
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 102 Shifting Your Garden From City to Country

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/102

- Theresa Loe: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode number 102.
- 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 Loe: Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe and on this podcast, we talk about living farm fresh without the farm and that can mean preserving, fermenting, small-space food growing and just taking more steps to living a sustainable lifestyle. All the different ways that you can live closer to your food, even if you have little or no garden space at all. If you want to learn more about any of these topics or my online canning academy, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com.
- Today, I have on a friend of mine, Robin Haglund of Garden Mentors. Now, Robin has been on the podcast before. She actually came on way back in the beginning on episode number 21. It's been, gosh, 80 episodes and she's coming back. Now, Robin is a garden coach, and I'll go into all of her full resume in a minute, but I wanted to bring Robin on not to give the latest garden tips or the latest pruning technique which she totally could do but instead, I brought her on to tell a really personal story of what she has just gone through in the last, little over a year.
- It's the story of her transitioning from being a city gardener to a countryside gardener. I had a similar episode just two episodes back, episode 99 where I interviewed new lavender farmer, Amy Boyd, but this one today is a little bit different. Robin didn't uproot her garden and sell her home to go off and become a farmer, instead she moved out to the country from living in the city in Seattle to find a new lifestyle and I thought it would be really interesting to hear about her transition especially since it's coming from someone with such a vast garden knowledge because even with all the garden knowledge in the world, when you move like that to a new place, there is so much to learn about the garden, the soil, the

climate, everything.

I just thought it would be a really interesting episode to have Robin come on here and talk about this personal journey and what she's learned. Before I list out what she talks about, let me give you a little bit of background about Robin in case you don't know who she is. Robin is the founder and president of the pioneering garden coaching company, Garden Mentors. She is an award-winning designer, an engaging speaker and I can speak from experience because I've heard her speak many times. She's awesome if you ever get the chance to hear her and she is also a garden television writer and a frequent guest on numerous television programs. We've even had her appear on our PBS show, Growing a Greener World.

Now, Robin is also a dedicated environmental volunteer and her articles and seminars are filled with not only solid how-to information but also with stories about her garden adventures with honeybees, puppy dogs and wild life. As I said before, she's going to talk about a very personal journey that she's been on and what she learned along the way. What she's going to cover today in your discussion is why someone would even want to move out to the country, what are the advantages that she was looking for, what things should you consider when you are assessing a new piece of land or a new piece of property and you want to garden there.

We also talk about what we personally think of landscape fabric and some of the challenges that she's had with that in her new property and we talked about what you can do if you get this new piece of land and you have inherited a very weedy garden area. There are other options besides landscape fabric. Also, we talked about how to change your mind set when it comes to wild life and is it possible to raise chickens when you have so many predators around, what do you do? I think the biggest part is really all the lessons that Robin has learned from making this transition.

I hope you enjoy this episode. I think there's a lot to learn from watching someone make this transition and seen how you have to come to a new piece of land with your eyes wide open and what things you want to look for. I hope you find it really inspiring and remember that everything that we talk about in today's show will be in the show notes for this episode. To get that, you go to livinghomegrown.com/102. With that, here is my interview with Robin Haglund of Garden Mentors. Hey, Robin. Thanks so much for joining me here today.

Robin Haglund: Thank you, Theresa. It's always such a pleasure to talk to you and to be a part of your podcast.

Theresa Loe: Thanks. Definitely we have mutual admiration for each other. I'm excited to have you on here not only because you're such a close and personal friend

of mine but it's been so awesome watching you go through this whole transition that you're going through and I thought it would be really fun to share so I want to thank you for coming on and doing that. I guess we should first start though in case people did not hear you on a previous podcast or don't know who you are. Could you explain what you do and about Garden Mentors and what you do with your business?

Robin Haglund: Sure. Garden Mentors is my business and I founded it with the intention of empowering people in their home garden. I do residential garden coaching and design and try to meet people where they are in their personal spaces and help them achieve the best garden that they possibly can based on their budget and their lifestyle and what their garden can support. It's super fun and I just love it.

Theresa Loe: People probably aren't familiar with garden coaching but you've been doing it for a long time. When I try to explain it to someone, I explain, "Well, you know what a lifestyle coach is. Well, this is the same thing but for your garden."

Robin Haglund: Right.

Theresa Loe: It can be anything that that person needs it to be.

Robin Haglund: Right. Everybody comes into gardening at some level or other and some people have a lot of experience and just need a little second set of eyes to come in. Other people are brand new and maybe their kids are the ones that have inspired them to get out in the garden and that's why they call me. They're like, "Hey, you know I've never done this before and my kid wants to learn how to grow a carrot. How do I do that? Can I do that?"

