start if you've never made bread-

Alexandra: Absolutely, yeah-

Theresa: But all of us live really busy lives, you know? So being able to do this and create a really nice bread. One of the things you said in the book that I thought was so cute is that you said you would use this as a party trick.

Alexandra: Yes. No, I really would never think ... And I still am sort of the same way, to have people over without making this bread, because more than any other recipe that I make, and anything that's really elaborate, this is the one recipe that they leave asking for. "Can you share this bread recipe? How did you do this? What do you mean you made bread, you made it in a bread machine?" No, it's just the easiest thing.

Theresa: Yeah, and just so everybody knows, I will be linking to a page you have on your website that has the recipe, you have little videos of what it looks like, and people can see for themselves and actually try it. So we will link in the show notes, and to get to the show notes people can go to, livinghomegrown.com/139, and I'll have everything there about your website and your book and everything. Just so people are going, "Okay, okay, how do I write down the recipe?"

They don't have to write it down, because you've got it-

Alexandra: Perfect.

Theresa: You've got it all there, yeah. So one of the things that you did in the book, which I just ... This is what made me just fall in love with your book, was you take that basic recipe, and then you adapt it and change it and create all these other breads. So describe what some of the other recipes are that you can make with this first recipe.

Alexandra: Sure, yeah. And this is something, really, I credit the people who found the recipe on my blog and wrote in, and they would say, "I added nuts, I added cheese, I've added garlic, I turned it into monkey bread, I made pizza with it," or people would ask and they would say, "How, if I want to add nuts or seeds, how do I do this?"

And I truthfully didn't make a single variation of the bread recipe until people started asking questions. But the simple variations include just adding seeds, so there's a three seed bread or a quinoa flax bread, there's a walnut raisin bread. You can, there's a cheddar and Parmesan bread, and the basic process is still the same. You whisk together the dry ingredients and at that same step, you add the nuts, the seeds, the cheese, the herbs, and then you add your wet ingredients.

The dough, once you start getting familiar with dough, you realize there aren't ... There's really not much difference between the Peasant Bread dough that's baked in Pyrex bowls and the dough that's used to make pizza. It's really how you handle it. So the same dough is used to make pizza, and it's used to make focaccia, and it's used, the proportions are used, though things are added, to make like a buttermilk cinnamon swirl bread.

But they're all based on the proportions of the main recipe, and they're all very simple.

Theresa: Yes, exactly, yeah. So you talk about that, how we kind of just stick with this basic proportions and even if we want to add a different liquid, we add the same amount of liquid, we just substitute the water, like for the buttermilk-

Alexandra: Right.

Theresa: I think you add, you split it up between buttermilk and water, and not-

Alexandra: Exactly.

Theresa: But the proportions are all the same, and that's what was, it was just so clever, and yet each recipe is so different and so you really, you can really impress your family with the same recipe.

Alexandra: Well, it is amazing to me just how these very subtle changes really change the flavor of the bread. So for instance, the rye bread, it's really just one cup of rye substituted for one cup of flour, and then with the addition of honey or molasses and caraway seed, and those are really simple changes, but you have a completely different flavor, and you would use it in a completely different way than you would use the peasant bread.

Theresa: Yes, exactly. Well, just so everybody understands, could you just talk about the basic ingredients, and you don't have to tell us the exact measurements and all of that, because we'll be sending everybody there, but I know it's flour, water, yeast, what is it exactly?

Alexandra: Sure, it's flour, salt, water, yeast, and sugar. So you whisk together the flour, the salt, the yeast and the sugar, and I always use instant yeast. I love Saf instant yeast, I order it either from Amazon or King Arthur Flour, and I get a pound of it and I transfer it to a quart container and keep it in my fridge. You can keep it in your freezer, if you want, for many, many months.

I just like using the bulk yeast, it's easier to me than always having to buy packets. But the instant yeast, which is nice, you can just whisk it right in to the flour, the salt and the sugar, you don't have to worry about blooming it or proofing it with lukewarm water and a little bit of the sugar, you just stir it right in. So it is a really simple formula, I know you said I don't have to say it, but if you can almost commit it to memory, it's four cups flour and then two teaspoons each salt, sugar, and yeast, and then you add two cups of lukewarm water.

