



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 56 High Yield Vegetable Gardening

**Show Notes: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/56](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/56)**

This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode #56.

**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, through growing your own organic food no matter how big or small your space, and just living a more sustainable lifestyle. To learn more about any of these topics or my online canning courses, just visit my website, [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

Now in last week's episode, we talked about smart garden design and how we can take our food gardens to a new level by adding some really simple elements and making them so that we can enjoy them and be a little less stressed out, so making our gardens do double duty. I had landscape designer Susan Morrison on to help us do that.



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Well, this week I'm still focused on the garden, but we are taking it to a whole, completely different level. Today's episode is more about being super duper efficient with our garden and being more productive. Specifically, we're going to focus on high-yield vegetable gardening and how to apply some really simple farming techniques to our tiny backyard food gardens to get maximum yield and maximum production out of our much smaller space.

This is really key if you want to get a lot out of your small space. You don't have to have a big giant acreage in order to get a lot of food, and so to help us with that, I have on as my guest this week, Colin McCrate. Now Colin is one of the founders of The Seattle Urban Farm Company up in Seattle, Washington. Colin and his business partner, Ben Halm, they design edible garden spaces. They are really know for blending sustainable farming principles with ecological design, and they create really unique and productive outdoor garden spaces.

Now they work with restaurants. They work with businesses and with homeowners to create these gardens. No space is off limits. In fact, they have created rooftop gardens for restaurants in the Seattle area, complete with bees to help with the pollination. One of my very favorite gardens that they created was a display garden for the Northwest Flower and Garden Show, where they actually planted a truck with a chicken coop. In fact, that's how I met Colin and that was many years ago, and I was just absolutely fascinated with how they created this garden out of a truck.

Really, the purpose of that display garden was just to show that you can create a garden out of anything no matter where you live. They're really creative and really hardworking guys, and they have written a couple of books. We talk about the books in this episode.



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One of the books is really geared towards beginner food gardeners, and the second one, the one that we really put a lot of focus on in this episode, is more for advanced growing techniques. But I don't want you to think that just because it's more advanced that you can't get something from this episode if you are a complete beginner food gardener or if you have never gardened with food at all, because there are so many tidbits of information in this episode, and you can add just one or two of the things that Colin talks about and you will get so much more production out of your garden.

But then, if you really want to geek out and totally take your garden to a whole new level of efficiency, well, Colin is your guy and their book can help you do that. It's all up to you at whatever level you're at, but you will get something out of this episode whether you are a complete newbie or you are a very advanced gardener. There are some really great takeaways here.

As always, everything that is discussed and everything that Colin talks about will be included in the show notes for this episode so that you can just go to one place and find everything that was mentioned in the episode. To do that, you just go to [livinghomegrown.com/56](http://livinghomegrown.com/56). Everything will be right there for you. With that, let's just dive right into the interview with Colin McCrate of The Seattle Urban Farm Company.

Theresa: Hey, Colin! Thanks so much for joining me here today.

Colin: My pleasure. I'm excited.

Theresa: Great, well, I gave a little information in the introduction, but I would love if you would start off by telling everybody what it is that you do because it's pretty cool.



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Colin: Yeah, well, so we have a business. It's called Seattle Urban Farm Company. We design, build, and maintain edible gardens of all scales. We do a lot of residential landscape design and build, but all those projects are focused on the edible garden. I think maybe in a lot of scenarios the garden—the edible portion of the garden is an afterthought or tagged on somewhere out of the way, but we work with clients to kind of highlight the edible part of the garden and make it part of their outdoor living space.

Theresa: Do you do a lot in the front yard or is it mostly in the backyard?

Colin: You know it's both. Every site is unique, and so it's about finding locations on the property that are appropriate for growing food. As you can imagine, not every square foot of your yard is a good location for an edible garden. We kind of have to assess, "This is a good spot. That is also a good spot." Then what fits with the other sort of uses they have for their space?

