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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 149 Southern Food From Scratch

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/149](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/149)

Ashley: Sonkers, so the mythology goes, they originated in Mount Airy. Basically, big farms, harvest time, summer, fall, there would be an abundance of some sort of fruit, and you've got to feed the staff. You've got all these ... Many hands make for light work, so you need to make sure that everyone is well-fed, and whatever fruit you might have in abundance in Mount Airy, whoever was cooking for the farmhands would put it in a big pan and then dollop it with, essentially it's a biscuit topping. And there are, across the United States, there are regional variations. There's betties, crumbles, grunts, slumps, all sorts of different names for basically a baked fruit dessert.

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown podcast, episode 149.

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 a farm, and that includes organic, small space food gardening, 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 want to learn more about any of these topics, or my online courses, or my business coaching, or my Living Homegrown Institute, then just visit my website, [LivingHomegrown.com](http://LivingHomegrown.com).

On today's episode, we're going to dive into something that I know you will enjoy. We're going to talk about food. Basically, we're going to talk about home cooking from scratch, when you make real food, not processed food, and I brought on someone who I have been following for years. Her name is Ashley English, and she's a blogger who has the blog Small Measure, but she is also a very prolific book author. I think I have every single one of her books on my shelf. I just love her books. I love her style.

She writes about keeping chickens, canning food, homesteading, entertaining, making pies. Pretty much everything that we love to do, she has probably

written a book about it. So, when I saw that new book of hers just was coming out on the market, I had to get my hands on it, and I had to invite her on the podcast. She's actually been on my list to be on the podcast for a long time, and this was the perfect opportunity to invite her.

Ashley's book, her new book, is called "Southern from Scratch: Pantry Essentials and Down Home Recipes." See? I knew you would like it. It says that it is a guide to Southern scratch cooking, 150 recipes for pantry essentials, and modern twists on traditional recipes. Now, the real thing that drew me to her book, not only because I love everything that she writes, but because she really makes the stories in here personal.

I'm one of those people who likes to read a cookbook as if it is a novel. I love diving into the backstory of how they created some of the recipes, or where it was handed down through family, where it came from, how they came up with the idea, the flavor combinations. All of that, that is my jam. That's what I love to hear about, and Ashley is a master of pulling that all together.

Now, what we talk about in this episode is not just Southern cooking, but really about cooking from scratch, and what it means to really prepare food where you know all of the ingredients. There is nothing that you can't pronounce, and you're using real butter, and real cream, and you're making biscuits, and you're cooking bacon, and you're using buttermilk, all of that.

So, in the conversation that I'm going to share with you today, Ashley goes into some of the ingredients that she uses in her Southern cooking, and I ask her to share one particular recipe that just made my mouth drool when I read about it in the cookbook, and that is bourbon bacon jam. I know this will be something that you will love. I've had bacon jam before, and it is amazing, and when I read how she created hers, I knew I needed her to share the recipe.

If you're a long time listener, you know that everything we share on the podcast is included in the show notes for the episode, which includes this particular recipe. I have it as a PDF download for you, and if you would like the recipe that Ashley talks about, and links to her books and her website and everything else that's discussed, all you have to do is go to [LivingHomegrown.com/149](http://LivingHomegrown.com/149), and everything will be right there for you.

Now, let me tell you a little bit of backstory about Ashley English. She has degrees in holistic nutrition and sociology. She has worked over the years with a number of nonprofit organizations committed to social and agricultural issues. She's a member of Slow Food USA, and regularly writes for regional and national publications, both online and in print.

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She is the author of all four books in the "Homemade Living" series, "Canning and Preserving," "Keeping Chickens," "Keeping Bees," and "Home Dairy;" as well as "A Year of Pies;" "Handmade Gatherings;" as well as another book called "Quench," which I love; "A Year of Picnics;" "The Essential Book of Homesteading;" and her new book that we talk about today, "Southern from Scratch." See, I told you she was a prolific writer. They're all awesome books.

Ashley and her family live in Chandler, North Carolina, where they're converting their land into a thriving homestead, and you can follow all of her adventures at [SmallMeasure.com](http://SmallMeasure.com).

Now, before we dive into the interview, I just want you to know that today's podcast episode is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my monthly membership site where you can access an entire library of monthly master classes that will help you live farm fresh without the farm. Now, this includes everything from how to grow heirloom tomatoes and raise chickens, to how to make your own homemade cheese, and even ferment vegetables.

I believe that living an organic, farm-fresh lifestyle is really just a journey in learning, and just as we learn different skills, such as food fermentation or food growing, or even critter keeping, there are three distinct stages of growth. We start out being curious, we move into experimentation, and eventually we grow into mastery of these different skills.