Usually the answer is, "Absolutely, you can. Here is how we approach it." It might be a tree. Everybody has a different set of goals and so I go in and really try to help people achieve them and sometimes the answer is, "You know what, maybe you need a little help. Maybe you need a maintenance company to get you over the hump or maybe you need me to come back and teach you to prune at the right time." Just there's a wide array of things in the gardening world and I teach people that are brand new and I teach people that are experienced and may even be master gardeners so it's really, really fun.

Theresa Loe: I think one of the things that if I were to have, if I were having knowing someone who was in your area and they were buying a new home, I think I would want to gift them you.

Robin Haglund: That's funny. I love it. I offer gift certificates and I love it when people give me as a gift. I've been a wedding present, a new homeowner present, a

Christmas present, a birthday present. That's super fun. It's always such a blessing because so many of my existing clients then choose to buy my service as a gift certificate for somebody else. The best clients you get are from once that have met you either through another client or have been vetted through another client. I've gotten some great clients through your podcast. People who are great follower of yours. We're a community and the more I can help that community, the better.

Theresa Loe: I definitely can see a huge advantage to doing this especially if you're moving to a new climate, you may be a really experienced gardener but then you get to a new area and it's like a whole new ballgame sometimes and having a coach in that area who can say, "Okay. In our area, this is when we do this to the trees and this is when we feed and this is when the frost date is," and have them walk your garden and tell you what you've got and what you might want to get rid of and all of that.

I love what you do and I'm so glad to share you because I think it's just a fantastic service and I just wish you could be everywhere. I know there are other garden coaches so people can always try to seek people out in their own area but if you are up in the Washington state, Seattle area, but now you're in a new location which we're going to talk about, definitely people should look you up and we'll have links in the show notes for this episode.

Robin Haglund: Thank you for that.

Theresa Loe: Yes, absolutely. Now, what I love to talk about is we're going to talk about your transition from where you were to where you are now and you were gardening in the city. I'd been to your home many times and you had a garden there so I think it would help for people to first understand what you were doing in the city? What type of garden you had, what kind of garden lifestyle you had?

Robin Haglund: My husband and I lived in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle for about 17, 18 years and we had a 1914 farm-style craftsman house on what was called a lot-and-a-half in Seattle. It was about a 6,500 square foot lot and we had about a 1700 square foot home on it plus a garage and things like that. Our garden was a mix of things. We had flagstone patios, we had an old concrete patio. I had small hobby greenhouse that I put in and use passively meaning I didn't have any electricity or water running into it that I used around.

I had mixed interest planting so a lot of ornamentals because I love them and I love fragrance and I love flowers. I like something going on in the garden all year round. I also had a lot of food so I had annual vegetable gardens as well as some fruit trees and berries and other perennial foods. We had a real mix of things going on but our lot was pretty small for

someone with some of my gardening aspirations and we outgrew it overtime.

Theresa Loe: You had a lot in a small space and it was just beautiful. You even had bees for a while to help with your pollination. We've talked about that on the show before but you do what I've tried to do in my space at different times which is pack a lot into a small space. Is that what made you want to start the idea of moving out to the country was that you were looking for just a bigger piece of land?

Robin Haglund: Yeah. We weren't looking for a farm. I grew up partially in LA and on the beach as you know and partially on farms in Virginia and in Northern California. We really weren't looking for farm. I have exited my 40s and at a certain point, you don't need that much more land or at least for me. I recognized how much work that can be. We wanted some more space and some more privacy and things like that. It became a journey looking for a property that could give us quite a few different things but getting a little bit more gardening space was definitely part of what we wanted.

The city just started feeling cramped for us. I don't want to disparage Seattle, I Absolutely love this city. I love my time there. I still go there, I still have clients there but for us we really wanted something a little but more out in the country for our next phase in life and if you don't do something, if you don't take that leap of faith, you never get to know what it's going to be about and we didn't want to spend the rest of our life in the same home we've been in for almost 20 years.

Theresa Loe: I totally understand that. The next step that did was you started looking outside of the Seattle area and what was it exactly that you were looking for in your land? What was your criteria?

Robin Haglund: It took us several years. It was about five to six years in the making to find the right property and we had a few false starts. We almost ended up on Vashon Island. We almost ended up on Camano Island but the properties we were looking at there in those places weren't quite right and the about halfway through our search, we realized we really want to find something that would allow my mom to live on the property with us and hopefully not have to live in our house with us, give her some independence and us as well.

Those were some of our things that we're looking for. One off my biggest life dreams and maybe this is the west coast girl in me is that I have always dreamed of having a property with a western water mountain sunset view. I never ever, ever thought I would find it. We did. That was something we really wanted. We wanted not a farm but a little bit of acreage. We wanted some space and quiet but we didn't want to be completely out in the

middle of nowhere. We wanted a place for mom and I really wanted that view and magically we found it and we found it at a price we could afford which is we aren't rolling in it by any means.