Maybe they want to hang out in this area where their barbecue is and have a lawn for the kids over here. That means only these couple spaces are open for the garden. Or maybe they just want to prioritize the garden totally and just listen to whatever we say, and then we get to do really cool things that way.

Theresa: Yeah, I love it when people just want to listen to everything we say.

Colin: It happens maybe once, ever. But it's good when it does.

Theresa: Well, that's fantastic. You're helping people create the gardens. Do you also maintain them?



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Colin: We do. Yeah, I mean not every project. We try to have a really kind of broad spectrum of services where sometimes we just do consulting or sometimes we do consulting and design. Sometimes we build the whole project, and then sometimes we also maintain it. We kind of just want to meet people where they're at. What do you need help with and how can we best help you reach your goals?

But it's really fun when we get to do maintenance because then you really get to build a relationship with the client, with the space, and just sort of watch it develop over time and get better and better every season.

Theresa: I imagine you're watching the gardener develop over time, too.

Colin: Yeah, totally. I mean our clients have a range of garden adeptness and some of them are very eager to learn, and so within a couple seasons, they more or less are doing everything themselves. Other people, I mean honestly, they want to have us keep coming back and they just get a lot of value out of, I think, interacting with our gardeners and having somebody there to share the experience with. So yeah, I mean for everybody it's different, what they want to get out of the project.

Theresa: That makes me wonder. So what are some of the main reasons that people are starting gardens, because I know you've been doing this for a long time, and now that food gardening is really more popular than at the time that you started your business, what are you finding are the reasons that people are wanting to grow their own food?

Colin: So everybody wants to grow their own food for maybe a slightly different reason. It's kind of all over the map. I mean some people are really into just sort of health and wellness. They want to eat healthier, and so they want to use a garden as a tool to make it easier for them



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to eat healthy. Other people, it's all about their kids. Just getting their kids to understand where food comes from and have a good relationship with it.

But what's interesting is when we started I felt like everybody needed to rationalize and justify why they wanted to do it. It was always part of the conversation. "Oh, well, I just read a Michael Pollan book and it changed the way I thought about it." Or, "This one thing happened to me, and so this is why I'm doing it." But what's really cool is now I feel like it is more just part of people want to have a sustainable lifestyle, and it's almost just like this goes along with that.

To me, the less people feel like they have to justify why they want to garden, then the better because that means it's sort of more in the public consciousness and feels just like something that people want to be doing and don't have to think about rationalizing it, if that makes sense.

Theresa: Exactly. Oh, I love hearing that. That is so great because they don't have to justify it. They don't need a reason. It's just they want to.

Colin: Exactly.

Theresa: They don't have to explain it to their friends.

Colin: Yeah, totally. I mean that's what it feels like. It feels like it's really changed, even in the last few years where it's just like people don't feel like they need a reason or excuse to have a garden. It's just like, "I bought a new house and I want to have a garden. Can you help me put it in?" I'm like, "Yeah, of course. That sounds great."



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Theresa: Perfect. That's great. Well, you have several books. You have two sitting here that I have on my desk, and I recommend both of them now. I've just finished looking through your second book, but your first book, I have been recommending ever since it came out. That's the *Food Grown Right in Your Backyard* that you did with Brad Halm. Is that the way you pronounce his last name? Halm?

Colin: Yeah, it is.

Theresa: You and Brad wrote this book and that book is so great for a beginner if they've never ever gardened before. It really lays it all out in a really easy to dive in way. It's not intimidating at all, and so when people are telling me that they're wanting to get into growing food, your book is at the top of the list that I recommend to people.

Colin: Sweet! Thank you.

Theresa: So it's very, very good. Now you have the second book, which I'm ready to talk to you about today, and that is *High-Yield Vegetable Gardening*. What I love about this is that so many of my listeners are gardeners who have very small space or just a small backyard or even no space at all, but they are starting to grow food, and we want to get the most bang from our buck. We want to get as much out of our small space as possible, and that's what this book is all about. Tell me what got you and Brad to want to write this book together.