And for the lukewarm water, again, because people get nervous with bread baking and they wonder if the water, you know, what is lukewarm, and they start getting, taking out their thermometer and trying to get it to be the exact whatever it supposed to be, a hundred and something degrees. Instead of worrying about that, I just say do one and a half cups cold water and a half cup boiling water, and if you mix those two together, you'll have perfectly lukewarm water.

And that's it. And then you add the lukewarm water to the flour, salt, sugar, and yeast, stir it up. The whole process should take under five minutes.

Theresa: Yes, it does take under five minutes.

Alexandra: Yes, yes.

Theresa: Yes, and the lukewarm water thing, I just want to back up for a second, that was such a good tip for anyone wanting to learn to be a baker. Because the first thing I was doing was getting ready to pull out my thermometer, and it just makes it so fast and easy and it's such a no-brainer, so I love that.

And I wanted to touch real quick on the yeast for a second.

Alexandra: Sure.

Theresa: So just to make sure everyone understands, we're talking about instant yeast, it can also be called rapid rise-

Alexandra: Right.

Theresa: Fast-rising is another name I've seen.

Alexandra: And sometimes I think it says bread machine yeast. When I run out of my Saf instant yeast, I'll go to the store and they have jars of ... I've seen, actually, the Red Star brand that might be active dry, actually, in a jar. Or the, I think Fleischmann's has an instant, or a bread machine, or one of those. So I usually buy one of those.

But it's nice that you don't have to worry about that blooming step.

- Theresa: Yes, exactly. Let's talk about that too. So blooming, in case someone doesn't know, is where you're really proofing the yeast to make sure that it's good, or that it's ... I don't even want to say that it's good, but getting it going before you use it, and with instant, you can skip that step.
- Alexandra: Right, exactly.
- Theresa: Yeah, so that makes, that kind of saves us time, and it's just, you mix it all in. In fact, you even said somewhere, might have been on your website, or maybe it was in the book, that this is a great recipe if you want to make the Peasant Bread or some of the others, that you can mix all the dry ingredients together and put them in a Ziploc bag and take it with you-
- Alexandra: Yes.
- Theresa: And like, prepare it at your friend's house when you get there.
- Alexandra: Yes, exactly.
- Theresa: And look brilliant.
- Alexandra: Exactly. I have done that. I mean, this past year was kind of chaotic with the book coming out and traveling and I was always traveling with bags of this flour, salt, yeast, sugar mixture, Ziploc bags in my suitcase, and then my Pyrex bowls also in the suitcase. But it made it so easy when I arrived, because I had everything measured out, and all I had to do was add the water, and magically, loaves of bread would appear.
- Theresa: Yeah, so let's talk about what happens next. So after you mix this all up, then we just set it aside to let it rise, and what's the rest of the process?
- Alexandra: Yeah, so let it rise in a warm spot for one and a half to two hours, and another trick, and this is something I learned from my mom, but she always turns her oven on for a minute and then just turns it off. So you don't even have to set it to a temperature, just turn it on and turn it off, it should be a little over a hundred degrees, and you should be able to put your hands on the grates.

I had some people set it to 350 and let it preheat at 350 for a minute, and then turn it off, and that's way too hot. So if you put your bowl of dough in the oven that has preheated at 350 for a minute, it will start cooking, and it won't ... You won't be able to get the second rise out of it, but you're just trying to create a warm spot, and it's really helpful in the winter if you have a drafty kitchen or just live in a cold environment to have this warm spot.

So I always, I preheat the oven for a minute, turn it off. I put my bowl of dough, covered with a cloth, a bowl cover, or a tea towel, let it rise for an hour and a half, and then once it doubles, you take two forks and kind of deflate it, you pull it from the side of the bowl and deflate it. If you were using your hands, and some people like to use your hands, you would flour it and kind of punch it down to deflate it. I find using the fork's nice because you just, it's less messy.

And then you take your forks and you split it down the middle into two equal portions, and you then butter one quart Pyrex bowls or other vessels, and we can talk about other things people could use if they don't have the one quart bowls, but the one quart is a nice size. And then you let it rise again for another 20 minutes or so, until you see the dough creeping above the rim of the bowl, and then you bake it.