Theresa Loe: That's so exciting. Yes, I remember when you were looking at the property, so you found this one piece of property and as is always the case when you are making a move and going to be moving your garden, you have to use your imagination as you walk through the properties, the perspective properties that you're looking at. When you found and visited this particular property for the first time, what was it that drew you to it? What was it that made you think this was the one?

Robin Haglund: I'll tell you, one, the view really spoke to me. The fact that the prior owners had really done quite a bit of landscaping on the property. I wasn't going to be coming to a piece of farm land or strictly a bunch of blackberries that I had to clear or complete forest, it's a mix. There's some older native trees on the property as well as well understory native plants. They had also landscaped in some lovely rolling lawns and some planting borders. Quite a few mature specimen plants. There's a mature ginkgo on the property and a mature dawn redwood so a couple of dinosaur plant on the property.

They put in Asian influence, little Zen garden. There's a creek, there's a couple of ponds. Then open spaces as well for growing food. They already had some blueberries on the property and there's some wild salmonberry and thimbleberry and things like that. I really recognized, "Gosh, this gives us a lot of really cool things and this is a really unique part of Washington. We live in a place in Skagit County which is known for a lot of its agricultural land.

A lot of the land is protected agricultural land and that does mean quite a bit of industrial ag but that's part of it. There's a lot of small scale farming going on as well, a lot of grass-fed livestock going on. Tulips, if you're not familiar with the bulb festivals, this is one of the biggest growing areas for tulips and daffodils in the country, huge tourist attraction. Then the water that we look out on, we actually face south but we can see that western view, that western sunset but the water we look out at is a nationally protected estuary. Part of the reason it's protected is it's a huge migratory bird path area. In the winter, there are literally thousands upon thousands of ducks and geese and swans that come through and live here.

Theresa Loe: Wow.

Robin Haglund: That's only a small part of what migrates through here. On any given day, I can look out my window and watch bald eagles doing barrel rolls and vultures and hawks hunting. Then there are the small song birds that come through and it's constantly changing every single day is different. On

Instagram if you follow my Instagram feed, one of my hashtags is where the wild things are. That is what this property really is to me. It isn't about a farm. It isn't just about one thing or the other one, it's all of these different things. I go to sleep at night about none months out of the year and maybe eight months out of the year to the sound of frogs calling each other.

Theresa Loe: Wow.

Robin Haglund: When we were looking at this house for the first time, we brought our dog with us and it was a warm day and she was in my truck with the windows down and I said, "You know, I got to run up and make sure she has enough water and she's cool enough." I did that and I suddenly had that moment where you feel like something is watching you and I turned around and I looked and a great blue heron had just landed on one of the peaks at the house. That just sealed the deal for me.

I just knew that something about this property was waiting for us. I was looking earlier and we're looking on Vashon Island. My friend Ross who along with Sylvia owns DIG Nursery which is pretty well-known on Vashon. We're looking at a property and I was struggling with it like trying to make our circle fit in to this weird square or vice versa. He said to me, he's like, "Robin, why would you try to live somebody else's dream? Why don't you go find or build your own?" When we walked on this property, I just thought of what Ross said and I'm like, "This is it. I can work with this despite the fact that most of the land is carpeted in landscape fabric."

Theresa Loe: We'll talk about that.

Robin Haglund: You get the good with the bad but those were real big things for me. Another thing that's funny is if you're selling or buying a house you get scored and one of your scores is walkability. If you live in our neighborhood, one of the things people will say on the neighborhood websites is how much they love the walkability of this neighborhood, but it will score an absolute zero with the realtors because you can't walk to a grocery store but you can walk down the street to a short trail along this beautiful estuary. It's funny how we score things in this world and what we value so those were some things. I got a sun room with the house which was also lovely. It's just an amazing place and it's just such a good fit for us plus there's another apartment for my mom.

Theresa Loe: Yes. It was one of those things. I love the word you used about effortless because as I watched you trying to find the different properties and this is really a good tip for anyone who's going through this, when you're looking at different places and like you said, trying to fit a square peg in a round hole or whatever, it's sometimes where you feel like you're butting your head against every single part of it to try and make it work and this one, I

never felt that from you. It wasn't perfect. You're never going to find the perfect place unless you're super lucky but it felt so much more effortless for you.

Robin Haglund: Yes.

Theresa Loe: Things fell into place and it was almost like you were being guided there. To me, watching you go through this that was really tallying and I love the idea of you building your own dream with your new property. I think the part that I would have the most difficulty with because I did the same thing when we bought this property in Los Angeles is that I'm looking at ... When I'm looking at a place to live, I look at the land, I value the land more than the house where my husband is like, "Well, the house has this, this and this," and I'm like, "I don't care about the house." "But look, we've got all this sun."