Colin: Well, in a lot of ways, this new book is kind of like *Food Grown Right* 2.0. It's sort of the same idea. We wrote *Food Grown Right in Your Backyard* to kind of introduce ideas to beginning food gardeners and try to make it accessible. In this book, I guess we view it as sort of what we would recommend to people once they've gotten established as a gardener and want to kind of take it to the next level.



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It's like vegetable gardening for nerds. If you really want to get serious about it, this is what you should do.

The premise is Brad and I both have backgrounds in small-scale agriculture, actually working on diversified vegetable farms. In taking the tools and the techniques and sort of just like concepts from farming and shrinking them down and applying them to a home vegetable garden, because as you can imagine, if your livelihood is dependent on the amount of food you can grow off your space, that you're pretty serious about maximizing the yield of everything through the season and year after year and improving the health of your crops over time. We want to just take that mindset and find ways of explaining that to somebody how to transition and make that sort of part of your home gardening experience.

Theresa: Yeah, it's really, as I was looking through, I was thinking, "Man, this is exactly that." It's taking what the farmers do and do really, really good planning and get a lot of your planning done before you even plant a seed. Then be very efficient. It makes you super efficient with the space that you have. I'm very excited about the way you have all the worksheets and all the charts. I mean it's all in there, so it's not scary or overwhelming and people can take it as far as they want.

Colin: Yeah, that's the idea. I mean I think that humans are separated into two categories. Probably those who love spreadsheets and those who fear spreadsheets. Knowing from experience, when I started growing, I was not detail oriented or interested in tracking things. I viewed it as more of an art and kind of was always shooting from the hip and just making a lot of mistakes like you do when you're gardening. It was really getting involved in planning and organizing and data tracking that totally changed my experience. I can say from experience once you get used to using the spreadsheets we have in the book, which

may at first be like, "Oh, man. Do I really want to sit here and enter in all these columns?" Once you get used to using it, it's super easy. I would argue that many people could increase their yields four or five times over out of their garden over the course of one season if they follow some of these techniques.

I guess what I'm saying is I think there's maybe an initial hurdle for some people like, "I have to start doing this," but once you're up and running with it, barely any time goes into it and you learn it a lot more. If you actually think gardening is interesting and you're excited to learn every year, it's just like you can keep track of all that, and then have an organized way of making improvements. It's remarkable the number of things you can change over the course of one or two seasons to improve your yields.

Theresa: That's what's so great about the fact that you guys wrote both of these books. If you just want to just get your feet wet, you can dive into the first book. But if you've been gardening for a while or if you want to go straight into getting as much out of your space as you can, then you can dive into the second book.

I also would think that once you've done one year of charts and graphs, you really can rely on that again going forward. You not having to reinvent the wheel so much, so it gives you a starting point every year.

Colin: Yeah, definitely. I mean I think you're right. I mean most of techniques and varieties and the timing, you're going to just want to look back and what you've done in the past and replicate that or make slight tweaks to it like, "Oh, well, the weather is a little warmer this spring, so I'm going to bump up that first planting of beets," but you know exactly when you planted it last year and when you harvested it and

you kind of know what to expect, so there's very little work or effort that goes into making those adjustments each season. But you have increased confidence that you know what's going to happen.

Theresa: Yes, exactly and your timing. The timing is so critical and I really got that from your book, and I love that you give the yield charts. You have so much in there that we don't have to go on the Internet and research every little thing. You have a lot of information that we can just look up in the book and then enter it into the charts and graphs. Let's dive into what—let's say I'm ready to bump up my yield. What would be the very first place to start? I've been gardening. I have a garden, but where do I start?

Colin: I think that as a really basic concept, where a lot of this information heads is don't let space sit than not be used. In my mind, if you have a pretty small garden space at your home, you should be making sure that you are using every square foot of it all season long, as much as possible.

