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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 95 Growing Organic Flowers

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/95](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/95)

Announcer: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode #95.

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 having a farm. We talk about things like preserving the harvest, raising backyard critters, small space food growing, and other simple ways that we can live a more sustainable lifestyle. As always, if you want to dive deep into any of these topics, or learn about my online canning academy, or any of the other things I have going on, just visit my website, [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

Today's episode is all about growing and arranging fresh cut flowers. I interviewed Erin Benzakein of Floret Farm, which is located just north of Seattle, Washington. Now, I have been wanting to bring Erin on the podcast for a while, and really for several reasons. Because first of all, I've been following her for years after reading about her business and her farm in a magazine. She does incredible work, and she's part of the local flower movement.

Now, what is the local flower movement? Well, you've heard me talk before about the local food movement, where people strive to eat seasonally and sustainably by supporting their local farmers. Local food is something that we talk a lot about here, because when you purchase food that's grown locally, you get the freshest produce and some of the most incredible flavors, but you're also supporting the smaller, local farmer, and diverting our money to that instead of industrialized food.

Well, the local flower movement is exactly the same thing, but with flowers. Now, I covered this topic in depth in episode 41 of the podcast. That episode is on slow flowers, and the gist of it is this, many people don't realize that most of the flowers that we purchase here in the United States are not grown in organic or sustainable ways. In fact, most of the commercial flowers are not even grown in America. They're shipped in from outside the country and they're grown with a lot of pesticides and a lot of chemicals. So, here we are, as consumers, buying flowers for our loved ones or for really special occasions, like weddings or special events, and we're sticking our noses into those flowers; and those flowers, nine times out of ten, have been sprayed with chemicals, and in some cases, dipped in chemicals; mostly so they can be flown in from far, far away.

Now, just as the local food movement can offer up incredible flavors and

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organically and sustainably grown produce, so to can local flowers. It just means that we as consumers need to be a little bit more conscious of our purchases and buy our flowers in season, rather than out of season, buying something that's out of season that was shipped in from someplace like South America. And that part is really key, because one of the reasons that so many of our flowers are shipped in, is so that we can have the same flowers all year long, even if they are out of season. So, the commercial industry purchases the flowers from a country where they have a different growing season than we have here.

But when you shift gears and you start looking at in-season and locally sourced flowers, a whole new world opens up to you. Because there are so many flowers that could never withstand being shipped or flown, but you can get them locally, because they don't have very far to go, and they are very, very fresh cut. So, in other words, you can find flowers that you would never find at the supermarket or a typical commercial floral shop unless that market or floral shop are supporting local flowers. Do you get what I'm saying?

Okay, so you could go and buy things like a bundle of sweet peas or ranunculus that maybe have something unusual tucked in, like maybe carrot tops, which are actually quite beautiful; and the reason is that those particular flowers may not be able to withstand being shipped from far away places. In addition, when you buy local flowers, you are getting something that is very, very fresh, so they last a lot longer.

Now, I wanted to also bring Erin on to the show because her new book is absolutely beautiful. She just came out with a brand new book. It is hot off the press, and I think that you would find a lot of inspiration from its pages. So, let me tell you a little bit about Erin and her book. Erin Benzakein is the founder of the flower farm called Floret, and she's the author of this new book, it's called Floret Farms Cut Flower Garden: Grow, Harvest, and Arrange Stunning Seasonal Blooms. Erin has been publishing articles on her blog and in Growing for Market, and she has mentored countless other aspiring farmer/florists all across the country.

Her floral designs and flower farm have been published in so many magazines, including Living, Sunset, Country Living, Victoria, Seattle Bride, and Mary Jane's Farm, as well as dozens of trend setting wedding websites, blogs, and photo shoots. And just so you know, Erin is considered one of the nation's leading farmer florists. She is an accomplished photographer, an accomplished floral designer, teacher, and she's an entrepreneur. Known for her lush, airy, romantic, floral designs, Erin was awarded the Martha Stewart American Maid in 2014 for floral design.

Now, one of the things that I love about Erin is that she's drawn to old-fashioned flowers, and she's consistently pushing the limits of what can be used in a typical bouquet. Her latest obsession is incorporating various herbs, edibles,

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and vines into her designs, which I knew you guys would love.

