
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 144 Seasonal Eating With A Foodie Farmer

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/144

Andrea: When you're eating fresh food that you've grown, it tastes so much better knowing that your blood, sweat, and tears went into producing this.

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, Episode 144.

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 podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that includes organic small-space food growing, canning and fermenting the harvest, and artisan food crafts like baking your own bread. It's all about the different ways that we can live closer to our food and take small, delicious steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics or my online courses, my coaching, or my Living Homegrown membership, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com.

Today's episode is all about seasonal eating, and what better way to learn about seasonal eating than with a farmer who is also a foodie? I invited on Andrea Bemis, and she is a farmer and a blogger. She has a fantastic food blog, and she is also the author of *Dishing Up The Dirt: Simple Recipes For Cooking Through The Seasons*. I love her book. It's one of those books that you might curl up at night and sit in bed and read almost like a novel. The way she writes in the book is the same way that she writes on her blog. Basically, her blog is taking us on the journey that her and her husband are on as organic farmers in Oregon.

I loved her book, and I asked her to come on because the whole book is built around the seasons. You know me, I'm all about eating seasonally because that is the best way to get the best flavor and nutrition, and having a farmer who is also a foodie is right up my alley, so I think you'll really enjoy this conversation. We talk about what it means to be a farmer, some recipes out of her book, what it means to eat seasonally. We talk about her CSA and how we can support and help local farmers through community-supported agriculture, and we just talk about the whole process of the vegetables coming from the field all the way to our table.

As always, I will have information in the show notes from this episode, including a recipe that Andrea shares with us for beet butter. I'm telling you, it is the most beautiful, gorgeous thing, this beautiful maroon-red beet butter that she uses on crackers and sandwiches. The recipe and everything else that we talk about today will be in the show notes for today's episode. To get to the show notes, you just go to livinghomegrown.com/144, and I'll have everything there for you.

Let me tell you a little bit more about Andrea. Andrea Bemis is a farmer turned foodie who truly manifests the farm-to-table lifestyle. She lives on Tumbleweed Farm, a six-acre property in Parkdale, Oregon. The farm grows for its CSA, community-supported agriculture, local restaurants, breweries, and farmers' markets. Andrea shares her delicious recipe creations and adventures on her website, dishingupthedirt.com. She blogs about her and her husband's lives as farmers. She shares meal ideas and a lighthearted look at the not-so-glamorous life of living off the land. The success of Andrea's blog led to her first cookbook, *Dishing Up The Dirt*, which was published last year. Just like life on the farm, the book is divided by the seasons, with each season kicking off with an essay about life at the farm and the day-to-day challenges and rewards and, of course, lots and lots of recipes.

Now, one of the things that I talk to Andrea about also are the beautiful photographs that are in both her book and on her website. If you get a chance to check out her blog, they really do make you just want to run out and rip some vegetables out of the garden and start cooking. They made me hungry, so I think you'll really, really enjoy the whole conversation.

Now, before we dive into the interview with Andrea, I just want to tell you that today's podcast episode is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my membership site. Now, I believe that living an organic, farm-fresh lifestyle is really a journey in learning. As we learn different skills, such as food fermentation, food growing, or even critter keeping, there are three distinct stages of growth. We start out with curiosity. We move into experimentation and, eventually, we grow into mastery of these skills.

Now, if you're working at creating a farm-fresh lifestyle, and you're curious where you fall on that growth scale, I've got a free resource for you. It's my Farm Fresh Success Path that I give to my students inside my learning institute, and it'll help you decide where you are on your own journey, the characteristics of that stage, and some action steps that you can take to get to the next level. To get the Success Path PDF, just go to livinghomegrown.com/path, and you can download it there for free.

Okay, so I'm really excited to share this conversation with you with Andrea Bemis, the author of Dishing Up The Dirt. Hey, Andrea. Thanks so much for coming on the show.

Andrea: Thank you for having me, Theresa.

Theresa: Well, your book is one of those books that I curl up with and read cover to cover. I know that probably sounds a little weird with a cookbook, but I love the way you write, and I love the photographs, and then the recipes just make my tummy grumble. You are doing exactly what so many of my listeners do, which is you are eating seasonally. As a farmer, I know that's what you do, but you're getting so many other people to take that journey with you, and that's why I'm really excited to have you on, so thank you for coming on today.