If you harvest a head of cabbage in the beginning of July out of the garden, you should pull out that root ball, work the soil, add some organic amendments to it, and be ready to plant a new crop into it right away. One of the really basic things that people do is there's this mindset of, "It's spring. I'm going to plant my garden. Then my planting season is over."

But once you really get into it and you start looking at, "Well, actually, this crop only lives for 40 days, and this crop only lives for 60 days, and this crop lives for 120 days, that means I'm going to have spaces available in my garden halfway through the growing season, and I should be anticipating that so that this cabbage is now almost ready to harvest, that means I should be starting a couple seeds in a tray

over here so that I can put a new transplant in in two weeks when I pull that cabbage out." Really just getting two or three plantings into a space that in the past maybe you only put one in.

Theresa: That makes really good sense. So really deciding what you want to grow, and then as you fill in those charts as to when you would be planting them and how long till harvest will show you where you're going to have those gaps.

Colin: Yeah, exactly. I mean on a really simple level we always break crops into short season, half season, and long season. There are subtleties in that, which over time, you'll get used to, but as basic categories, salad greens are a really perfect example of a short-season crop.

You can plant salad greens over and over and over again over the course of the season. People will call that "succession planting," so that you have a consistent harvest of lettuce. But in order to do that, you have to understand that if you are direct seeding a lettuce mix, really, you're going to be harvesting that crop and it's going to be done maybe 40 or 50 days after you've seeded it.

So you can just keep doing that and moving crops through your garden in that way. Knowing those lifespans makes it really easy because then you can predict it, and it's the same way with a half-season crop like the cabbage or maybe a broccoli, something that in the middle of the summer it's going to come out of the garden. There are actually a ton of crops that come out of the garden in the middle of summer. Then you just have all of this opportunity. Maybe you already harvested all of your garlic and all of your onions and all of your spring brassica crops, and half your garden could be open again and ready for fall planting if you're ready to do that.

The best way to be ready is to, at the beginning of the season, you'll sit down and map all that out and say, "Well, shoot. I know that in July I can plant carrots in all those beds where I'm going to pull out the onions, and then I'm going to have an awesome fall carrot crop."

Theresa: You talk in the book you talk about succession planting, but you also talk about relay planting. Can you explain what that is?

Colin: Yes. Relay planting is kind of a variation on succession planting, but the idea is that the two crops may be in the bed at the same time, but that you spaced out the planting in such a way that you'll harvest the first crop before the second crop gets too big and overwhelms it.

So an example we talk about in the book is relay planting with carrots and tomatoes. In the spring, you direct seeds carrots in rows. They start to fill out. A month or six weeks later, it's time to plant tomatoes, so you actually have left space in between the rows. You transplant your tomatoes in, but tomatoes take a while to get established and to really fill out, so what happens is the tomatoes are kind of just setting out roots and barely growing. The carrots are maturing, and then you start to harvest the carrots, and all the carrots are pulled out of the garden and you store them or you're eating them before the tomatoes are so big that they would be shading that space.

Theresa: Yeah, I thought that was so great. It's just a really great use of space. Like you said, you're not leaving any blank spots when you do that. That alone, just doing that, will get you quite a bit more out of one small little plot.

Colin: Yeah, without a doubt. I mean and what's cool, too, is a lot of these concepts, once you consider them, they're pretty easy to employ. It's not like there's a huge barrier to figuring out how to do it. It's just

here's the timing. Here's the spacing of the crops. You just go and plant those crops like you normally would and account for that.

I think what's awesome is that a lot of the ideas in *High-Yield Vegetable Gardening* are going to be pretty simple, and it's just a matter of getting them into your garden routine.

Theresa: Yes, exactly. If we have sat down and we've figured out what we want to plant and we've kind of figured out our timing, looked at frost dates and kind of figured out when is the earliest we could plant, when is our window of time, how do we figure out how much to grow? Because I saw you had little calculations in there that we could look up on a chart how many, let's say, lettuces are in a square foot.