Now, Erin has a very impressive client roster, which includes companies like Whole Foods, and the floral world always seems to be watching whatever Erin's doing on her little flower farm. So, I really wanted you guys to learn all about her.

Now, I mention it in the interview, but I also wanted to say it here, that Erin has an incredible Instagram page with the most amazing photos. So, if you do nothing else, you have to check out her Instagram page. It has over 400,000 followers, and I will be sure to link to it in the show notes for this episode.

In the interview, I have Erin tell her complete story of how she got started in the world of flowers, and she offers up some tips for us as food gardeners on what we can do to bring flowers into our own gardens. And in the show notes for today's episode, Erin shares some tips for caring for those fresh cut flowers after we harvest. The tip sheet will be in the show notes for the episode. All you have to do is go to [livinghomegrown.com/95](http://livinghomegrown.com/95), and I will also have links to Erin's website, her book, and I will link to some of Erin's information on growing Dahlias and sweet peas at home; and of course, I will link to Erin's Instagram page, which is absolutely incredible.

Now, Erin lives, and farms, and writes from her home that she shares with her husband, her two children, and a small flock of chickens, all in Washington state. So, with that, why don't we dive into the interview. Here's my interview with Erin Benzakein of Floret Farm.

Hey, Erin. Thanks so much for coming on the show today.

Erin: Oh, thanks so much for having me.

Theresa: I'm really excited about this. I have been so excited about your book ever since I first heard about it, and then when I got a copy in my hand, I literally was carrying it around the house and trying to read it every spare moment. It's absolutely beautiful. You did a beautiful job.

Erin: Oh, thank you.

Theresa: I'd love to start at the beginning, because the listeners may not know who you are or what you do; so why don't you start by talking about you first became interested in growing flowers.

Erin: Okay. Well, we were living in Seattle, and I had just had my daughter; and I had a little city garden, and I was just, I had outgrown it. I wanted a life in the country. I wanted chickens. I wanted apple trees, and there was nothing in the city that we could afford that actually had a garden. So, we started looking

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farther and further outside of the city, and we found this big ugly, old, weird house with an acre of land up in the Skagit Valley, which is so beautiful.

So, we transplanted ourselves up here, and my husband commuted back and forth to work; and all of my gardening dreams came true. Like I had a whole acre to play with. There were some established fruit trees already here, an asparagus patch, lots of old flowers. So, I mean, I was blessed with this like blank canvas, basically. And then just started trying everything. I grew a huge vegetable garden. We had a hundred chickens. Like I did everything that I had always wanted to do.

And then in the process of that I was really trying to figure out what I wanted to do where I could make some money while my kids were home, and trying a lot of different ideas out. I was growing a ton of veggies at the time, and down the middle of the vegetable patch, I planted flowers. I started putting in different things, and I grew a double row of sweet peas. They're the thing that started this whole journey. They really caught my attention. It was the first thing that I really had done gardening wise that I felt like, "This. This is what I'm supposed to do with my life."

Theresa: So, those flowers you, I know I read in your book and also on your website, that you started selling or giving those flowers away, and it was the reactions that you were getting from people that really started to drive you. Can you explain that?

Erin: Yeah. So, my great-grandma when I was growing up, I visited her in the summer, and when she passed away shortly after we got our first house up here in the country, and so I brought some of her ashes home with me and I put them in the garden, and I planted the sweet peas over the top in memory of her. And they ... I had so many like happy memories of that time in her garden and flowers. So, people had found out that we started, we had things blooming, and someone ordered a \$5 dollar jar of sweet peas, and I drove like 45 minutes away to deliver this jar. I was so nervous. Like my first sale.

Theresa: Oh, that's so great.

Erin: Totally. And I'm really shy, so I was very nervous. I just wanted to like ding-dong ditch; like just drop the bouquet and run. But the lady opened the door, and so I just like, you know, pushed the bouquet at her, like trying to run for my car, and she took like a big smell of it, and then she started crying, and it totally caught me off guard. And she started talking about her grandmother, and her childhood memories, and sweet peas. And then I start crying about Grammy, and it was like in that moment we were total strangers, and all of those nerves, all of that tension just disappeared, and we connected through flowers instantly. And that's when I knew this was definitely something worth pursuing. That someone could drop all those defenses, and we could connect that quickly

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and that easily over that shared love of flowers.