Theresa: Yes, yeah. I want to talk about the bowls, because that really surprised me, also, when I read that. I was like, "Well, I've got my old Pyrex bowls that were passed down through the family," so I use them, and it cooked a perfect bread!

Alexandra: Yes.

Theresa: And it was another one of those "Wow!" You know, we get so wrapped up with thinking that something has to be complicated, and it's not at all. So yeah, so that just came from the fact that your mom always used that?

Alexandra: Right, and I think it's like, everybody has Pyrex bowls on hand. So it's probably what she had on hand, you know. And when she was baking, she was using a different shape, it was a little bit wider and squatter than the one quart bowls, but it just goes to show, you really can use any shape. I find the one quart to be really nice because in about 20 minutes you can see the change in the dough.

Say, for instance, you use a one and a half quart bowl, in 20 minutes, it won't look as if the dough has really made any movement because it will still be below the rim, so you'll sort of be thinking, oh, is it rising, am I doing it right? And with these one quart bowls, you definitely ... When you put it in the bowls, it's below the rim, and then within 20 minutes, it's creeping above the rim.

But again, it doesn't affect the flavor if you use a one and a half quart bowl or if you use a loaf pan. And in the book I give people some tips. Say if you do have two one and a half quart bowls as opposed to one quart bowls, it's best to make one and a half times the recipe, and then your dough is a better proportion to the bowls. Again, it's just really so you have a better visual guide. It's not really going to affect the flavor in the end.

Theresa: Yeah, okay. But you could use a loaf pan if you don't have the Pyrex bowls?

Alexandra: Yes, and also ... And I have a friend, actually, she has this huge loaf pan, I want to say it's ten by five inches, ten inches by five inches, and she bakes the whole batch in that one pan. If you have an eight and half by four and a half loaf, or a nine by five, I recommend baking off three quarters of the dough in the loaf pan and then whatever's left you can bake off in little ramekins, or whatever you have, and make little rolls.

Or, if you have two eight and a half by four and a half inch loaf pans, again, make one and a half times the recipe and then split it evenly between your two loaf pans.

Theresa: Got it, got it, yeah. That makes perfect sense. Okay. And something that I do for warming up the bread, which worked great for me, is that ... We have like this internet cable box that gets kind of hot-

Alexandra: Oh, nice.

Theresa: Yeah, and I use it for when I'm doing my yogurt. It's like the perfect temperature. It's almost like putting a little heating pad, but not so hot that it's going to cook anything. So it's just a little warm spot, because we have a TV in our kitchen, and there's a cable box behind the TV, so my family can always tell when I'm fermenting something because the TV's pushed to the side and the cable box is pulled out.

So that is where I sat this Peasant Bread, and it worked perfectly.

Alexandra: Oh, that's great.

Theresa: So if someone doesn't want to turn on their oven, or for whatever reason, you could always do that, too. Maybe you're using your oven for something. If you have a warm spot like that, it worked great. Really, really great.

Alexandra: Right. Yeah. People get very creative with how they create their warm spots, I've heard funny things over the years. I think people, I know somebody who's used the dishwasher, a microwave, or even the dryer, you know, the thing, you just set it on top of the dryer-

Theresa: Yes.

Alexandra: I don't know.

Theresa: Oh, the dryer would probably work great.

Alexandra: Yeah.

Theresa: That's a good one, yeah. Okay. Very, very good. Okay. So now, when you're talking about the ingredients, was there any particular flour that we should use when we're making this Peasant Bread?

Alexandra: I'd say for beginner bakers to always start with something like King Arthur all-purpose flour. That's what I use most often. And it was really the brand that my mother used, which is why I always buy it. But I also, I really think it's a good quality flour. I get a lot of questions about, how can I use more whole wheat flour, or incorporate whole grains into the bread.

And I've been reading a lot about flour, and I know, I'm sure your listeners also know a lot about flour, but the things that I've read about whole wheat flour are that they're not necessarily, at least commercial whole wheat flour, they're not necessarily more nutritious for us.

It's basically processed the same way the all-purpose flour is processed.