Colin: Yeah.

Theresa: We can calculate how much we need to grow. I thought that was really great, because that's what the farmers do.

Colin: Totally, totally. Yeah, I mean you want to know what your end goal is and then kind of work backwards from there.

Theresa: You reverse engineer it, which I thought was really good. So we have to kind of have in our head, "Okay, we want to have this much lettuce per week," and then we use the charts to figure out how much to plant.

Colin: Yeah, exactly. There's an example. One of the things we like to do in our books is kind of provide these what we call case studies, where we call out sort of pretend gardeners, fictionalized gardeners, and explain their rationale for how they set up their garden space and how they're



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managing it, hoping that that kind of just tells a story and explains it in a more real-world way.

So one of the kind of case studies we talk about in the book is just like what you're talking about. A gardener who doesn't have a ton of space, but likes to eat arugula. So similar to lettuce, you might—I think salad greens are a really good goal because they grow in every climate. They grow most of the season, and they grow quickly. If you know, "Okay, I love to eat arugula salads and realistically I eat them three times a week, because I'm not going to eat them seven days a week because half the time I'm doing takeout or whatever."

Theresa: Right.

Colin: You can look at and actually say, "Okay." We have all these charts in the book and say, "Okay, a normal serving," because who knows, nobody is typically calculating the ounces of vegetables they're eating, so we have that stuff calculated. You can say, "Okay, four ounces is a normal size salad. I need to therefore plant 12 row inches of arugula each week if I want to be able to harvest three 4-ounce salads out of that space. Therefore, I know that each week I'm going to go out there on Monday or whatever day I have the most time for gardening and plant one row foot," which is a pretty small amount in your garden.

That gives you parameters, because it's really easy for anybody, even an experienced gardener, to go out there and be like, "Well, there's all this space. I'm going to just plant a whole 10 row feet of arugula."

Theresa: Yeah, I've done stuff like that.

Colin: Yeah, I mean everybody does. But if you have the plan in place, you can just be like, "I'm going to do this and I'm also going to do it next Monday, and I'm also going to do it the following Monday. I'm going to fill out this space. I'm going to have the arugula mature, actually taste good. It's not all going to be ready at the same time, and I can just keep cutting it, and I'm going to be clearing those old patches as I go as well, so I'm going to keep opening those spaces back up and just kind of have this cycle going."

That's based on my projection of how often I eat it, how big my salads are, and then there's tons of data in our book about what is your harvest per row foot or per plant? What can you expect? You kind of just use those sheets in the book and make a projection about how much you should plant each week or each month to get the harvest that you want.

Theresa: I don't want people to think this is scary at all, because that's what was so great about the book. It's really easy. You can take the charts and graphs that are in there and just fill in—look up what you want to grow and fill in the numbers, and it's so easy to fill this out. I thought that was brilliant. You provide everything in the book so it's not this big, massive—you don't have to do calculus or anything like that. It's really simple.

Colin: Hopefully we've done a lot of the hard work in terms of just pulling the information together from disparate sources and doing the research to say—and obviously, everybody is going to be different. Maybe my salads are twice as big as somebody else's, but these are based on just general serving sizes. People will adjust them over time, but you're right. All that information is in there. What you can do when you're starting out is just put in the numbers. What crops do you actually use? It just sort of spits numbers back out at you.



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Theresa: Yeah.

Colin: It's awesome. If people are into it, we do—this is called out in the book, but I wanted to mention it because on our website we actually have links to downloadable spreadsheets from the book. You can fill in spreadsheets within the book that you have, just writing them in in pen or pencil or you could photocopy them so you have numerous copies to work with, but you can also just go to our website and download all of them and then have endless flexibility in terms of editing them and making copies and doing whatever you want.

Theresa: Yes, absolutely. I did see that. I had a note for that. If anybody is driving in their car and thinking that they have to quick pull over to write that down, I'll have links to all of that in the show notes for this episode, so if they forget, they know where to go. But I loved that and you even talk about that both on your website and in the book, that there are a lot of different ways we can keep track of all of this.

