



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 55 Designing A Food Garden For Double Duty

**Show Notes: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/55](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/55)**

This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode #55.

**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 is the podcast where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that's through artisan food crafts like canning and fermenting, growing your own organic food no matter how big or how small your space, and just living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you want to learn more about any of these topics or my online canning courses, just visit my website, [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

On today's episode, I'm interviewing a really close friend of mine. Her name is Susan Morrison, and she is a garden designer who lives up in the Bay Area of northern California. I wanted her to come on to talk to us about garden design and how we can use some of the elements of garden design to benefit our gardens when we're growing food.



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Now I know you may be thinking, "Well, why do we want to use garden design when we are growing food?" Well, here's the thing. A lot of times when we are growing food, we are only thinking about what flavors we're going to get, how many tomatoes we're going to have to can that summer. We kind of forget about the fact that we can still make this garden beneficial, both to the wildlife and the pollinators that we want to draw in, but also to ourselves.

That is exactly what Susan specializes in. She specializes in creating these beautiful garden designs that do double duty of benefitting the environment and draw in birds and wildlife, and also benefit the homeowner gardener by helping them de-stress, slow down, and enjoy the garden.

There are so many elements that she talks about both in her speeches and in her writings and her books that she talks about these things that we really can incorporate into our food gardens as well so that we can enjoy our gardens not only from the flavor aspect, but from the connection to nature. That's what I wanted her to come on and talk about today.

Let me give you a little bit of background on Susan. She is a nationally recognized authority on smaller-spaced gardens and that, I know, resonates with a lot of my listeners because so many of you have little to no garden space. The things that she offers up are things that you can do no matter how large or small your garden is.

She's also the coauthor of the bestselling book *Garden Up! Smart Vertical Gardening for Small and Large Spaces*, and she wrote that with our mutual friend, Rebecca Sweet. I've also featured both Susan and Rebecca on our PBS TV show, *Growing a Greener World*.



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There they talked about making big impacts with very small spaces. I will link to that particular PBS episode if you want to watch it. It's really good! Packed with lots of information.

Susan's garden designs have also been featured in numerous publications, including *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Cottages & Bungalows*, and *Fine Gardening*. She also contributes a lot of articles on design and plant selection. She is a very, very popular speaker at all the garden shows that I go to, and every time that she offers up information, there are always so many takeaways. I really was excited that she agreed to come on the show today.

What I love about her designs is how they always serve double duty. They not only benefit the wildlife and draw in birds and beneficial insects, but they also help the homeowner slow down and smell the roses. She's really big on enjoying your garden space and not having to be a slave to your garden space and I just love that!

Now in this interview, I have Susan walk us through just a few of the design elements that we could add to our gardens to help us to not only de-stress, but to draw in those beneficials, because you want to get that pollination so that you get more fruits and vegetables. It's a really important element to have.

As you listen, I want you to keep in mind that everything she talks about is not really just geared for food gardening. In fact, it's not at all. It's geared for any type of garden. Whether you're actually growing food or not at this point, all of these design elements can really add a lot to your garden space.



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As Susan and I were laying out what exactly to cover in the podcast, she really had four garden design elements that could help draw in pollinators and beneficials and birds, and I really wanted her to focus on two of them. Those were sound and movement. That's because those elements are mentioned a lot in design books, in garden design books, and I find that they're a little bit harder to grasp. The other two elements, which are color and scent, well, those are a little more straightforward, but it can be a little bit harder to try and figure out how to add movement or to add sound to your garden. I'll let her explain all of that, but those were the two elements that we focused on for this particular podcast.

What I love, also, is that she explains to us why we want to have these things in our garden, and if nothing else, understanding the why makes it even more motivational to want to do it. Let's dive right into that interview with Susan Morrison so that we can learn how to slow down a little bit and enjoy our gardens even more.

Hey there, Susan! I'm so glad you could join me here today.

Susan: Hi, Theresa. It's wonderful to be here.