Robin Haglund: I am very much the same way. I can be way too enchanted with that. We did. We gave up on some things that we had hoped for in a home where we're having to do a lot of work on this house and a lot of renovations. It's a beautiful home but it has its challenges and with some TLC, we'll get to a point but right now I don't have any trim on any of my doorways or floor. We had to tear it all off to refinish the floors and we haven't gotten out on it. It needs a coat of paint. A lot of things but we achieved so many other goals that we really thought we would never, ever be able to find that those things, I can see beyond it. I can see beyond the exposed old teal paint that was under the trim. That's just hideous. It's okay with me. I just go outside.

Theresa Loe: Exactly. I felt the same way was when we moved in to our place, I did the garden first. We set up the landscaping and the garden before we even we put a coat of paint inside the house.

Robin Haglund: We were notorious that way too. We'd rather be outside and we're better at the outside work, than the inside work.

Theresa Loe: Yes, exactly. I could vision it better. It was easier for me to tackle that first. I'm sure you had binoculars now with all those birds that sounds incredible.

Robin Haglund: I have a scope.

Theresa Loe: Oh, wow. That's awesome.

Robin Haglund: I want to get a bigger one. We bought a telescope. We can see the stars at night too. Last summer, we've been in just over a year now and last summer, it was clear during the meteor showers and I would go out late at night or I'd set an alarm and get up really, really early in the morning and

go out and just lay on a lounge chair on the lawn and watch the meteors fly by just dozing in and out.

After living in the city so long where it's so sterile and there's so much light pollution. You can't see these things. You can't listen to the frogs while you're doing that. They just aren't there. I didn't have any amphibians or reptiles in my Seattle garden and I miss that. Here, we've got garter snakes slithering through the grass and the frogs, the frogs, the frogs and then the salamanders. Then watching the stars. It's just absolutely amazing. Bats at night, it's just really, I love it.

Theresa Loe: It's definitely a contrast to the city and me still being in the city and me visiting your city garden, this sounds so completely different and what a restful relaxing place determination spend your time so I'm so excited for you.

Robin Haglund: You need to come visit.

Theresa Loe: It's on my to-do list. I guess what I'm wondering next though is we're talking about all of this. One of the things that a lot of people struggle with when they have to move is leaving their garden behind. Let's talk about that a little bit. You had some incredible garden plants and landscape plants that I would wonder if would you try to take those with you, did you take cuttings, did you just walk away from it all. What did you do when you have to make the move?

Robin Haglund: I started planning early. Before we found this place, we'd almost moved to another place and that was in winter. I started getting out in my garden in winter and digging things up and dividing them and root pruning. I root pruned one tree in hopes I'd be able to move it. I started doing all of that in, I think it was January or February prior to what became a late May move. I was able to bring quite a bit of plant material with me and by the time we put our house in Seattle on the market, you would never know that we had done that. I was really lucky and that one of my really good friends cleared one of her drive ways and I just started moving my plants over to her place so that once we put our house on the market, they wouldn't be cluttering things out.

Theresa Loe: That's a good idea. I hadn't thought about that. You don't want it to look like a nursery while you're trying to sell your house.

Robin Haglund: Exactly. Our realtor was great. I said, "Oh, I'll great all of my garden art out and all of my big pot." She's like, "Don't worry about it. We'll just have a list that says these things aren't included in the sale." Down to the point of the tree that I root pruned because I didn't want to have to take that out of the ground until the very last minute.

I did bring quite a few things with me. You have to be prepared for the fact that you're going to lose some things. One of my prized plants, a Corokia cotoneaster, didn't make it through the move and it's a little heartbreaking but so it goes. The tree that I root-pruned which is a large crepe myrtle, it made it. It's absolutely thrilled with its new home.

We moved stuff. I had to actually rent an extra truck, to bring my plants and my big pot and then I had to stash them away because we moved in May. I brought my plants, I think later in June and so I had to put them under the forest where I could get a host and water them, and water them, and water them. Then last fall, really started putting them in the ground. Now, this year, my big challenge is can I keep them all alive now that I have this large property with new plantings all over the place because it'll be a lot of watering and I do not have any irrigation system.

Theresa Loe: Are you in the same zone, growing zone or you in a different zone now?

Robin Haglund: Pretty much the same zone. We get a little less rain here than Seattle. We're in a little bit of a rain shadow. I'm watching an eagle fly by right now, lovely. I know, that's my life. We're pretty much in the same seven-ish something zone. I always struggle with zones. You know this about me that I struggle with it because zones in different parts of the country can be very different from each other.

Theresa Loe: Yes, absolutely.

Robin Haglund: This last winter, one of our ponds, the lower pond got so cold that the fountain on it, one side of it got covered in ice froze and it fell over and then the pond itself froze. We couldn't really get it out and get the water moving again. It was like frozen solid for a while there. Everything made it through just fine. We also have very different soil on this property than we had in Seattle and Seattle my garden was very sandy and I had worked on the soil for a long time so it had quite a bit a loam to it.