When we're filling out our calendar, you can do it online or you could do it on paper. You could do a real spreadsheet or you could just pen and paper and do it that way. Then you even mentioned that there's some kind of a farm record keeping place that you can go, if people are really into it and they want to get really down to the wire that for small fees you can—there are different programs you can go and you're basically using the farming programs to figure all this out.

Colin: I think we projected that everybody has a different threshold for detail. Some detail is a million times better than none. Also, I think just with all aspects of gardening there are so many ways of doing it. We didn't want to just say, "Here's the spreadsheet you have to use. If you can't use this, you don't know what you're doing."



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Theresa: Right.

Colin: It's more like, "Here are a bunch of different ways of going about it," and we try to provide those examples and actually lay all those options out, because I think certain sort of data tracking techniques will work better for different people. We try to give people options and say, "Here's one way to keep track of it. Here's another way to keep track of it. Find what fits best for how you garden and how you're going to learn," because really, a lot of it is about individual learning.

I mean the microclimate at your house and the microclimate at my house are going to be different, even if we both lived in the same city. So ideally, you're kind of learning from yourself over time. you're taking the tools that we created, but you're actually learning a lot from what you see happening in your space and using that to guide when you plant things and when you expect things to be ready to harvest, because honestly, it can be totally different than somebody else who lives a mile away from you.

Theresa: It can even be different from year to year, like I may decide that I really like a certain thing and I'm like, "Man, I'm planting double this year," and it would be so easy to look at my charts and say, "Oh, I know exactly how much to plant. I'll just double what I did last year and leave more space," so it's perfect. It gives you this record that you can refer back to.

Colin: Yeah, exactly.

Theresa: There's another section of the book that I really loved that you included and that was the section on timely harvesting and storage.

The part that I really loved that you included was about harvest times, how some things are better harvested in the morning and some things, maybe, are better harvested in the afternoon. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Colin: Yeah, it's kind of fun actually knowing things like when the best time a day to harvest a crop is and to see how much longer it lasts when you harvest it at the right time of day. One of the crops we talk about in the book and I think, again, is relevant because everybody loves salad greens, at least I hope, are salad greens. We recommend harvesting them first thing in the morning.

The idea is that the plants, the biological activity happening in the plant is pretty slow at that point. It's more or less dormant and the weather is usually cooler. There's usually dew on the plants. If you harvest it in the morning before the plant has to kind of wake up and really start respirating and doing a lot of work, it'll actually retain better structure of the leaves, more moisture, and keep a lot better in your fridge. You can maybe even double the storage time of a crop if you just pick it at the right time of day so that it's ready for harvest.

Theresa: Yeah, and lettuce, because it has so much water, that it's better to pick it when it isn't in the heat of the day where it'll wilt right away. Then you were talking about how tomatoes are kind of the opposite. You don't want them to be wet, so we can harvest those later in the day, right?

Colin: Exactly. A lot of the fruiting crops that you have in the garden actually will keep a lot better if they're not covered in dew and they're not cold. You want them to kind of have dried out, so summer squash and cucumbers and tomatoes perform a lot better when they're picked midday, when it's actually kind of warm out.

Theresa: And then in the book you were talking about with harvesting and how we can rinse our greens or our vegetables or whatever we're picking. Giving them a good rinse and I loved that you put in the part about that a lot of people don't know this about garden hoses. Can you explain about the one thing that we need to kind of worry about with our garden hoses that people may not think about?

Colin: Yeah, so it's a little known fact that most garden hoses actually have lead. If you look at a new garden hose at the store, it'll even have a tag on it that says in really small letters, "Do not use for drinking water. Contains lead." I can't explain why this has been the status quo for so long, but we would recommend not using an old garden hose to drink out of or wash your vegetables.