Theresa: Yeah, you're correct. And we've actually talked about this on the podcast, so when we talk about whole wheat, the commercial ... What you would find normally in the store is not necessarily more nutritious. But there are a lot of mills that are-

Alexandra: Yes.

Theresa: Popping up all over and so a lot of my listeners have been going to either mail order or finding a local mill where it is actually processed in a very organic way, so that you're getting all the parts, and I'm sure that would alter the recipe, here they might have to play with it.

Alexandra: Exactly.

Theresa: Is that what you usually recommend?

Alexandra: That's exactly what I've been recommending. There's a ... Actually, there are probably others I don't know about, but there's a place in the Finger Lakes called Farmer Ground Flour, and they sell it at a co-op near me, just in Albany, called the Honest Weight Food Co-op, and you know that it's going to be freshly milled, you know that it's stone milled, so all the pieces of the kernel are together.

And then they sift out some of the bran and the germ, so I think it's called a high extraction flour. And that's what I say to people who are really trying to incorporate whole grain, or whole wheat flour, into their breads, and to start small. So add, substitute one cup of all-purpose for this stone-milled flour, and see how it works. And then if you like the texture, and you like the flavor, substitute two cups of the flour for the stone-mill flour.

And then if it's starting to get too dense, then maybe play around with a longer rise. But changing one variable at a time will help you create the loaf that you're looking for.

Theresa: Yes, exactly. And they don't need to be afraid of experimenting, and we're just talking flour and water and some yeast, so-

Alexandra: Right. Exactly.

Theresa: So it's nothing scary, and you haven't invested a lot into the ingredients, so I think that's a great idea. Perfect, okay. Well, now, the book is divided into three sections, so I definitely want to talk about some of the other sections. You have the bread, toast and crumbs.

Alexandra: Sure.

Theresa: So after we have made some of these different breads, in the bread section, you go into some of the things that we can do with those breads. I mean, everything from savory French toast, which totally had my mouth watering, to this berry-filled bread pudding. So I wanted to ask you, and it's probably like asking you to pick a favorite child, but did you have a favorite recipe within that section on toast?

Alexandra: In the toast. Oh gosh, I'm trying to think. I love toast in general, probably ... And this sounds so ridiculous, just toast with butter and salt is probably my favorite thing to eat, but I do love ... And this is one that I haven't ... I've heard from people this past year who have made the recipes and I really haven't heard from anybody who's made this one, but it's the vinegarette toast.

And I love it because you're used, we're always used to tossing day-old bread in olive oil, and either crisping it up on the grill or in a frying pan, or tearing it into pieces and making croutons with olive oil and salt, but you don't hear, too often, at least, tossing the bread with olive oil and vinegar before you cook it, and the vinegar just adds such a nice flavor.

So you soak these slices of bread in olive oil and vinegar. Then you pan-fry it, and then you finish it in the oven while you poach some eggs, and the toast just gets so ... The vinegar, I think, adds a sweetness and a sharpness. And then you add a poached egg on top and there's the kind of richness of the yolk and it ... Eggs and vinegar always go well and there's just something about the whole combination, it's simple but it's really good.

Theresa: Oh man, that's making me so hungry. We're recording this in the morning for me, so I'm just like, oh that just sounds so delicious. That's a good one. Okay, I'm going to have to try that one. Well, the last portion of the book you have dedicated to crumbs, which I thought was really cute. And I don't think people really appreciate the incredible flavor of fresh and dried crumbs when you make it yourself.

Or even how easy it is to do. So could you describe the difference between the fresh and the dried crumbs?

Alexandra: Sure, yeah. I think everybody, I mean, not everybody, but most people are familiar with the dried breadcrumbs. People I feel like, these days, are really into the Panko bread crumbs, which are great. You're familiar with breading chicken and making chicken cutlets or breading eggplant and making eggplant Parmesan. So I think the dried bread crumbs a lot of people are familiar with.

But the fresh bread crumbs was something that I really learned a lot about once I started making the Peasant Bread a lot and people were asking questions and I had all of this extra bread on hand. And I needed to find a way to use it. And I was, I would look in all these old Italian cookbooks and there's so many uses, people have been using the fresh breadcrumbs for as long as they've been making bread.