Here, we're on this clay ridge. Skagit is known for its agricultural land. Has really fantastic soils but thus part where we live is just this weird lump of clay that the glaciers push through. It was actually known by the settlers as starvation ridge because you can't grow much of anything in the soil directly. If you had a couple inches of top soil, you're very fortunate. It's mostly glacial tills so gravelly rock and boulders and then clay which has its own set of challenges.

That being said, when I walk the property and looked at it, I saw, "Okay. There are a lot of mature trees and shrubs here, things do grow here.: It's not impossible but we have this clay. We get a lot of moisture. We're on a

slope so we have a lot of water challenges here. You hear a lot about drought gardening. Here, we have a lot of wet.

Theresa Loe: You have the bottom of the hills is where you have water collecting so you have to deal with that and direct it somewhere, correct?

Robin Haglund: Right. We still have downhill slope on our property but we're getting towards the bottom of the slope that then enters into the estuary system. We also want to be really careful about maintaining plants on the property to help with bio filtration so that the cattle uphill aren't necessarily pushing down a lot of pollutants. There are issues with the estuary getting pollutants from the farmland. There are a lot of slues that run through but this area is monitored regularly and hopefully is a little cleaner than it could be if it wasn't being monitored.

Theresa Loe: I want to ask you about the projects that you have going but before we get to that I thought of a question while you were talking and that is when you're first looking at a new piece of property, you're planning on moving your garden to or planning to move to, what were some of the things that you did to check out that property before you bought because you're not there for very long to really ... It's not like you can observe it for a whole season and see how the light is or really know what's in the soil. What kind of investigation did you do in deciding what the soil was really like? I'm assuming part of it is that you have your experience and just walking and like you said, seeing mature plants was a clue for you.

Robin Haglund: Usually, there will be a county website that may give you some insights into the history of an area so I definitely did some research on that, what is the history of this area. That's how I found out about starvation ridge. I walked the property. I took a class with a realtor a few years ago. It was entitled, Buying Your First Farm. One of the things this guy said was walk every inch of it if you possibly can. We didn't walk every inch of it. In fact, two weeks ago, our neighbor, one of our adjacent neighbors pointed out to me that we own this huge swath of land. We didn't realize we owned. We thought it belonged to another neighbor but he showed me the property. It was like, "Oh, okay. Cool. Well, there's more sunshine for me."

I didn't do a perfect job of that but I did observed. We noticed that there was definitely moisture coming through the lawn so there was some sloppy points when we looked at it in spring. I was a little concerned actually that that might be part of the septic system because it was near the tanks on the septic system. That's something you really want to investigate in the country especially if you've got land like ours that doesn't perk.

We have an engineered septic system that has to actually run out to a sand mound that's been engineered to manage this so since we have clay that

doesn't allow water to filtrate real well, they have to actually build the sand mound to help with that so that's part of the bio filtration. These are things you see a mound then you're like, "Okay, clearly the land doesn't perk here." I took a soil course sampler and tried to shove it to the ground to see what was going on and get it into the ground because I hit so many rocks.

That was something else I did. Doing that level of observation and that's how I discovered at least to some degree that there was quite a bit of landscape fabric that had been put down. Just really getting out there and digging a hole. I wish I dug some other holes once we got around to doing some planting this late winter. We dug a few holes to put in trees and the water table just the holes just filled up with water.

Theresa Loe: Wow.

Robin Haglund: Which is okay. That then says, "Okay. This isn't where you plant this tree. Let's go find a tree that can actually in standing water." I then changed my mind set for this area where I was planting. I tried to observe what plant materials were growing in some of the areas. For instance, there is one area that had quite a few rushes growing in it and I know that those can indicate seasonal wetness and our realtor was actually ... To me, it was funny. She's like, "Oh, you want to get those out of here right away because if you don't the county might declare you a wetland."

Then I look at my husband and we laughed because for us, that isn't a big concern for us. We really want to be stewards of this land and honor what it wants to be as much as we can. We also have to live here but we also ... Once we moved in, we observed that the deer liked to go eat over there. They like to eat in this wet land areas with native plants that come up. I was like, "Well, maybe I experiment with that. Maybe if I weave some of that and let it become what it wants to be, then the wild life will go for that rather than some of my more special plants that are ornamental and aren't particularly native part of their diet."

So far, knock on something, that seems to be working. Last night, I was out and one of the deer was out in that wetland and we've let the meadow grow up around it so much that I could barely see the deer. The grass were almost as tall as she was.

Theresa Loe: Wow. That's very cool. Those are really good tips. I'm glad I asked if someone who maybe isn't a real experienced gardener or as experienced as you are, in different types of landscapes wouldn't know what to look for so that was very helpful. Thank you.