- Theresa: That is such a beautiful story, and it touched me when I first heard it from you. I just loved that story. Especially sweet peas, they definitely have a connection to people. I know for me also, my grandmother and my mother love sweet peas, and so I always think of both of them whenever I see them. And my mother's still alive, you know, not that she's gone. It's just I always, it just has a connection, it's an emotional connection. And in fact, you talk about this a lot, and I love it. I agree with you 100% that you always say, "Flowers are not really a luxury, they're a necessity." Could you just touch on that for a moment?
- Erin: Absolutely. So, back in the day, I mean, before things got so disconnected, people grew gardens, and they grew flowers, and we all have memories, and our mothers have memories, and our grandmothers, they're all tied to nature; and the lilacs that were blooming, and the cherry blossoms, and the sweet peas. And I think that flowers are like that thread that runs through life and those memories, like what flowers were in your bouquet at your wedding, what trees were blooming when you brought your baby home from the hospital. Like we remember all of those things.
- But along the way, flowers have become this expensive luxury item, or at least they've been framed that way, and I actually believe they're a necessity. I mean, they connect us to the moment, the moment in nature, like what's happening right now. If we can let ourselves just go even pick a few sprigs on a walk, or go out into our yard and just cut whatever is flowering, you know, from the trees and the shrubs around. It's really connecting ourselves with that moment, and with nature in a really tangible, real, down-to-earth kind of a way, and it helps you connect like right here, right now. They're so powerful. So, I don't think of them as a luxury. I think that they're essential to having a wonderful life.
- Theresa: I agree so much, and that's one of the reasons I take a walk every morning through my garden, and I always bring something in, and set it on my desk for the day. I always have a vase of flowers, always, always. And not just on my desk, but on our kitchen table. We always have something there.
- Erin: Yes.
- Theresa: And I've always just been that way. Because we're inside, and we're on the computer, we're on social media, and we're not connecting as much, just like they talk about kids not connecting, it's really important for us too. So, I love that you preach that, because it's so, so important. And flowers are used as gifts so often. So, they're tokens of love, and I think that's another reason why people have such a connection. Like you said, you know, the bouquet of your wedding or when you brought your first baby home, people bring you flowers; and so, it's always a celebration, they're always used in celebrations, or even celebrations of a memory of someone, even if it's at a funeral. There's so much

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with flowers, whether they smell or not, they just have such a powerful force. So, that's fantastic. I love that.

So, back to your farm. So, you then started to make these bouquets and started selling them, and it kind of evolved into an entire flower farm. So, how did that take place?

Erin: The first couple of years were not ... I was floundering and experimenting a lot. I was trying everything. Like I knew that I loved flowers, and I wanted to do something with them and make a business out of it, but I couldn't really imagine what that would look like. There weren't a lot of examples at the time, and we didn't have access to very much land; it was just our yard. So, our entire property is one acre. So, I had about maybe a quarter of an acre I could garden.

I started out with a flower CSA. So, people ordered a weekly bouquet, like mason jars full of whatever was blooming in my garden that week. That was really popular. And then, I started doing deliveries to small businesses. And then, expanded out from there. But really the turning point was I got up the ... I was so nervous, but I really wanted to make a go of this, and my neighbors had finally rented me part of their field; and so, I called the regional buyer at Whole Foods, and kind of pretended like I had everything together like, "Oh yeah, I can totally grow flowers." And they wanted me to come in the next day and have a meeting, and I got an account with Whole Foods right in the beginning. So, I came home from the meeting, tilled up the neighbors field, and started planting. And really, overnight almost, went from a big cutting garden to a small farm, and it was craziness.

Theresa: That is so cool. That is so, so cool. Way to go being brave. Wow.

Erin: Oy.

Theresa: Yeah. Well, now explain to everybody how big is your farm right now, because I think people, when they see the book or if they go on your website, they think you're like 500 acres -

Erin: Yeah.