Theresa: I'm super excited about this topic because I think it's something that a lot of times we just kind of glance over, especially as food gardeners, we're just trying to get our seeds in the ground and aren't really paying attention to a lot of design aspects, and so I think being able to talk about smart garden design with you is going to be so beneficial to us because there are a lot of things that we can pull in, even if we're growing food. But also, I love that we can talk about how it benefits us and the wildlife that we might



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be bringing into our garden. I really appreciate you coming on today.

Susan: Well, I think it's going to be a fun topic to talk about.

Theresa: Since a lot of people don't know everything that you do, I would love for you just to start out by just explaining what it is you do with garden design.

Susan: Well, I am a garden designer and I work with clients in different ways. Sometimes I just consult with them, but most of the time, I meet with someone who wants to either redo their front or their backyard entirely or who wants to remake a substantial section of it. So I'm there to not so much tell them how to do it or what should be in the garden, but to understand what their vision is and then figure out how to make that happen.

The second part of that that I think is sort of relevant to what we're going to be talking about today is sometimes people don't always know exactly what they want. They tend to focus on the individual aspects or the individual components of a garden, and they forget to step back and look at the big picture of what a garden can be. One of the things that I do is make sure that gets addressed as well.

Theresa: That's really good! Do you think that a lot of people are trying to maybe connect more with their gardens, but they don't even realize that's kind of the goal that they ultimately want?

Susan: I think that's very true until you actually go through the experience of trying to plan a garden. I believe we have a tendency to sort of treat the inside and the outside as if they're very similar, but in fact,

although they do have some things in common, of course, being outside is such an entirely different experience than being in a house, that when people start out with this idea of, "Well, I need to have a place to eat and I need to have a place to read and I need to have a place to cook," that they kind of miss the bigger picture of what a garden can be.

Theresa: Ah, well, that makes perfect sense. I know you have talked about this before that when you were in design school that you really saw that from—that mistake that a lot of the designers would make, that they were treating the inside and the outside the same. Can you explain about the cat story that I've heard you tell before?

Susan: Oh, well, that's right. When I was telling you about when I was in design school, I took a class that actually included both interior design students and garden design students, and so we did a lot of projects that included both pieces. What I found was that the interior designers tended to just sort of dismiss the plant life and dismiss the other things that went into the garden. They just kind of took their green pencil and drew something in with a slash and said, "Low water plants here."

What I think was missing was this idea that a garden is alive. The cat story that I told you was I feel like looking at our pets is one of the best ways to understand what we might inadvertently be missing from our gardens. If you have a cat, I know you've had this experience where you open up the door and the cat goes halfway out the door, so half of the cat is in and half of the cat is out.

Some of that is just cats are weird, so that's part of the explanation, of course, but the other piece is if you really pay attention to your cat when she stops like that, look at her face because her ears are

going to be bending forward and her nose is going to be twitching, and you're going to see her eyes, a light on thing and really just watch it with laser like intensity.

What the cat is doing is using all of its senses to appreciate what is happening out in the garden. That cat is experiencing everything. What the garden smells like, what the garden tastes like, what the garden sounds like. That's one of the things that we sometimes forget to do. That's one of the things that I try to help my clients with is to make sure that they are putting things into their garden that are going to maximize those kind of essential garden elements.

Theresa: I love that because we get so busy we completely forget that. What you're hitting on there is that the garden is alive, and I know that's a big part of what you try to teach people in what you write and when you're lecturing, you always talk about how the garden is alive and we need to treat it that way. You have these elements that you talk about. What are the elements that we need to look at?

Susan: The four elements that I think are important are sound, movement, color, and scent. Of those four elements, sound and movement tend to be not as distinct. I find those two elements kind of travel together naturally.

Theresa: When you're saying sound, what kinds of things are you talking about?

Susan: Well, sound comes from a lot of different places. One of the best ways to bring sound into the garden is through water, is through the sound of water. That's one way to do it. Wildlife is a way to do it. There are artificial ways to bring it in as well, wind chimes and



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things like that. But for the most part, the sound of something that is really alive or moving is probably the most exciting way.

Theresa: When we're talking about sound, I would imagine that by bringing in the element of water, it actually automatically brings in the wildlife because they are attracted to it, right?

Susan: Exactly. Water is great for both sound and for movement. One of the ways that it brings wildlife into the garden—if you have moving water, this is not really necessarily going to be as true if you just have a birdbath is moving water sparkles. One of the reasons, whether it's insects or whether it's birds are attracted to your garden is because they can see that from a really great distance.