Andrea: Oh, thank you so much for your kind words.

Theresa: Sure. Well, I guess we should start by having you tell everybody how did you get into farming in the first place?

Andrea: Well, the long and short is my husband grew up on an organic vegetable farm in Massachusetts. Farming was the furthest thing from my life. I grew up in a suburb of Portland Oregon. He was a farm boy, and we met on a ranch in Montana about 14 years ago, and he kind of ... he drug me to the dirt.

Theresa: I love that. I love that. Well, tell everybody about Tumbleweed Farm.

Andrea: Tumbleweed Farm is ... it's our six-acre farm in Oregon. We moved out here from Massachusetts six years ago. We learned to farm on Hutchins Farm, my husband's family farm. We were there for three full years, but we ... It was large operation. It was 60 acres, which for vegetable farming is on the large size, but we wanted our own operation, so we decided that, after three years of farming under our belts, we kind of wanted to go out on our own. We found a little six-acre plot in Parkdale, Oregon, and with a little pole barn style house on it, nothing too fancy, and we decided that we wanted to give it a go out here.

Theresa: Ah, that's so cool. Three years on a big farm, that's a lot of experience, so you guys kind of knew what you were doing when you got started but just on a much smaller scale.

Andrea: Correct.

Theresa: What sort of things do you grow at Tumbleweed?

Andrea: We grow a mixed variety. We grow about 50 different vegetables. We have a CSA and do the farmers' markets, so we're really into diversity.

Theresa: Perfect, perfect. Now, I know about your blog because I've been a follower of your blog, Dishing Up The Dirt. How did the blog develop? Did that come first, or did you do the farming first and then the blog came along?

Andrea: The farm came first. I started the blog just to sort of document our daily farm chores just so my parents could ... I knew that my dad wouldn't believe me that I was out hauling hundreds of pounds of potatoes and filthy dirty, so I started the blog so that my family could have a little glimpse into our life back at Hutchins Farm. I knew my mom would be proud of me for finally getting in the kitchen and cooking with ingredients that I hadn't grown up eating, like beets, and rutabagas, and kohlrabi. I started the blog just to kind of document the kind of trials and tribulations of our first year being on the farm.

Theresa: Yeah. You definitely feel like you're there with you, because you do, you talk about the ups and downs, which I love. You're very authentic and real, but you also make everything sound so delicious. You have a lot of recipes, and so you're cooking up, really, what you're growing, which is kind of fun. Now, I love the cookbook because it definitely makes me feel like I'm there with you, and I know that that kind of stemmed from Dishing Up The Dirt the blog. You talk so much about seasonal eating. I'd love for you to tell everybody what does seasonal eating mean for you?

Andrea: Well, seasonal eating, for me, really does mean ... For the most part, I try and be as much of a locavore as I can, and so, in the springtime, it's those first ... It's a lot of leafy greens, a lot of radishes, a lot of turnips. Also, we like to preserve as much as possible, so we're still eating pesto from last summer that we canned but that almost tastes so much better in the winter when you're just craving that fresh flavor, basil and garlic. Seasonal eating is eating what we're growing on the farm and harvesting it when it's ready and then, again, preserving what we can so that we can continue to eat off of our land for most of the year.

Theresa: Yeah, exactly. You definitely talk about that, and that's something that I talk about here on the podcast is that if you preserve what you're growing or what you're getting from your local farmer, then you get to extend the season. So many people think, "Well, I can't eat seasonally because, when it's out of season, I still want it," and so that's how you get around that is you preserve everything, so I'm so glad that you covered that too.

I have to tell you that the photographs on your blog and in your book are just so gorgeous. Are you taking those photographs? You're the one that takes those pictures, right?

Andrea: Yeah, so I take all the food photography, and then a dear friend of mine, who's actually also a CSA member, she has come up and taken a lot of the

farm photos of my husband and I when we're out there in the dirt harvesting or planting.

Theresa: Yeah. The pictures definitely totally make you realize what it's like to be a farmer. No one can see you right now, but you're a little petite thing, and you're hauling these big giant crates of stuff. I was like, "Whoa, you are strong," so very impressive. The photographs are just so gorgeous, and so I wanted to ask you, on the food photographs, are you taking those with natural light? How do you go about photographing food so it just makes it look so delicious?