Theresa: ... and you're not. So, explain how much space are you actually growing all these incredible flowers?

Erin: Yes. Nobody ever believes that is two tiny acres. So, we, our property and then the neighbors, it was their soccer field that I talked them into letting me till up. So, all together what we're growing is just two acres. That includes, we have 11 greenhouses, perennials and shrubs, and then open field for our annuals. But the way the valley is laid out, it's very flat here. So, all the berry fields around me, the leek fields, the barns that are in the background of the pictures, they look

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like they're mine. So it looks like I have this beautiful estate, but really it's someone's soccer field and my backyard. So, whenever we do our workshops, I always warn everyone like, "Get ready. It really is only two acres," and they're like, "Oh, you're just being modest," and then we walk out to the field, they're like, "Oh. This is it," like, "Yeah. No, this is it."

Theresa: Well, and so people, I want people to understand how many flowers you grow there. So, what's some typical numbers of cut flowers that you do in spring and summer?

Erin: Okay, so, if we're harvesting sweet peas, we will be delivering between 250 and 300 bunches a week to the groceries; those are ten stem bunches, plus bouquets and all kinds of other stuff. Or when we're harvesting dahlias, we pick the field twice a week, and we're picking between 480 and about 520 bunches, twice a week. So, out of this little tiny piece of ground, we are just cranking. We call it turn and burn. Like we're just one crop after the next crop. So, we'll do huge numbers, and three to four hundred mixed bouquets a week. I mean, hundreds and hundreds of bunches, thousands of bunches are leaving our farm every week in our 15 passenger van that's just driving up and down the I-5.

Theresa: That is so great. Yeah, you definitely have a system down, and that's why this book is so fantastic. Now, you also started diving into seeds, selling seeds, and I know that that kind of came about while you were working on the book. So, explain to everybody what you're doing with the seeds.

Erin: When I started writing the book, the flower varieties that I wanted to feature, my editor limited me to six per category, which was so painful. Like I wanted to do 30 or 40 daffodils, and they said six. So, that was really hard.

Theresa: Yes.

Erin: But a lot of the very best varieties for cutting, I mean they're bred to have these long beautiful stems or interesting coloring, they're not generally available to the home gardener; they're only commercially available. And the requirement, if I was going to include it in the book, it had to be available to home gardeners, because the book is really meant for home gardeners wanting to grow cut flowers.

So, I had had this dream of having a seed company, like maybe in five years or someday. But it became really clear that I would either have to not really share my favorite varieties or we'd have to find a solution. So, we decided to move that goal up by four years, and start a little seed company that specializes just in the best varieties for cutting. So, everything mentioned in the book we offer in our online shop, and we ship stuff, we ship seeds now all over the world, and then bulbs and tubers all over the country.

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- Theresa: Wow. That was a big undertaking while you were writing the book. So, that ...  
Kudos to you.
- Erin: Yes it was.
- Theresa: Yeah, yeah. Oh, that's so fantastic. Well, and people may not realize, you say this in one of your videos but you also say it elsewhere on your blog, that 70-80% of all the flowers sold in America come from South America.
- Erin: Yes.
- Theresa: And so, you are a certified organic flower grower, and that is why it's so important for all of us to support the small growers.
- Erin: Absolutely. I mean, really by, when you really are voting with your dollar, so when people choose to buy our flowers at the store ... One of the great advantages we have as small growers is we have the opportunity to share our story. So, that's why we've been really open and transparent, especially online, sharing images from the farm, sharing a little bit of our life, because these are not being flown in from some far away land, harvested by people you don't know. I mean, you can actually get to know our family and this small team that works with us. But you really, by choosing to buy local, you know, you're keeping the money in your local economy, but you're also supporting your local farmers, which gives them the opportunity to do what they love for a living, and it's better for the planet, it's really a win-win.
- Theresa: Absolutely. And if anyone wants to follow you, you have an incredible Instagram. You have over 400,000 followers on your -
- Erin: How is that even possible?
- Theresa: I don't know, but I can see why if you go to the Instagram, and we'll have links in the show notes for this episode, so everyone can find your website, your Instagram, everything. We'll link to everything so they don't have to try and find you. We'll send them your way. But when you go to your Instagram, it is so beautiful, and I can see why, because you are not only just showing the pictures of what's growing and what you're doing, but you're also telling the story of your family, which is so fantastic. So, I think that's fantastic that you've don't that. And it helps everyone else too, not just people up in Washington, but it helps other flower growers across the country try and get people to connect with them so that they're buying local. So, fantastic.
- Erin: Absolutely. Thank you.
- Theresa: Yes. So, now let's talk about the book a little bit. I love how you laid it out. So, you've gone through all of the different seasons. Could you explain how you did

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that?