Robin Haglund: You're welcome. It can be so overwhelming. I just want to say when you're

looking at a property, when you're looking at a big property, you fall in love with certain things and it can be hard to see everything and we miss some things along the way and despite doing inspections and things like that. Go easy on yourself if you miss something. It's hopefully not the end of the world. It's just an opportunity to do something different.

Theresa Loe: I like your idea of just shifting your mindset like, "Well, this going to be a little bit different area than I originally planned but that's okay."

Robin Haglund: Right.

Theresa Loe: Go with the flow. You're out in the country, you can be a little more zen. Just go with it.

Robin Haglund: Exactly.

Theresa Loe: I would love to touch on thus landscape cloth because I know from talking to you, this was a big thing that you had to tackle among some of your other projects. Could you explain to everybody about the landscape cloth that was there and what's bad about it and what you're doing about it.

Robin Haglund: Landscape fabric is one of the banes of my existence. There are some agricultural applications where it can be helpful for farmers but I find that in residential landscapes, it becomes really hard to deal with overtime. I think that the reason that there's so much of it on this property is that historically, this had been forested land so lots of Douglas-firs and western red cedars and understory. Then at some point, those darn Himalayan blackberries got loose up here and took over the land and got into the forest and went everywhere.

I've learned from this talking to people that have been in this area for their entire lives. This used to be covered with blackberry. I think when they developed this property in the late '80s, they probably had to really work hard to get the blackberries under control. I think one of the things they did was they just strapped down landscape fabric to suppress the blackberry growth and then when they developed the ornamental gardens, they brought in a lot of sand and top soil and built mounds because that would then drain and give a lot of these trees, the opportunity to grow and I think they used landscape fabric to then also strap everything down and dump things over top of it like bark and things like that.

What happens overtime when you do that is the roots of everything grow through the fabric as well part of the problem with the fabric is that it can stop water from getting through to the soil real well and it doesn't stop the weeds. It may have suppressed some of the blackberry and other weeds that were underground to some degree but they can still break through the

fabric and you're not going to stop a bird from eating a blackberry and then pooping out of seed on top of the mulch that you've put on top of the landscape fabric.

Once they do that with that seed, the weeds will start growing on top of it and through it. It becomes really hard to remove this stuff and I like to get it out of the garden as much as possible because it's not doing any favors to the soil microbial life underneath in the plant roots.

Theresa Loe: Yes.

Robin Haglund: It's just a real problem so we found it in all of the ornamental beds, we found it under mature older ... Maybe not old growth but very old cedars and Douglas-firs. We found it piled up in mounds of trash out in the woods with what I thought ... I thought it was a mound of moss and ferns and I went to go do some cleanup this winter and realized that was a mound of thrash landscape fabric that had been just dumped.

Not only have we been tearing it out of beds as best we can and cutting it out where we can't tear it up but then cleaning up this piles of trash they just dump in the woods and then the other really joyous thing we found is that probably when the land was developed, they put down a layer of the landscape fabric, planted and put some mulch down and then somewhere in the more recent history, they put another layer of landscape fabric down and then dumped more mulch on top.

You clear that first layer out and you get ready to dig a hole. Another 12 to 18 inches down, you find another layer of fabric and it doesn't decompose. Some of the fabric is the papery kind that does breakdown a little bit. A lot of it is just pure nasty plastic that's decomposing but it looks like trash flapping around in the wind. That has not been my favorite thing.

Theresa Loe: Wow. To have a double layer that just blows me away.

Robin Haglund: Oh yeah.

Theresa Loe: I love what you said though about the landscape fabric with microbial life. That's why I was like, "Yes, I'm so glad you said that," because that is one of the things that I don't like about it is that when you do use it in like a bed in a bed in your front yard. You are smothering what you're trying to bring alive in your soil by covering it up and it heats up and yes, you know where the little hole is that you made for your plant is fine but as that plant gets bigger and the roots go out, they water does doesn't go through.

Robin Haglund: The weeds grow just fine on top of the stuff. It looked like thrash flags.