That's why, for example, that hummingbird is going to choose your backyard instead of all the backyards around you because you've got that sparkle that alerts them that water is there and is available to them.

Theresa: I know you talk a lot about we don't need to have this big giant pond, right? By having just a small amount of movement, because most of my listeners have really small backyards or even balconies or patios and nothing else. It can be a really small amount of water that can attract the wildlife.

Susan: Yes, absolutely. In fact, the way that you are describing your listeners is very consistent with most of the clients who I design gardens for. Most of them have small lots or they just have average-size lots, and so having a pond or something on that type of a scale is just not really going to be practical. The types of water features that we most typically do are just kind of a jar fountain, which you've probably seen.



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Theresa: Oh, yeah. Those can be beautiful and you can make them really customized to what kind of style you like.

Susan: Exactly, and if you have a little bit more money and you want to go a little bit farther, you can actually set them up with an in-ground reservoir, and that tends to have a really beautiful, natural effect because instead of being enclosed with a little dish, there is actually a container that you put down in the ground and then you set the fountain on top of it, and then a pump just recycles that or recirculates that water through, and you've got rock that's covering around it so it looks like the water is just magically disappearing down into the rocks.

What's nice about that type of an option is you can get a very customized effect because you can just go to your favorite nursery or garden center and you can just pick a container that you really like the look of, although I do have one caveat if you do decide to go that way and you're using an open container versus when you buy a prefabricated jar fountain that just sits in a dish. It's going to have a closed top and there's just a hole in the middle that allows the water to flow out.

If you are going to have an open container like that, it will attract birds and you need to make sure that you have some sort of a shallow cover that you add to it. Typically what you can do is you can just have a piece of Plexiglas just custom cut in a circle, and you can set that down in the lid of the—or in the top of the jar and then just put a little bit of rock in there, because it's important for birds and for insects, in particular, to be able to gauge the depth of the water.

If you just have an open fountain, then potentially you're going to have a bad bird experience where a bird is going to land and they're not going to be able to get out of the jar.

Theresa: Oh, wow! Yeah, that's a really good point. Okay, so you can just do Plexiglas on the top, and then you have a hole in the center where the water is actually coming out?

Susan: Exactly.

Theresa: Then the rocks sit on top of that Plexiglas so you don't really see the Plexiglas.

Susan: You don't really see the Plexiglas, because it's definitely—it's one of those lessons you do not want to learn the hard way.

Theresa: No!

Susan: You want to make sure you get it right from the beginning. Then ideally, if you want birds to bathe and to drink, which, of course, they're not discriminant. They do both in the same spot. Then you're still going to want to have maybe a good inch and a half of water in the top. What you can do is you can take a few of the little stones or pebbles on the edge and actually have them sit up a little bit, so that's going to give birds enough space that they can get in there and splash around, but there are still rocks that they can gauge the depth from and there's still a place for bees to land.

I have to say we now have an enclosed jar fountain, and the birds are in it all of the time. I have moved to a new home and I haven't finished putting the garden in, and so there's really not as much plant life as there normally would be to attract them, but just the

sight of that sparkling water brings them down all of the time. You know that expression, "Shake your tail feathers?"

Theresa: Yes.

Susan: I never really thought about it until I watched so many birds in my little fountain shaking their tail feathers that I thought, "Okay, that expression really kind of makes sense."

Theresa: Wow! That's great, so really the water is a big attractor. That's great. If, let's say, we don't have a fountain yet, just having something small like a saucer of water or a birdbath is still a good first step until we can get that sparkling, moving water, right?

Susan: Absolutely, yes. It absolutely makes a difference. In fact, if you specifically want to attract butterflies, then you might even want to consider even if you do have a space where you have moving water, having just a separate small, very, very shallow dish because they can handle very little depth at all, if that makes sense, with water.