Erin: Yeah. So, in the beginning, the beginning chunk, probably a quarter of the book, is really laying the foundation. So, it's all the essential techniques, tools, and things you need to understand before you get started. How to keep the flowers, succession planting, and keep the harvest going. So, you really get the basics; it's like the 101. And then, we dive into each season. So, the beginning of each seasonal is an essay, and then the important tasks and things that you should be doing in your garden during that season, like don't forget to do these things; and then we walk through all of the different, well not all, because I wanted to include all, but as many as I could squeeze in, flower varieties. So, we start with daffodils, and then it would go to tulips in the spring, and we'd walk our way through all of the major beautiful, most incredible flowers; and then at the end of each seasonal chapter, there are three how-tos to make some type of floral arrangement using the flowers from that season.

So, we've got, starts with spring, then summer, autumn, and then into winter.

Theresa: Yes. And what you're not saying is that there are incredible, beautiful photographs of the flowers that you're talking about. So, it's very inspiring as you're working in the individual seasons. I love that you did it that way.

Now, my listeners, they are mostly food growers, a lot of them are food growers or wannabe food growers, and I always encourage them to grow flowers for bringing in the pollinators. But you use a lot of edibles in your flower arrangements. So, I thought that would be a good topic for us to dive in today, if you're okay with that.

Erin: Absolutely.

Theresa: Okay. So, you always say that there's a lot of foliage that we should be growing along with our flowers, so that we can make these beautiful bouquets. So maybe we should start with that. What are some of the edibles that we can use as foliage when we are making our flower bouquets?

Erin: My number one favorite early season foliage is apple mint, really any of the mints are incredible. You just want to wait till the stem is nice and firm and the tip isn't floppy anymore to harvest it, and you get ten days of vase life out of mint, basil; I love bolted cilantro, both the flowers and the little, once they make the seeds, they're an incredible filler.

Theresa: Oh, that's good, because it's always bolting.

Erin: Yeah. And bolted lettuce is beautiful -

Theresa: Yes.

- Erin: ... in an arrangement. Any of the herbs. Really there are so much in your veggie garden. Little green tomatoes on the vine, sometimes you just have too many tomatoes, and when you need to go in and thin them out, especially the currant tomatoes cascading over the edge of an arrangement, talk about a conversation starter. Even the most checked out person will notice the tomatoes and reach over touch that bouquet. I always put them in our wedding arrangements on the table, because it gets everybody talking. So, you can go forage around your veggie patch, and there is so much in there that you could incorporate into your bouquets.
- Theresa: Well, I really love using the bolted things, because that, you know, so many times we're like, "Oh, we missed it," you know, "We missed that window. No, that's till usable. So, I love that you tell people to do that. Absolutely. Now, you also talk about using forced branches, and that was something that I kind of learned because of my heirloom orchard that we have up in Northern California. When I first started pruning my orchard, I wasn't thinking, you know, I was just thinking pruning, I wasn't thinking about taking those branches that we just pruned off the fruit trees and bringing them inside in bouquets. So, could you talk a little bit about what kind of things we could force that are edible.
- Erin: Absolutely. So yeah, when you're pruning your orchard in late winter, you could be bringing the plum branches in, peaches, apricots, apple trees. You know, you just need a little bit of a swollen bud, and then bring them into a warm room, put them in water, and within a couple of week, depending on how developed they were already, like if it's really in the winter when you're pruning, it'll take a little bit longer, but you just bring them into that warm room and watch them come to life. There is nothing that tides you over from that end of winter craving springtime than forced branches. Some of them are a little stinky like pear, you're like, "Ugh, it smells like the cat went to the bathroom in the house," like you can't find the smell, you're like, "Oh, it's the pear blossom." But they're so beautiful, so it's worth it.
- Theresa: It is. Absolutely. And I have two boys, and when I brought home all these sticks and stuck them in a mason jar, and stuck them on the kitchen counter, they were looking at me like I was a nut. But as soon as they started opening we had that sitting on our kitchen table through all our meals, and it was absolutely fascinating to watch it start swelling more and more, and then it opens up, and then there's this flower; and it's almost like you're watching in slow motion what happens in the springtime. So, it's really fun.
- Erin: Totally. Totally. And you might miss that in the garden but you get to watch it happen before it's going to happen out in nature, and then you're even more aware of when the garden starts to wake up. Then you're looking for it, because you've already been given that little glimpse. It's such a magical process.