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- Theresa Loe: Yes. I know you've been working on that taking away all the landscape fabric. What are some of the other things that you're doing now that you have this new property. You're starting a whole new garden from scratch or building off what was there. What are you working on?
- Robin Haglund: Oh, boy. We have planted probably close to 20 trees since we got here. Some are ornamental. We put in an orchard which has been really fun. We've got a couple of Asian pears, an almond tree, a Yuzu citrus tree and then a couple of apples. I also put in a peach tree that bloomed beautifully and then promptly died. There's a lesson in that. Not everything is going to make it. Then my mom who turned 75 this year really wanted a vegetable garden and at first, I was like, "Mom, I just don't think we can do it this first year. We've got so much going on." Then boom, I decided to do it. Part of the reason I was like, "You know. I don't have to invest in raised beds and moving soil and doing all of that in the first year. What I can do to get things started is straw-bale."
- This February we used a bunch of our moving boxes and a bunch of wood chips from several hazard trees. We had to have down last summer when we first moved in and she mulched a section of garden and put our straw-bales to let them start rotting because we can grow vegetables into that. Then we put up a deer fence because we do have the deer and we used a small squared wire at the base which is to keep the bunnies out so we've gotten that going and that's been a set of lessons for me because I haven't done straw-bale before. Note to everyone who's going to do it, get those bales out really early. I wish I gotten mine out last fall but you do what you can and you got to be patient with yourself.
- Theresa Loe: Why do you need to get them out so early?
- Robin Haglund: It takes them a while to break down and here it's cold and wet and we don't get the heat real early so they didn't break down as quickly as I would have liked but that's just a chance to say, I've got to do something different. What I've done with my summer crops is I've actually dug a lot of the halfway-rotted cores out of the straw-bale and set that aside because so it's still part of the garden. It's not going to waste. I'm using potting soil so I'm using them like hot pots in the garden and everything is just thriving beautifully. We've got that and then ta-da, I've finally got chickens.
- Theresa Loe: Now, I want to talk about the chickens but I have a question first. I do the same thing in my garden with cardboard wood chips and I wanted to just touch on that in case someone didn't catch it. Instead of using the landscape fabric, if you have a weedy area or an area that you want to have paths going down or even I use it in my raised beds is you lay down the cardboard and then you mulch or ... I use mulch if it's in my raised beds. If it's on my pathway, I use wood chips.

The cardboard breaks down but it takes so long. It's just enough time to smother whatever is underneath but it is adding to the soil rather than smothering the microbes underneath like the landscape cloth does. I love that you did that with your moving boxes because you used up something that would have ended up going to the thrash.

Robin Haglund: Exactly. We have quite a few more where we put in the orchard. We actually did some sheet mulching around the base of those so we can mow around it. Eventually we will try to ... We're trying to reduce a lot of lawn. There's quite a bit on the property and so some of it we're allowing to go to meadow for the wildlife and for my allergies. Some, we are going to convert to different type of growing space.

We're just chipping away at it because it's a lot of space and so I need to get more wood chips on the property. I still have boxes. One thing I will say, there is certainly some controversy about whether the cardboard is good or not, unnecessary or not. I find it's very helpful. I do find that some weeds like buttercup will grow right through it but it's pretty easy to pull when it goes through a sheet mulching situation. There's some folks that will say you don't need the cardboard and you can just layer, a really thick layer of wood chips down. I found things really grow through that a lot faster. Some of it comes down to choices.

Theresa Loe: I feel exactly the same way although I've never had anything grow up through the cardboard although I imagine that the blackberries could but I've never had anything come up through it. I do have occasionally new seed land on top of it but I'm able to pull it out so much easier because ...

Robin Haglund: So much easier.

Theresa Loe: It just has a couple inches that it's coming out of and then it hits the cardboard and slows down. That's fantastic. I definitely want to ask you about the chickens because I remember a time when I was talking to you and you said you would never ever get chickens again.

Robin Haglund: Right. That was me definitely thinking back to being on the farm and we had chickens when I was a kid and my bedroom was right over the barn where they lived and they drove me a little crazy.

Theresa Loe: That would drive anyone crazy.

Robin Haglund: It drove me crazy. We had roosters and so I really wasn't interested in it. Particularly when I lived in the city. Now, there definitely gardens and city locations where having chickens is absolutely appropriate. You do a fantastic job with it. I have several clients that do but for me, it just never

felt right. Having bees made sense, having dogs made sense but chickens just didn't for me there. When we got out here, it just seemed kind of dumb not to have chickens. We have so much space that they're easy to incorporate in. They're easy to have close to the house but not so close that you smell them or hear them or any of that.

It definitely takes a lot of critter proofing. One of the first weird creatures I saw as I was sitting at my desk last summer looking out the window is looking at one of our ponds and all of a sudden, this things goes running around the edge of the pond and nosing in and out. I'm like, "That's not a cat, that's not a squirrel," very rapidly, your brain starts going through, "What is this thing?" I realized it was a weasel.

Theresa Loe: Oh, wow.

Robin Haglund: We have weasels out here, we have foxes, we have skunks, we have raccoons, we have coyotes. Hopefully you don't hear from me later that I've lost chickens to any of this but it took a lot of critter proofing and then I take my big dogs down and they like to think they own the chicken so they're peeing all around the perimeter so I hope that helps because they're-

Theresa Loe: I'm sure that will help. That's actually very good. That's great.

Robin Haglund: I'm like, "Go for it, guys. Go ahead and pee on the hen house. I don't care." We decided to get them and we scored this fantastic fun, funky chicken tractor off of Craigslist. One of our farm neighbors was getting rid of it. I got that and then we bought a small coop kit and put that together with a whole lot of hardware fabric trenching around it for the girls and then a farmer I know nearby was kind enough to provide us with pullets.