So what I do is I take day-old bread or couple days old bread and whizz it in the food processor. If you don't have a food processor, you can dry it out in the oven just briefly and then break it up with your hands, or roll it with a rolling pin to get it into smaller pieces. Or you can just crumble it with your hands.

And then you have, these fresh crumbs are so versatile. So you can moisten them with olive oil and lemon zest and herbs and anchovies and garlic, however you want to season it, and you can either spread that over a layer of beans and bake it into a gratin, or over a layer of pasta and bake it, and you get that crispy layer over a baked pasta.

Or use it as a thickener in soup. There's so many peasant soups that call for thickening with bread, and it just, it gives the soup body and a little bit more substance, and it was probably a way to stretch it for more mouths. My favorite way of using the fresh crumbs are, you can heat up a pan with olive oil and garlic and have all the seasonings, then add the fresh crumbs and toast them till they get really crispy.

And then throw those over pasta, or over sauteed vegetables, or ... Really, over anything. They just make everything delicious.

Theresa: Yeah, as you were talking, I was like, "That would be so good just over vegetables."

Alexandra: Yes.

Theresa: Like, just some plain vegetables, and so many of my listeners are gardeners, and we are always looking for things to do with our vegetables, and that would be such an easy way to really take it to a whole new level.

Alexandra: Yes, they're so good in a kale salad, like a raw kale salad, a raw Brussels sprout salad. Or roasted carrots, just to have this crunch.

Theresa: Yes.

-
- Alexandra: And it's nice too, if people are allergic to nuts, they can kind of provide the same sort of texture. Or people who are allergic to cheese, or have a dairy allergy, the nuts provide a richness without having to be cheesy, or-
- Theresa: Without being cheesy.
- Alexandra: Yeah, exactly.
- Theresa: Yeah, no, I can totally see that. That's the thing, is people only think of dried, so I'm so glad that you included that in the book. And then, just to make them dried, we would just kind of roast them in the oven to dry them out?
- Alexandra: Yes, very low temperature. 200, 250 degrees. Make sure they're ... You can grind them in the food processor beforehand, spread them out, you don't ... It's okay if they get a little bit of color on them, but the goal is to really dry them out, you don't necessarily want them to take on color. Only because you're then going to use them again and crisp them up again.
- Theresa: Ah, okay.
- Alexandra: And they can get too dark. And that's ... If you don't have a food processor, you can break it up, break up the bread into bigger chunks, dry it out, and then when it's hard, it's easy to put in a Ziploc bag and put a rolling pin over it, or just crumble it with your hands.
- Theresa: Yes, yeah. That would make it really easy. And you also covered in the book, which I was really glad that you did, how we can preserve these crumbs. You talk about preserving bread all the way around, but with the dried crumbs, we can store them at room temperature once they're dried.
- Alexandra: Yes, definitely. The dried crumbs will store for a really long time, just at room temperature. I put them in an airtight container, and then the fresh crumbs, I often ... If I'm pressed for time, or feeling lazy, I'll just take a chunk of bread and throw it in a Ziploc and put it in the freezer, but better is to grind it before you freeze it, then you have ... Because they're in such small pieces, they thaw so quickly at room temperature.
- Theresa: Ah. Yes.
- Alexandra: So if you have a bag of fresh crumbs on hand, it's really nice, it's just so handy to grab from the freezer.

Theresa: Yeah, and then you're just, you can be a master at whatever you're making when you have these at hand, they can just be like staples that you have all the time. And we all get that little bit at the end of bread that maybe we're already making the next batch and we have the end-

Alexandra: Right.

Theresa: And this is a great way to use it up, and you're going to be so happy you did it.

Alexandra: Right, exactly. And you can store, you can accumulate those ends, and then when you have a batch, then use them to make the crumbs if you want, or just make the crumbs right away and crisp them up and throw them on whatever vegetable you make that evening, and-

Theresa: And then you're good to go.

Alexandra: Yeah, then you're good to go, yeah.

Theresa: And you'll look brilliant.

Alexandra: Right, exactly.

Theresa: This is so good, I really appreciate you coming on, Allie, because I just loved your book, and I'm making several different recipes out of it. I actually, just last night, made the dark chocolate bread-

Alexandra: Oh, nice.