Theresa: That makes really good sense. I know I've, on a different podcast with Robin Haglund, she was talking about the bees in her garden, and there's an object that I put in my water fountains that I know Robin brought up on that podcast and that is the bee saver. It's a glass ball that has little bumps on it, and you can put that in water, too, and butterflies will also land on that. Because of the little bumps on it, it keeps them from being slippery. It gives them a chance—because I know butterflies, they do not like deep water, so that can be a problem.



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Susan: No, and I know that product and I have that product in my own garden, not in my fountain, but I have a birdbath as well. I love it because it gets back to this idea of being able to do things that make the garden great for us, but also make the garden welcoming to wildlife, because the bee savers are adorable. And they come in this huge range of colors, so they actually are this really lovely art feature to put into the garden even if they didn't do anything except look beautiful, and yet they actually are doing something good for the overall environment as well. When you talked about the idea of things that do double duty, that's a perfect example.

Theresa: Well, I will definitely have a link in the show notes to the bee saver, so if anyone is interested in finding out more, they're done by a fantastic artist that we know who lives up in Washington, and she can actually mail them to anybody. They're really cool! I'll have a link in the show notes for that.

I think that's really awesome. I didn't even realize how important sparkling water was. I knew water was an element, but having it moving really seems to be key, so that's really cool. That kind of takes us right into the other element that you mentioned, movement. What are some benefits of having movement and what are some ways that we can bring movement into our garden?

Susan: Well, movement also is just a way to remind ourselves that it's a living space, something that you don't really get inside of the house. I always want to make my outdoor experience to be as distinct as possible just because why not take advantage of your whole property? The more you make your outside feel like your inside, the more I kind of feel like, "Well, why bother?"



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So movement is something very unique to being outside. Water itself is obviously a big aspect of movement, so I'm going to talk about water for just a minute more before I move on. One of the things to think about if you do decide to add a water feature to your garden is the type that I've just talked about is a jar type of a fountain, and it's very beautiful, but you're not going to get that splashiness. If one of the things that you want is a really strong sound of water, you are better to come up with something that has a little bit more of a tiered effect.

The other aspect of water and your water feature and where you place it is it's a great way not only to relax because of the soothing sounds of the water, but it also is a great way to mask noise. If, for example, you want to sort of mute out some of the typical neighborhood sounds that you get of people mowing their lawns or things like that, then it's a good idea to put the water feature closer to where you're going to be sitting because it's going to be more effective that way.

Water is, again, that's going to be great for sound and movement, but the other way that I love to bring movement into the garden is to choose plants that catch breezes very easily. Probably one of the best plant categories for that are ornamental grasses. The way that ornamental grasses have those very light plumes, it takes only a very tiny, tiny breeze to get those waving in the wind to get that beautiful, silky scent. In addition to that, ornamental grasses are what are often called "light catchers," because in early-morning light or late-afternoon light, they really pick that up and sparkle. They really reflect the light back. They get a really beautiful glow to them.

Unless you have a lot of allergies, in which case you want to stay away from ornamental grasses, I consider them an element that really—they work well with just about any type of garden design, and they bring a lot of pleasure besides just their beauty.

Theresa: That's really good. The light-catching part is another thing I never knew about, and I love the way you're talking about all the things that—all the benefits that we get from this. Everything you're talking about is really about us slowing down and de-stressing and really enjoying the garden more, which so many of us, well, all of us, really, need more of. I know I've been hypnotized by watching grasses blowing in the wind before. It can really be a relaxing thing. It's kind of like watching fish swim in an aquarium.

I did have a question, though. On the ornamental grasses, I always worry about if they get weedy. Are there certain ones we should definitely stay away from because they will be blowing weeds or their seeds all over or is that really not an issue?

Susan: You're talking about the potential for ornamental grasses to be invasive?

Theresa: Yes.

Susan: Yes, that is definitely something to be cautious of, and it's unfortunate because there are several that are well known to be invasive, and you would think that the nurseries would just not sell them, but unfortunately that's not really the case. The level of invasiveness really varies on where you live in the country. A grass can be invasive in one part of the country and not in another, so that adds another level of complexity.

But in general, what you want to avoid are ones that can be wind pollinated. For example, Mexican feather grass is probably one of the best-known examples of that. Another example that you can see here in northern California where I live is Pampas grass, because what happens with both of those grasses is it's not just a case of re-seeding because I think a lot of us have plants in our garden where you'll notice, "Oh, gosh, a baby plant started nearby."