Andrea: Well, so Theresa, a little ... I am not a photographer, and I have made it so that it's as simple as possible. I take my food photos at the same location in my house right next to a big window, and I have a tripod and a couple different surfaces that I'll put down on the ground. I typically take those photos at the end of the day when the lighting's not so harsh. I've watched a lot of YouTube videos on food styling just to ... because I'm not a photographer, and so I had to try and make it as easy as possible on myself, but yeah, I have a pretty basic setup, but it's amazing what natural light can do.

Theresa: Well, I know you don't think you're a photographer, but I thought you did a just fabulous job. The photographs on the blog are just as gorgeous, so kudos to you. You did a good job. It makes me hungry when I see your pictures, and they look ... They're real, and they're rustic, and it feels like you can almost smell them coming off the page, so I just love that.

There was one particular picture that, when I was first thumbing through your book, that really caught my eye, and it was your beet butter. It was this brilliant maroon-red, bright color, and it just sounded so amazing. Before we talk about that recipe, because I told you I wanted to ask you about it, you say something in the book where you said that beets are your spirit vegetable, and I thought that was so cute, so could you explain what you meant by that?

Andrea: Yeah. Again, I did not grow up eating beets. We ate a lot of spaghetti and mac and cheese in my house, but beets ... I will never forget one of our first afternoons at Hutchins Farm. We harvested hundreds and hundreds of pounds of beets. My back was killing me. I didn't think that I liked beets. I don't even know that I'd actually tasted a beet before, but I ... When we were done harvesting that afternoon, I was like, "We are going to go home and cook these beets and learn to love them because they took all of our energy." I was like, "My back's never going to be the same again."

My husband wanted pizza, and I was like, "All right. Well, I'm going to figure out how to incorporate these beets onto a pizza," so I made a sauce out of the beets, kind of made a puree. We made a pizza, rolled out the dough, and

then put the beet puree on it, and we loved it. I ended up just, all of a sudden, the beets ... All was forgiven. I was like, "Okay." Beets can be tough. Growing beets is pain, thinning them, seeding them. They take forever to germinate. They're heavy. They stain your hands, but I love them. They won my heart over.

Theresa: Ah, so because they've won your heart, now they're your spirit vegetable.

Andrea: Now they're my spirit vegetable, exactly.

Theresa: I love that. Well, back to the beet butter. It sounds so amazing, and I was wondering if you could tell everybody how you make it.

Andrea: Yeah, so the beet butter ... and it's a great dip for crackers. You could even put it on a pizza or even a sandwich. It is a combination of cooked beets, macadamia nuts, a little olive oil, vanilla extract, and a little bit of maple syrup. You blend that all together sort of like a ... It kind of is like a nut butter, and it's sweet and has just the right amount of sweet, salty, and it's beautiful.

Theresa: Well, it definitely is beautiful. I think if you were to serve this with crackers, like you said, I think it would definitely be the conversation. It's also a new way to get people to eat beets because I know some people are like, "No, no. Don't like beets," because they've only had them one way. I'm always trying to look for ways to get kids to eat, and I think the color alone would get someone to try it. You even say that you like to use it instead of cranberry sauce on a turkey sandwich, and that sounds amazing to me too. I wanted to tell everybody that we'll have the recipe in the show notes so they can give it a try. It's directly out of your book, *Dishing Up The Dirt*, so thank you for that. I'm excited to try it myself.

Andrea: Yeah, let me know.

Theresa: I will.

Andrea: Let me know how you like it.

Theresa: I will, absolutely. You recently had, on your farm, you had your first harvest dinner. How did that go?

Andrea: It went really well. We also raised a couple of pigs on the farm, but we ended up having about 20 folks come and sit at our table out in the tractor shed, and we dished up a five-course meal, and there was pork and a lot of ... It was in October, so it was such a good time to get people to gather on the farm when the harvest is so bountiful and there's a wide variety of produce available. Yeah, we made farm-fresh cocktails, and appetizers, and cooked up a couple of pork shoulders, and it was really lovely.

Theresa: Oh, I love that. Yeah, so definitely farm to table right there at the farm, which had to be amazing. You had photos on your blog that you used a Big Green Egg, which I have a Big Green Egg too, and I love it. Is that what you guys used for the pork?

Andrea: That's what we used for the pork, yes.

Theresa: It's so awesome because you can just slow, slow cook. Low and slow, that's what they say.