I didn't want to go through the whole chick thing. We have so much going on. I've done it in my life. I didn't need to buy all the equipment. It made more sense to buy pullets that I knew had been raised well and were strong laying hens. We have Georgia, Lacey, Sassy, and Big Red. They're all ISA browns and we've only had them a couple weeks and then Georgia really wants to be a pet.

Theresa Loe: That's fantastic.

Robin Haglund: The older two will probably be laying by next month and then the other two by late summer so they aren't laying yet but they're fun.

Theresa Loe: The advantage of what you did is you're not doing the guest work and end up with all roosters and then have to have a rooster plan of what to do with the extra roosters.

- Robin Haglund: Exactly.
- Theresa Loe: That worked out really well. I wanted to touch on one thing you said there about the hardware trenching. Someone might not know what that means. Are you talking about the digging around the edges of your coop and laying down hardware cloth which is metal down under the soil line so that something can't dig under? Is that what you mean?
- Robin Haglund: Yeah. I'm using the royal we here. My husband dug around the outer perimeter of the coop and laid in hardware fabric in a deep trench fanning out from the base of the small run and the coop so that hopefully rats and weasels can't dig their way in or coyotes because they'll hit that fabric and there's a lot of gravelly rock down there. Our soil is hard to dig in but we certainly have moles and voles out there digging around. Then the one thing I hadn't mentioned before is that we also have to make sure we have overhead protection for them.
- Theresa Loe: Right because of all those birds you have.
- Robin Haglund: Yeah. The eagles are flying over our property more than ever before because they're eying the chickens. We can tractor them out and they'll be okay and if we're out there with them, odds are they will do okay with the raptors but they're just such an opportunity for them to get picked up from the error that we just really want to keep them. They're contained pretty well all the time because of that.
- Theresa Loe: That's a good idea. At night time, do they go completely inside the coop?
- Robin Haglund: Yes. Dumb chickens, they're like, "Hey, it's summery. We just want to roost out here. It's really nice." I have two colleagues and my female, I'm trying to train her to help me herd them in. She's learning not to bark at them and jump at them but I'm trying to train her to do a loop around the coop to help me usher them in because they're getting a little stubborn. They want to summer outside.
- Theresa Loe: That's funny. That's good. I'm glad to hear that and the hardware trenching around the edges was so smart. It sounds like you have had so much going on in this first year and I know you probably learned a lot of lessons on the way so in closing, I would love for you to share what are some of the things that you learned from making this transition from the city to the country with your garden?
- Robin Haglund: Definitely no regrets. We're just absolutely loving. I still go to Seattle all the time so I get my city fixed. One of the things I always try to remind my clients and I'm trying to practice what I preach is to be patient with yourself

and give yourself time to know what's going on your property. Don't feel like you have to do it all at once.

Always keep that beginner mindset. I practice a lot of yoga and that's one of the things that you learn through that is that we're always beginners and approaching life as a beginner is just a really good way to go because there's always so much to learn. Then know that things aren't always going to work like my straw-bale idea. I was so excited about it and my first planting is just really didn't thrive because they were trying to grow in undecomposed straw.

Sometimes you just have to punt and try again and so something different. Then one of the other things is do know that when you live in the country, things will fly into your house. We've had humming birds fly in. We have bolted ceilings and the humming birds will right in the front door and we had to rescue a few out of the house. Be prepared for that and get to know your neighbors when you live out in the country. We live in a neighborhood but not really. Everybody has several acres but we've made some really wonderful friend with some of our neighbors and they're there to help you.

You can build community even if you're out in the middle of nowhere and it makes a difference. You never know when your power is going to go out or you need somebody to come help you when a tree goes down or something like that. It's a little different than being in the city where there's always somebody to call that has a service that they can get out for you right away. Sometimes it takes your community out here.

Theresa Loe: Really, really good tips. I love that. Thank you so much, Robin for coming on. I just love all that you shared and I love hearing the story and we can hear the passion in your voice when you talk about the place. It just sounds so awesome and I really appreciate you sharing it with everyone so thank you.

Robin Haglund: My pleasure. Thank you so much for having me on. It's so fun to talk to you and be inspired. I love it.

Theresa Loe: Thank you. You inspired us today so thanks so much.

Robin Haglund: My pleasure.

Theresa Loe: I hope you enjoyed that interview with Robin Haglund of Garden Mentors. I know for me, personally, it's really fun to listen to the passion in her voice when she talks about her property. You can tell how much she loves it. Now, remember that in the show notes for today's episode, I will have links to Robin's website, her Instagram page and anything else that we talked about. Just go to livinghomegrown.com/102 and I'll have everything right



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there for you. Thank you so much for joining me and until next time. Just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

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