That's not usually a big problem. That can be a fairly easy thing to control within your own garden, but grasses like Mexican feather grass, also some of the fountain grasses, although not all of them, because they can be wind pollinated, what can happen is that little grass in your suburban backyard is actually being carried a couple miles away.

So what happens is it's not just the unsightliness of having plants pop up where you don't want them, but it's also if you live close to any sort of an urban, open space interface, meaning you live close to open spaces. If seeds get out into that part of the environment, they spread rapidly and they choke out native species. That, obviously, is a problem in terms of supporting native wildlife as well.

Theresa: Is the best option since it can be different for different people in different parts of the country—is the best option to make sure that you talk to your local nursery before you start planting a ton of these different grasses in your backyard?

Susan: You can talk to your local nursery. It's actually fairly easy to find information online.

A lot of states have regional watch lists, basically, that say whether or not plants are invasive in their area. When I'm writing something for a national audience, I don't necessarily know if the plants I'm talking about are invasive in other parts of the country, so I often find it very easy to just Google the name of the plant and pull up lists to see where it might be a problem and where it might not be.

Theresa: That's good advice because that's always—I've just heard of it from other people, so I always try to be careful with those kinds of plants in my own garden. You're right. If it's something like fennel that we grow—is also very feathery and wind blown and looks beautiful in our edible gardens, but if you let it go to seed, it will be all over the place. It's fairly easy to pull out young, but if you let it take root, those taproots are quite deep.

Susan: Absolutely.

Theresa: So they can be a problem. We're just talking fennel! So I'm sure it can be a big deal with some of the other ones. Okay, that's really good. When we're looking at movement, things that are billowy, that maybe will be moving. Does that also attract birds and some of the wildlife that could potentially be pollinators in our garden, because pollinators are such an important part of growing food?

Susan: That's a good question. I'm not sure if movement like that does attract pollinators, but it's believable to me that it might do that. Pollinators tend to be more attracted by color. They're very old school. We sophisticated gardeners and designers love our ornamental grasses, but they still, for the most part, gravitate towards flowers. That's still their bread and butter, so to speak.

Theresa: Okay, well, so let's define what pollinator is since I just brought it up. A pollinator is a way to describe any animal, bird, or insect that helps plants produce fruit or seeds. When we're talking about pollinators, we're talking about things that could potentially help our vegetables when we're growing our vegetables or fruit trees like apples and things like that. What are some things, since we're talking about attracting wildlife, what are some things we could do to specifically draw in pollinators to our garden?

Susan: Well, one we've already covered, which is, of course, having a water source available, which not only attracts them in, but it provides the—helps provide some of the nutritional needs that they have. The best way to bring in pollinators is to bring in the plants that they love.

One of the things that I like about this aspect of planning a new garden is it doesn't really take a lot. I know sometimes people will want to attract owls to their property, for example. I have clients who like to do that and that's a great thing to do, but it's kind of a big production and you may or may not be successful. But when it comes to attracting pollinators, if you plant just a few of the plants that they like, that's going to be enough to bring them into your space. It's fairly easy to do.

Theresa: Well, that's good news. Yeah, that's great! So what are some of the things, like let's say let's focus on bees for a minute. I know bees are so important and you know bees are so important, but what are some of the things that they are looking for when they're out and about foraging?

Susan: Well, they actually forage from a much wider range of plants than I think a lot of people realize. To start with the more obvious things,

they love flowers. Bees are actually not that great at seeing flower color. Butterflies are actually more adept at that.

For bees, basically the more pollen and nectar they can get, it's kind of that one-shop-stop idea, the happier they are. While there are many flowers that they like, they are particularly attracted to flowers that are actually made up of a whole lot of other flowers. I think probably one of the best examples of this is just common yarrow.

Whereas you or I would look at that, at yarrow, and we would see a few flowers, if we really, really looked close at it, we'll see that there's actually a whole lot of little tiny flowers inside. A plant like yarrow is also great because the flowers themselves are flat. That also makes them more attractive to butterflies because butterflies have much longer legs, and so that creates a nice flat landing pad for them. It's easier for them to get the nectar that they're looking for.