Andrea: Yeah, low and slow, absolutely, and then it kind of has that nice smoky flavor and ... Yeah.

Theresa: Yes. Ah, amazing. I should also say, in your book, you do have a couple cocktails, which I love that you have cocktails in there. You talk about how sometimes, at the end of the day, you're working towards that cocktail.

Andrea: Yes, absolutely. At the end of the day, we get a little thirsty. Physical labor will do it to you.

Theresa: Absolutely, absolutely. You talk about your CSAs. In case any of my listeners aren't familiar with a CSA, it's community-supported agriculture. Can you explain to the listeners how that works from the farmer's point of view?

Andrea: A traditional CSA, folks buy ... they're basically buying a share into your farm, and so it's this agreement that, through kind of thick and thin, they will support you through the seasons. Typically, people will pay for a full season's worth of produce in the wintertime, and the wintertime is when farmers aren't really making a lot of money, so ... but it's also when you're spending a lot of money, so we're buying all of our equipment, seeds, fertilizers, compost. The winter's a very expensive time on the farm, so it's nice to get that income when the farm isn't bring in money yet. Our CSA runs for about 26 weeks, so then, for 26 weeks starting in the spring through the fall, folks will get a box of in-season produce weekly, but there is kind of this agreement if there's a disease or a crop devastation, you're not getting your money back if there was ... if something goes wrong.

Theresa: Yeah, right.

Andrea: Which is great, though. It's a communities-building kind of relationship. We have 65 families that are a part of our CSA, and they feel like family members. I mean we'll be outside on a hundred-degree day, and we'll get text messages from some of our members saying, "Hey, I'm in my air-conditioned office thinking of you guys."

Theresa: Aww.

Andrea: It's so wonderful. They'll text us photos or email us photos of what they made for dinner with our produce, and I just ... It makes us feel so connected, and I love that.

Theresa: Absolutely. From a consumer side, it totally makes you vested in the food that you're getting, and the work that you guys do to make it organic and to get it to us in the best way possible so it has peak flavor, it makes us appreciate that so much more. Yes, absolutely, we're investing in you, and we're taking the risk right alongside you. I really encourage people, if they can, to join a CSA if they have one in their area because it definitely makes you eat with the seasons. You learn, really, what's in season and what's not, especially if you're not a gardener, and you don't have any idea, so that's fantastic. Then your blog has recipes for the different foods, so if something like beets, if they're not used to that, you have recipes for them to try.

Andrea: Yeah, absolutely. Our biggest mission is we want to get people stoked to eat vegetables, and yeah, and even ingredients that they wouldn't maybe pick up at the grocery store, and so I provide a lot of recipes to kind of help people ... set them up for success. We grow a lot of those Japanese turnips or a lot of kohlrabi. Folks might not know what to do with kohlrabi, but I get really excited to inspire them to maybe try different recipes or just experiment with maybe new-to-them ingredients.

Theresa: Yeah, absolutely. I'm so glad you're doing that because then, by doing that, they'll be more willing to try some of the other things, and it just keeps going from there, especially with kids. I keep saying that, but I had ... My boys are teenagers now, but trying new things, if they understand where it came from, either by visiting a farm or the farmers' market or growing it themselves, they're so much more likely to eat it, so it does definitely help.

Now, I know a lot of my listeners are wanting to become farmers themselves. I have a lot of want-to-be farmers, and so I wanted to ask you about this because I know it's not an easy transition, and so what do you feel can be, maybe, the hardest part of diving in to being a farmer?

Andrea: Well, oh, gosh. Where to start? I had that romantic vision of farm life, and about five minutes into working on Hutchins Farm, I was like, "This is not romantic. This is hard, hard work." I definitely would recommend for folks to work on somebody else's farm first before investing in land themselves to learn the ins and outs, because if we had just bought land and decided to farm on our own, I think we would have drowned. I don't think that we would have a successful business, and I think that because when you're farming it's not just ... If you're doing it for your livelihood, you've also got to learn the business side of it.

It's not just growing food. There's having a market, and where are you going to sell your product? There's all sorts of different things going on, and I think that we learned so much from the farm that we kind of went out ... my husband's family farm. We learned so much from the farm manager out there, so I think working for somebody else, just for a season, will really help train you and see if is something that folks want to continue doing, and then definitely finding land in an area where you have access to a city or a big enough town that will support you.