If you're looking to create your own farm-fresh lifestyle, and you're curious where you may fall on the growth scale for any of these different skills, well, I have a free resource for you. It's my Farm-Fresh Success Path that my students use inside my learning institute, and it will help you decide where you are on your journey, the characteristics of that particular stage, and some action steps and information that you can take to get to the next level. To get to the success path PDF, you just go to [LivingHomegrown.com/path](http://LivingHomegrown.com/path), that's P-A-T-H, and you can download it there for free.

Okay, so, let's dive in to everything biscuits and bacon, and real, whole food Southern cooking with Ashley English, the author of "Southern from Scratch: Pantry Essentials and Down Home Recipes."

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

Ashley: Thank you so much for having me.

Theresa: Well, I'm actually a big fan. I've been following you for a long time. I have probably almost all of your books, and I love your blog, and everything that you do, so I'm really thrilled to have you on here, and I know my audience is going to love you. So, I would love to talk first about what it is that you do. You do

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homesteading. You love to do cooking, gardening. You kind of do everything that my listeners love to do. So, how would you describe your lifestyle?

Ashley: Oh my goodness. Well, we live just outside of Asheville, North Carolina, in the mountains of Western North Carolina. My husband, he works from home with me on all of our projects, and we have two young sons, a seven-year-old and a one-year-old, and we own 11 acres, which we homestead on. We have chickens, bees, a garden, and we entertain here a lot. In fact, tomorrow, there's a wild foraging instructor coming with her class of students, and they'll do a wild forage on our property and cook some food. We regularly host events here. We have weddings, funerals, baby showers. So, we kind of do it all, from every aspect of homesteading to entertaining. I homeschool my son. Yeah, we're here a lot. Fortunately, we like each other.

Theresa: That's good, that's good. Yeah, you do do a lot of entertaining, which I think is such an important component, bringing in the community and sharing our food, and what we grow, and what we bake and cook. So I love that you even have books on that, which I talked about in the intro. I'm just thrilled that you're able to come here and talk about Southern food from scratch, because that is something that I really haven't ... I don't talk a lot about how important it is to cook things from scratch, but I really do believe that that is where the flavor is. And we're all about getting away from processed food, so your book and everything else that you do just fits right in.

So, how would you describe your cookbook, "Southern from Scratch?"

Ashley: Well, when we were knocking around ideas with my publisher ... This is the tenth book that I've written, and I'm never at a loss for ideas for books. In fact, it's kind of a running joke that anything that happens, I'm like, "Oh, that would make a great book." My friends, or with my husband. I have to rein it in. But when I was knocking around ideas for book topics with my editor, I offered her a series of different ideas that I had, and she said, "I love all those books, but one thing I keep coming back to is the way that you cook, the way that you grew up, maybe we should explore that avenue." And then I thought, what perfect idea to kind of distill all of this that I learned growing up, that I do now, into a book. So, that's kind of how it came to be.

Theresa: I love that. Well, what I noticed right away about this book was that it was very personal. More personal than I'd seen in your other books. And so, was that really one of the reasons why you wanted to cover this topic? Because you talk about your family a lot in this book.

Ashley: I do. It is exactly what you said. It is the most personal book to date. Not just in the food that's in it, but all of the narrative throughout, where I detail why I chose what I chose, which is basically the book ... When I was thinking of the

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nuts and bolts of a Southern Appalachian whole foods pantry, what would be in it? And I solicited on Facebook from my friends. I was like, "What do you think of when you think of Southern food?" And people were giving me biscuits, bacon, buttermilk, bread and butter pickles, chow chow, all of these different things, and I came up with 50 of them, and then I built the whole book around that. And as I started to write it, I just realized how deeply personal what I chose was.

So, this is Southern Appalachians. This isn't Texas cooking, or Florida cooking. It's not New Orleans style cuisine. It's Southern Appalachian food, which is what I grew up with. My great grandmother, grandmother, and mother are all from the same county in the mountains of Virginia, in the western part of the state, and their influence on me was profound. So, as I started working on these recipes, and thinking back, and knocking around ideas, talking them out with my grandmother, all of these stories started to manifest.

And what was lovely was that she passed away while I was working on the book, but I was able to ... She was 90 years old, and I was there when she passed. I was able to just have these wonderful reminiscences of our collective culinary heritage as women, which was really special. And then, thinking about my culinary upbringing with ... I have a degree in nutrition. I have two degrees. I have a bachelor's in nutrition and one in sociology, because I'm really interested in the intersection of food and the access to it. But then my marriage with my husband, how we entertain, and how we cook now, and these three aspects of my life really coalesced in this book.

And then, like I said, my grandmother passed away while I was working on it. My father-in-law passed away while I was working on it. I got pregnant during the book. I had my son. Allister was born three months early, and so I spent every day in the NICU at our local hospital for 79 days working on the edit for this book. While I was doing skin-to-skin kangaroo care with him, teaching how to nurse and latch on, I was working on the book, too. So, it's personal on so many levels.