Theresa: Ah, well, that makes perfect sense because I know I always see bees and butterflies on my bachelor buttons, which I like to plant just around because I just love them. I think they're so pretty. They always are going for that, and I'm always thinking, "Well, there's really nothing in there." But that's what it is. It's made up of lots of little tiny flowers and my sunflowers, too. They love my sunflowers.

Susan: Sunflowers are that way, as well. Yeah. Agastache is a great plant. I like that one as well. Where I live in northern California, low-water plants are important. And I also love plants that bloom and bloom and bloom and bloom. This one will really go for a long season here in northern California. It starts in the spring and it'll go on and off all the way through the fall. But bee balm, obviously, a plant

with a name like bee balm you know has got to be attractive to bees.

Theresa: Right.

Susan: And lots of old fashioned things, cosmos, hollyhocks. Really, a lot of things work. In fact, herbs work as well. I know many of your listeners are growing edibles, and herbs, I think, are probably one of the easiest and most practical things that you can grow in a garden. The key with herbs is oftentimes we'll cut off the flowers because sometimes that can make the leaves bitter once the plant goes to seed and also then maybe it dies after that. It bolts. The key is to let at least some of your herbs actually flower because that's the aspect of them that the bees are going to be attracted to.

Theresa: Ah, yes. I know I always hate picking off all of my basil flowers, but basil is an annual, and when you continually pick off the flowers, you'll make your basil season go a little bit longer. I do use the flowers for cooking, but my bees love my basil. When I'm cutting that off, that can always be a problem. There is a basil, though, that here in southern California, I'm not sure about in other parts of the country, but here in southern California, there is one basil that is a perennial. I think it's Blue Mountain. Do you know?

Susan: There could be more than one, but one that we grow here is African Blue Basil.

Theresa: African Blue—yes, that's the one I grow, also. That one I do not pick the flowers off. I just let it go to town, and every morning it's buzzing, so that's a great one for attracting bees into the garden and it smells fantastic, and it's edible and it works just like regular basil. It just does not die after flowering.



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Susan: I absolutely agree. Actually, even if you aren't in southern California, you can just treat it as an annual. It'll get pretty big in the first year. I've actually grown it in containers, and I love that! I love seeing the bees all over it. In fact, watching bees, to me, is a huge part of why you want them in the garden in the first place. It's not just about the hard work that they do pollinating everything. It's also just the sensory experience of being around them.

Theresa: Yeah, we all need to slow down and really just take time to enjoy the garden. That's one of the things I do every morning. I walk through my garden with my cup of coffee. I go out and feed the chickens, and then I just walk the garden. I just make one loop. It kind of lets me get a sense if anything maybe, "Oh, this plant isn't getting any water or this plant has a little problem or oh, I need to harvest this." I just make a walkthrough, but that walkthrough is when I do see the bees and the bumblebees and the hummingbirds and everything. It's a great way to start your day or to end your day, to try and get out there and do that.

Susan: Well, actually, we end our day in the garden almost every evening while the weather is nice, and we're fortunate to have a pretty long outdoor season here. With bees, I think my favorite bee to watch is probably a carpenter bee because they're just—they're so fat. They're just big and fat and they always look to me like, "I think he's going to land and he's going to drink that nectar and he's not going to be able to get up again."

They just have such a slow, lazy way about them. They don't whip around and speed around sometimes like honeybees do, so I love watching them. But when it comes to sound, when I mentioned that I've moved into a new house and one of the things that I'm going

to replicate as I create a new backyard is in my old house I had a Brazilian pepper tree. Again, people don't always realize that trees also produce—many trees produce flowers that are attractive to bees.

When you have a tree like a Brazilian pepper, where it gets covered in flowers for about a four-week period in the summer, your tree is going to be a magnet for all the bees for miles around. So for that four-week period in the summertime, we actually would move our lounge chairs underneath the tree because the entire tree hums and vibrates. It is just the most incredible experience to be underneath it. It's like the attractiveness of a kitten's purr, except you're surrounded by an entire litter of kittens. It's just a very incredible experience.