Theresa: I hadn't even thought about that, but yeah, that's probably pretty important that, whatever you're growing, you need to be able to have a market for it.

Andrea: Yeah.

Theresa: I think that's really good advice because not everybody would have a family member that they could go to to ask, or a mentor would also be great, but to actually experience it and get some experience under your belt, because it is a lot to learn, not just from how to grow things but, like you said, the marketing and the financial side. You're an entrepreneur, and you're a farmer and a grower, and there's just ... You have to be a marketer, all of that tied into one thing, so that's a lot to learn. It's kind like sink or swim if you dive in without any experience at all.

Andrea: Right, right.

Theresa: Well, what would you say is a typical day for you in the springtime, because isn't spring the busiest time of year for you? What does a day look like for you?

Andrea: We check the weather like crazy. We're checking the weather. That's the last thing we do before we go to bed, and it's the first thing we do when we wake up. Right now, it's all about seeding, so we're seeding in the greenhouses, and that's where we start a lot of our plants. Then we'll be transplanting out into the field pretty soon. We direct seed a lot of stuff out into the field. Yeah, so the spring is kind of a hustle. It's we're prepping parts of the field, so we're spreading compost and fertilizer and getting a lot of plants out of the greenhouse into the field, and then we'll be harvesting the first round of spring greens in May. That's when we kind of start harvesting the first round of our spring produce, but right now, yeah, it's planting and prepping the fields.

Theresa: Oh, well, that makes sense. I'm sure that's a lot of work, but you also get to work outside, and it's beautiful, and I know you do love the work, so what would you say is the most rewarding part of being a farmer?

Andrea: I think the most rewarding part is ... I've thought about this a little bit. You can get so in your head a lot, but it's like the simple pleasures of, yeah, being outside, everything just tastes so much ... Your morning coffee tastes so much better. When you're eating fresh food that you've grown, it tastes so much better knowing that your blood, sweat, and tears went into producing this. Life is pretty simple out here. It can be really stressful, but just kind of the simple joys of that morning cup of coffee, that evening beer with your ... I work right next to my husband, so it's kind of nice to unwind at the end of the day and look out at all of our crops and just be like, "Wow, we're doing this." I really do kind of love looking at the farm from afar, but yeah.

Theresa: I love that too because you're in the moment. I think, when I read your writing on your blog and in the book, that's really why I'm so attracted to your writing because you bring us into the moment with you. We're on that journey with you, so I think that makes perfect sense that that's the best part for you. When you created this book, and you were deciding on recipes and creating the recipes from what you were harvesting, what was the favorite part for you in creating the cookbook?

Andrea: I kept thinking of our CSA members, actually, and what I thought maybe they would kind of want to see out of a seasonal cookbook, so I got really excited just getting creative with some of the vegetables that folks receive a lot in their CSA boxes or would see at the farmers' market booth weekly. I wanted to create recipes that were not only delicious but really approachable and simple. I've always said this. You don't have to be an experienced cook to eat well, and so I wanted to create recipes that would be delicious and really simple to prepare.

Theresa: Well, I think you did a fantastic job, and I think you nailed it, because when I read through each season, it's really complete meals that are based on your day's harvest. I think you even say that in the cookbook, and so as I'm reading through and thinking about what I'm going to be pulling out my own garden or that I can get in season from the farmers' market, it's really inspiring to see what you've done. You're the one who has planted it from the seed, taken care of it, and nurtured it, harvested it, and then you've created this great recipe for it, so I just wanted to thank you for coming on the show because I find it really inspiring that you're a farmer and a foodie at the same time. I can totally relate to that, so thank you so much for coming on.

Andrea: Theresa, thank you so much for having me.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that conversation with Andrea Bemis of Dishing Up The Dirt. I so enjoyed this conversation, and I thought you would enjoy actually talking to a farmer who is just as much of a foodie as we are. Remember that everything that we talked about, including the recipe that Andrea shared with us for beet butter, is in the show notes for today's



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episode. I have a complete PDF of the recipe that you can print out and enjoy. To get to the show notes, you just go to livinghomegrown.com/144.

Also, today's episode is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute. If you would like a copy of my Farm Fresh Success Path that my students use inside my membership, then just go to livinghomegrown.com/path, and I'll have that there for you as well. Thank you so much for joining me here today. I hope you enjoyed this one, and until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

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