Theresa: And it was after everyone went to bed that I baked it, and we're going to have it tonight as a dessert, because we're going to have some berries with it, and I'm really excited, and it made the whole house smell so amazing. I couldn't believe it.

Alexandra: Oh, that's so good.

Theresa: Yeah. And chocolate bread was something I've never made before. I've made chocolate zucchini bread, but not chocolate-

Alexandra: Yes.

- Theresa: This has chocolate chunks in it, and I just ... I was thumbing through, and I was like, "I have everything to make this right now!"
- Alexandra: Oh, perfect.
- Theresa: And so I just did it, yeah. And it was interesting that when you ... so you even say this in the book, and you explain it, that when we ... Because it has more sugar in it, because it-
- Alexandra: Yes.
- Theresa: Has the chocolate and the sugar. So it just took a little longer to rise, but otherwise it was the same basic recipe.
- Alexandra: Right, exactly. No, sugar and ... Whenever ... If a dough has a lot of sugar or a lot of fat, it will slow down the rising. Which was interesting to me because you hear that yeast, it needs a little bit of sugar to kind of encourage, I mean, not always, you don't have to add the sugar, but if you add a little bit of sugar, it encourages the rising, but too much sugar slows it down.
- Theresa: Yeah, that was interesting to me too, but I was glad you had mentioned that so that I didn't think something was wrong. Because it just, it definitely, it just took a little bit longer-
- Alexandra: Sure. Right.
- Theresa: But it was definitely slower than the standard, and I was glad you had brought that up. But it has cocoa in it, and oh man, it's just like ... When that was baking, I was just like salivating, it was-
- Alexandra: Oh, good. I'm so happy. Awesome.
- Theresa: Yeah, it'll be fun. Well, thank you, I really appreciate this. I think you did such a great job with this book, and I think you're really opening up more people to want to bake their own bread and enjoy the bread in different ways, so I really appreciate you coming on and sharing all of this with the listeners today.
- Alexandra: Oh, thank you so much, Theresa. It was so nice talking with you.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Allie Stafford of "Bread, Toast, Crumbs." I will have in the show notes for today's episode links to her website, her book, and the link to that particular post that has the recipe for everything that she talked about today for that Peasant Bread, and it even has videos so you can see what it's supposed to look like.

Trust me, you don't even need the videos, the recipe is just brilliant all by itself, but if you want all of that, just go to livinghomegrown.com/139 and I'll have everything there for you. I really, really encourage you to give this recipe a try, and if you love it, you definitely should get Allie's book "Bread, Toast, Crumbs."

And I'm not just saying that, I really, really am using this book, I am making so many of the recipes out of this book. You know when you have a book that, you know it's good because it has little dog-eared pages, and there's like food stains on it? Well I've only had this book for a few weeks, and it already is looking like that.

It is sitting in my kitchen all the time, and I have been known to go to bed with this book, reading it like I'm reading a novel. So that's always a good sign of a great book, isn't it? So, I'd love for you to get that book too. And if you do, let me know, send me a note. If you're on my email list, just hit reply to any of my newsletters and let me know what you have made out of this particular book.

I'd love to hear which recipes you loved the most. And remember that today's podcast episode was brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my membership site. And if you'd like to get that free Success Path PDF with information on where you are on your particular journey for living a farm fresh lifestyle, then just go to livinghomegrown.com/path and I'll have everything there for you. You can download the PDF for free.

So that's it for this week. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care, everybody.

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

Theresa: All right, so we're all set. Perfect.

Alexandra: Great.

Theresa: I have to tell you, because you know, I've been making the Peasant Bread like I told you, and my son, this morning, he's 17. Both of my boys enjoy cooking, and they help me in the garden and things like that. I have a 17 and a 19-year-old. But my 17-year-old said, "Are you talking to the bread lady today?"

Alexandra: I love it. Makes me so happy.

Theresa: And I said, "Yes I am," and I said, "Do you want me to tell her anything?" And he said, "Yes, tell her that I love the Peasant Bread."

Alexandra: Aww, that's so cute.

Theresa: So I said, "Okay, I will definitely tell her."

Alexandra: That is so cute. I love hearing that.