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Theresa: Yeah. I love that. Now, one of the things you mentioned, was when you were talking about herbs, is growing dill, and I know one of the problems I used to have with dill was when I would harvest it, it would get kind of floppy, and then I learned to harvest first thing in the morning. Is there any other tips for having your dill stand up?

Erin: Yeah, you want to want, especially with any kind of like an umbel flower, wait until it's a little bit more developed. If you pick it too young, it can kind of tip down and droop. So, let it get a little bit more developed and a little more firm. And then one of the tricks, if stuff starts to flop, take a cup of boiling water, you can stick it in the microwave or just pull it off the oven, you know, just something recently boiled, so it's still nice and hot, and plunge the bottom two to three inches in a cup of boiling water, count to ten, and pull it out, and it will revive even the most wilted, floppy stem; they'll just straighten right up. It's this trick I use with everything. If mint is kinda wilted, basil, give it the boiling water treatment and it'll come right back.

Theresa: That is so good. I did not know that, and it's so counterintuitive. You would think, "Oh, that'll kill it."

Erin: I know.

Theresa: You know?

Erin: Exactly.

Theresa: Wow. That's a good one. Thank you for that.

Erin: Yeah.

Theresa: What about scented geraniums? I love to use scented geraniums. Do you use those a lot in your arrangements?

Erin: We grow tons of scented geraniums. My favorite is chocolate. It gets massive. We grow it in the greenhouse; just in the back corner of our little seedling house. But it has a green leaf with a chocolate vein running through the center; attar of rose, which smells so wonderful and is edible, really any of the scented geraniums. They make great cuts, they last forever. The trick is to pick them when the stems are a little bit more thick and woody, not the fresh new growth at the tips, because that tends to wilt. And then the boiling water treatment works great on scented ones too. That'll get them to just hydrate really quick, and then they'll last well over a week in the vase.

Theresa: Great. Okay. So, now if we are, now we're harvesting all of these different wonderful edibles to use in our arrangements, what are some flowers that you would recommend for us to grow along with our vegetables to use in flower

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arrangements?

Erin: There's a couple really easy to grow, like say zinnias. Zinnias and cosmos are probably the two that I would recommend the most. They're kind of the training wheels of cutting flowers. They're very easy to grow, they thrive in the summer heat, and the more you pick them, the more they bloom. They're really a cut and come again. From just one sowing, you're going to be harvesting for six to eight weeks, and you can mix it with anything that you have in the veggie garden. And butterflies, bees, I mean, they're very pollinator friendly, especially cosmos, but the trick with them is to just keep both of them harvested regularly. Like you're going to want to go through the little patch and cut it at least once a week, and the more you pick, the more you get. So, be as greedy as you possibly can be, because you're going to be rewarded.

Theresa: Oh, that's good. Yes. That's a really good thing. Okay, now what about if we wanted to grow something that would go into the fall months. Like is there any flower that we could start in the summer that would still be blooming as we start to transition from the heat of summer into fall?

Erin: Well, we here at Floret grow many, many dahlias, so we have almost 10,000 in the ground.

Theresa: Wow.

Erin: So, I would highly recommend dahlias. Depending on where you are, if it's super hot, they might be kind of dormant in the summer. But then as summer cools down and fall comes along, they'll wake up and just bloom like crazy. For us here in Washington, we start harvesting in July, and they go all the way to our fall frost. And they're the same as zinnias or cosmos, they're that cut and come again, so the more you pick them the more they flower.