Theresa: Wow! That is so cool. That brings up the point that you don't have to be afraid of the bees. I know you talk about this all the time, but they're really busy. They're really not interested in you unless you're trying to squish them or something.

Susan: I know that's true. Unless you actively know that you're allergic to bees, when they're away from their hives, they're basically out foraging and they're way too busy looking for food, looking for something to drink to be interested in you. That's absolutely true.

Theresa: Oh, that's so cool! That's a great experience. Well, I know also you don't even have to have a giant tree. You can have a small little balcony and you talk about how just having a few plants, a few potted plants, you can still get the experience. I'm sure by planting something that is going to really attract bees, like maybe basil or thyme. Thyme, I know, has so many flowers on it. I always have a lot of bees on my thyme. So something like that just on your back

porch is a great way to just sit on your patio and get to enjoy that, so that's a really good tip.

Susan: Yeah, that's absolutely true. In fact, if you are in a more urban area or maybe you live in an apartment building where there aren't so many backyards and gardens all around you, you are actually doing a great service for bees because it's difficult for them if they have to fly long distances when they're foraging without having a place to land or to rest.

There is something called "the urban wildlife corridor," and that's what happens when people who do live in more urban areas actually take the time to plant containers on their balconies with plants that provide nourishment to foraging insects because it gives them a place to stop to rest, to refuel, and to go on their way. You can feel really good about yourself not only that you are enjoying the look and the sound of the bees yourself, but that you're doing something that's going to make their colonies more successful.

Theresa: That's so great! It's just a little rest stop so that they have a place to recharge on their journey, and I'm sure that by having water and some of the other elements that we've talked about here, having that included would really help bring on even more. Then you can just sit there on your patio and enjoy the show. That's great!

Susan: Exactly.

Theresa: One more thing, Susan, while we're on the subject of all of the pollinators. I know you have said to me once there's some big word you used, and I can't remember it right now off the top of my head, but it's some kind of a spray that we need to be wary of. Could you explain that because it was really important?

Susan: Yes, and actually, it is a mouthful. I'm probably going to garble it when I say it to you, but there is a category of insecticides and they're referred to as neonicotinoids. They are considered to be less harmful to mammals and to insects than other broad categories of insecticides, but they still have the potential to harm or to poison bees and other pollinators.

They're very popular in the nursery growing business, particularly for growers who grow large amounts of plants that are mass marketed because, of course, they want those plants to look their best when they're in the nursery, so you're encouraged to pop them into your cart.

Unfortunately, if you're choosing plants specifically to be pollinator plants and they've been treated with this particular insecticide, then potentially you're doing the exact opposite of what you want to do. If you are searching specifically for pollinator plants, it's worth it to search out a reputable source or to just have a conversation with your local garden center and let them know your concerns and make sure that they are sourcing from a grower that works for you.

Theresa: Very important information. Good. Thank you. Well, this has been so, so helpful. By just including some of these elements and maybe just focusing on just sound and movement, we can bring so much more into our garden and enjoy it so much more. I really appreciate you taking the time, Susan, to explain some of this to us. I think it'll be helpful to us. Even though we're really focused on food, we can use so much of these elements to enjoy our gardens more, so thank you so much!

Susan: You're welcome. It's been a lot of fun, Theresa.



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

Theresa: There you have it. That was my interview with Susan Morrison of Creative Exteriors Landscape Design. You can find more information about Susan and her design work and her writings and speaking engagements at [celandscapedesign.com](http://celandscapedesign.com). That CE stands for Creative Exteriors. I hope that gave you some ideas of little tiny things that you can add or incorporate into your garden design that can have really big benefits for both you, the wildlife, and any beneficial insects or pollinators that you draw into your garden.

Now remember everything that she mentioned will be in the show notes for this episode, including a full transcript and I have a plant list there, a PDF that you can download that has all kinds of recommended plants that you can add to your garden for drawing in pollinators, which is so important when we're growing food. To get that, just to go [livinghomegrown.com/55](http://livinghomegrown.com/55).

That's it for this week. Thank you so much for joining me today! I know you're super busy and I really appreciate that you took time out of your busy day to listen to this podcast. Until next time, keep working towards living just a little bit 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.**