Fortunately, these days you can actually get non-leaded garden hoses and they're a lot more available than they were even a year or two ago, so polyethylene is a good plastic to get for a hose. Most irrigation supplies are made out of polyethylene. It's a more stable plastic, so it's not supposed to leach anything into the water. I would recommend using a hose like that if you're going to be washing your vegetables.

Theresa: Perfect, yeah. I think so many people are shocked when they hear that because that's usually the first thing you do is, if you have to, you rinse of your vegetables right outside. If you do have a leaded hose, you could just take them inside to rinse, but definitely—I got a lead-free hose as soon as I learned that a few years ago. You're right. It wasn't as easy to find, but now they're marked and they're readily available and I can have a link to one of those, too, one of the brands, but there are a lot more choices now.



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Colin: Yeah, it's nice. Again, I wouldn't want anybody to be really concerned if they had been using a lead hose because I think people have for decades. I spent most of my childhood drinking out of a garden hose.

Theresa: And look how good you turned out!

Colin: The damage has probably already been done.

Theresa: Right.

Colin: But I think now that you know, I mean it's just one of those things that's easy. It's a toxin. Once you know, you might as well stop using it.

Theresa: Well, one last question that I'd love to ask you is if you could recommend any particular fruit or vegetable that you like to grow in your garden that has a really high yield. Are there any favorites that you think, "Man, you just plant one or two seeds of this and you'll have it forever?"

Colin: Well, that would be nice. There are a few. Basil is a huge giver. If you put in a couple basil plants and you manage them properly, you can get unbelievable yields off of them. I'm also a really big fan of bush beans.

Theresa: Oh, yeah.

Colin: I like pole beans, too, but bush beans are cool because you don't need to trellis them, so you can plant them in more spaces in the garden and they grow a lot more quickly. They yield just unbelievable amounts for the space that they take up. Those are also kind of half season crops, and so you can plant them multiple times over the



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course of the year and get just a lot. I also—one of the crops that half of my garden is planted is in kale every year.

Theresa: Yeah, me too. I grow a lot of kale.

Colin: It's awesome. I mean you can use it in any recipe that you're making and it can provide for months. In our climate and I think if you cover them in a lot of climates, they can even live through the winter and then start producing again in the spring for you.

Theresa: Yeah, mine actually did. I had a little section that did survive, but I'm in southern California. But they did survive, and the thing that I also love about kale is it's so beautiful in the garden.

Colin: Yeah, it is. It's an amazing plant. The flowers are beautiful and you can eat the flowers. I don't know if this is already well known, but there's a variety that we really love that's called "rainbow lacinato."

Theresa: No, I've never heard that.

Colin: It's a hybrid of redbor and the just Tuscan normal lacinato kale. It's just awesome because it's beautiful. It has red veins and a green leaf. It's got that kind of crinkled look that the lacinato does, but the leaves are really big and it's super healthy and really, really productive.

Theresa: Awesome.

Colin: So if you like kale, I would totally recommend looking into getting some of that.

Theresa: Yes, I'm writing that one down. The thing when you were talking about managing basil and managing bush beans, in case anyone doesn't

know, you mean by picking off the flowers so that—because once basil goes to flower, it dies. So if you keep the basil picked, the flowers picked and you use it and the flowers are delicious, too, then it will last longer in the garden. With bush beans, I'm assuming you also manage—we have to keep harvesting, because if you stop harvesting, it stops producing.

Colin: Yeah, totally. I mean basil is one of those crops. It's pretty funny because it's like the more you harvest, the more you get, because every time you pinch off a branch, you get two branches that come out. A well-managed basil may only be 18 inches tall, but it could have 60 or 80 branches coming out of it and just be a giant mob of basil. If you don't pinch it, you have two branches and they're super spindly and tall, and then it flowers.

Theresa: Yes.