Theresa: Okay. Fantastic. Yes, and the other thing I wanted to ask you is when we are growing some of these things, I know that they can tend to want to be tippy or floppy, especially if we have a windy area, and you talk a lot in the book about different techniques we can use for supporting them. What are some things that we could do that are pretty simple for supporting flowers? I know you did something where we were able to just grow the flowers up through, it's a netting, you grow it up through a netting, and that helps support the flowers. Is that what you usually suggest?

Erin: That's what we do over the beds. So, it's called Hortonova netting, and Johnny's Select Seeds sells it; and you can buy it in, I think, 10 or 20 foot lengths. It works great both for veggies and flowers, so if you want to go vertical, it's this white mesh netting that's very lightweight, and I attach it with zip ties, because it's the easiest. You could also use wire. Attach it to your stakes, so you can either go vertical and grow peas up it, any kind of vine that you want, you could even

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attach some tomatoes. Or you can turn it horizontally and suspend it over the beds using stakes in the corners to hold it tight; and the flowers or veggies will grow right up through it, and they'll be held. So that if you get a big wind storm or it gets very rainy, things won't tip over, and bend, and fall on the ground. It just keeps them vertical; gives them that extra support, and it's fast, it's lightweight, it's easy to put up, and then you don't have to worry about staking each individual plant with a bamboo stick or something.

Theresa: Yeah.

Erin: That's our favorite thing to do.

Theresa: Yeah. But that can be, you don't have the time to do that, this can be a really fast solution for even a large area.

Erin: Yes. Yeah, we'll do 70 foot long beds, and it takes us max five minutes to stake a bed, and then it's done. That's it.

Theresa: Wow.

Erin: Like you don't even have to worry about it.

Theresa: Yeah, that's fantastic. Okay. So, once we've cut all of these, could you just give us a couple little tips of what we can do when we make an arrangement so that it'll last longer in the vase when we bring it inside?

Erin: So, when you're picking flowers, you want to harvest them before they're fully opened. So, if it's something like a daisy flower that has that little yellow center, like a cosmo, you're going to want to pick it before it's fully opened, because when the pollinators find it and they start pollinating it, it kind of tells the plant to go to seed, so it'll shorten the vase life. So, I like to pick flowers when they're about half to two-thirds of the way open, so you still have a little life left in them. Picking, definitely, in the coolest parts of the day; so, early in the morning or in the evening. That really helps them. Stripping off all of the foliage that's going to fall below the water line, so it doesn't make the water scummy. And re-cutting everything when you put it into your vase, so that there's that nice clean cut, and the flower can drink up its stem and get nice and hydrated.

But I find that we get seven to ten days out of an arrangement, even without the use of flower food, just as long as you change the water. If it starts to look a little bit murky, just rinse out the vase, put in new water, so every other day you're changing it. It's amazing how long fresh flowers from the garden will actually last.

Theresa: Yeah. We're so used to buying things that have already been picked for a long time when we bring them home, that when we pick it either from our own

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garden, or we buy it at a farmer's market, or from a local flower market where the flowers have been fresh picked, oh my gosh, they just last so much longer.

Erin: Yeah.

Theresa: So, you get more for your money, really.

Erin: Absolutely.

Theresa: Well, I cannot thank you enough, Erin, for coming on the show. This has been so, so good, and I know people are going to love your book. So, I will link to everything in the show notes, and I just so appreciate you sharing your story, all of your tips, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

Erin: Oh, thank you so much for having me. I really, this has been a total treat.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Erin Benzakein of Floret Farm. Her book is absolutely gorgeous, and I have been carrying it around with me ever since I got it. It's just so lovely, and it's actually inspiring me to grow a few more unusual things in my garden this year.

So, as I said before, in the show notes for today's episode, I will have links to Erin's website, her book, I will also have in the show notes Erin's tip sheet for caring for our fresh cut flowers after we harvest. I think it will really come in handy if you're planning on starting to cut and use some of the things that you have growing in your garden. Just go to [livinghomegrown.com/95](http://livinghomegrown.com/95).

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