Colin: So yes, just learning how to harvest it, and then just being willing to harvest it whenever it needs it. Sometimes I honestly recommend harvesting even if you're not ready to harvest if the crop is ready to be harvested. For basil, it's almost like sometimes it's better to harvest basil and compost it than to leave it on the plant, because in the long term, the plant will produce more basil for you that way.

Theresa: Ah, yes, good.

Colin: And with bush beans, yeah, it's totally like you just want to be out there picking them because even though bush beans kind of fruit in a relatively short period of time, a lot of the fruit is ready almost at the same time. You want to be out there picking the biggest ones everyday so the small ones can size up more quickly, and also, just so

you don't let them overgrow, because when they're huge, they don't taste very good.

Theresa: Yeah, their texture is not so good. Yeah.

Colin: No, yeah. They go pretty fast. That's the other thing. A lot of crops have a pretty narrow harvest window, so one of my general, really basic, easy recommendations is if you want to increase the yield of your garden, I would just recommend spending five or 10 minutes a day in the garden every day. Spending 10 minutes in the garden six days a week I think is better than spending one hour in the garden one day a week, because you just sort of—every time you go out there, you see something new and you can always sort of really be on top of changes that are happening.

In terms of managing pests and diseases, knowing when a crop is going to be ready to harvest so you don't miss it at its perfect window. All that stuff. If you're just out there peeking around the garden, even if there's barely anything to do and you just pick a couple dead leaves off of something, you'll probably notice something that you can go back and take care of a couple days later. That's my #1 tip is just always just cruise through the garden every day and poke around a little bit. It's amazing how quickly things change.

Theresa: Yeah. That's so funny that you said that because I interviewed Susan Morrison, who I don't know if you know her, but she's at all the garden shows that we go to. We were talking about walking through your garden everyday and I was saying that I go through every morning with a cup of coffee. I walk my garden.

It's not only that I catch things really early, but I also get more enjoyment out of my garden from doing that because I get to

experience it everyday, whether it's at the beginning of the day or the end of the day. Your advice is spot on because not only will people be able to see what needs to be harvested or if there's a bug problem or maybe some plant didn't get enough water, you'll instantly see it before it dies. Then you also get to have that moment or that time in the garden, which is really what it's all about, for me, is to get to experience the garden and experience our food. That's excellent, excellent advice.

Colin: I totally agree with you. I think it's funny. In the intro of the book, it's one of the things we talk about is that in order to be, I think, "successful." I'm making air quotations, "successful," because as a gardener, I think you really have to maintain that love of it over time, because I've run into people who just get really frustrated when something doesn't go well in their garden. They convince themselves, "Oh, I can't grow this crop or this terrible thing always happens in my garden and I just am tired of dealing with it."

What I find is if you maintain just that real appreciation for it and that love of being in it everyday and just seeing what's happening, even accepting and dealing with the things that aren't going as well as you want them to, then that, in and of itself, will make you a more productive gardener. You're right. That's kind of just what it's about. You're there because you love doing it, and if you love doing it, then you can find opportunities to do it better and get more food out of it. That will hopefully also increase your appreciation of it.

Theresa: Exactly. Excellent. That's exactly true. I love that. Well, Colin, thank you so, so much for taking time to explain all of this to the listeners. I think it is so helpful just even adding a few of the tips will increase their production, but I'm really encouraging everyone to get both of



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your books because they can take your gardening to a whole other level. Thank you very much.

Colin: Yeah, it was fun. I appreciate the opportunity.

Theresa: I hope you got some really good takeaways from that interview. There is even more information in both of Colin's books with Brad, and I have links to both of the books, to information about their businesses, everything that was discussed with Colin, and it's all in the show notes for this episode. Just go to [livinghomegrown.com/56](http://livinghomegrown.com/56) and everything is right there for you in one place.

That's it for this week, but I hope that you will be joining me next week as we dive back into the world of preserves, and I'm interviewing a really fun couple who are quite famous in the preserving world. We go into some really unusual preserves. That'll be next week's episode. Until then, try to live just a little bit more local, seasonal, and homegrown.

**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.**