Theresa: Oh my gosh, yes. Well, it definitely came through, and I did really connect with the stories, like with your grandmother. You mentioned her several times, and I felt it. So, I really love that about this book. I'm one of those people who read cookbooks kind of like novels, so not just that I thumb through and pick a recipe. I do do that, but I also like to read them. I love when they have stories connected to the food. And so, that's what made this so special to me as a reader. So, I'm sorry that so many people passed while you were working on the book, but the connections and the stories make them live on, and your passing down the heritage of your family to us, which is really exciting. So, I definitely love that.

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One thing that I thought was really interesting, though, was when you talked about you didn't always cook this way, and that as a young adult, you were vegetarian and vegan, and then you shifted back to more traditional foods. I'm not vegetarian or vegan either. A lot of my friends are. But I have always cooked in a more traditional way. And so, I found that really interesting that you shifted back. So, tell us about that, that shift.

Ashley: Well, when I was a senior in high school, I started to become a little bit more aware. You know, when you're a kid, you just eat what you're given. We don't really have a lot of leverage at the table. So, as you get older and start to become a little more aware, and my brother had gone off to college, and it was just my mom and I, and I started to do a lot of the cooking, and looking at my family and seeing a lot of health issues surfacing on my mom's side of the family, which is the side of my family that's from the southeast US. And so, I made this connection between what I was seeing, in terms of heart disease and diabetes and obesity, with what's got to be their Southern food diet.

So, when I went off to college, I quickly became a vegetarian. Then I was vegan for four years. Then I did a macrobiotic diet. I did a raw food diet for a year. I tried on all these different sorts of healthy approaches. I worked at natural food stores, both national chains and independent mom and pop shops, but I'd never felt worse, from my own personal health. I had constant digestive upsets. I was having issues with reproductive organ health, and I couldn't figure it out, because I'm like, I'm doing all the right stuff. Why is this happening?

And then I obtained my nutrition degree, and started working in Asheville for an integrative health practice, and the doctor there is a big proponent of the Weston Price Foundation, and the approach that they have, the whole foods approach that they take to nutrition, and he had me attend a conference that Sally Fallon was doing here in Asheville. That was when I really got introduced to whole fat, and the benefit of whole fat, and whole animal protein.

I started to realize that I had kind of thrown out the baby with the bathwater in disregarding my culinary upbringing, and realized pretty quickly it wasn't the Southern food approach, with bacon and buttermilk, it was all the processed foods that had sort of weaseled their way in, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle. So, I started bringing back whole foods to my own diet, and the change in my health was profound. I mean, all of my digestive issues went away. The cysts that I developed in my ovaries and my breasts, they went away. It was pretty phenomenal to witness happen, and I felt great. I didn't have any energy lag. So, I realized that I had kind of done a disservice to myself, and my family's culinary history, by disregarding all of that, and so I started searching for a balance.

Theresa: That's really, really profound. Absolutely. Well, I think you've hit on something there, which is really that there's some misconceptions about eating real, whole

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food. And I'm the same way. It's the processed food that I took away, and boy did I ever feel better when I wasn't munching down sodas and potato chips, and that definitely made a difference. So, what do you feel is the biggest misconception about Southern food?

Ashley: Well, I think that people, they see a lot of obesity in the South. The Southeast US has the highest rate of obesity in the United States. It also has the highest amount of poverty in the United States. the poverty is equivocated with nutritionally diminished foods, traditionally in the form of processed foods. So, this association is made with, they're Southern, they're overweight, it must be what they're eating. And in a sense, it is. There's a lot of consumption of processed foods here, and a tremendous consumption of sugar, often in the form of sweetened beverages, and then weaseled in sneaky ways in processed food, as well.

But my husband calls it the big fat lie, this belief that dietary fat results in body fat, and that's not the case. If you're talking about trans fats and partially hydrogenated fats, yes, but that's in so much processed food, so if you cut that out, and you're just eating whole fats from animal sources, or good quality vegetable fat sources, natural saturated fats, it's not the same sort of association, and I think that that's a big ... It's a rampant misconception. I mean, I was the one who got my mom to eat vegan margarine for years, and get her off of butter, and now I'm like, "No, no, I was totally wrong there. Let's go back to butter."

Theresa: Well, and that's an important point that it's okay to shift and change, and I think that that's totally fine. We have to experiment and try, and if something isn't working for our particular body type, I think that's fine, and it's not about being right or wrong or shaming ourselves if we did eat potato chips, or margarine, or whatever. But absolutely, I agree with everything that you're saying.

So, I want to talk a little bit about some of the cooking, and types of recipes, and ingredients that you have in the book, and particularly, you were going through a section where you had different ingredients that you list. My audience is pretty familiar with pickling salt, because we talk a lot about canning and pickling on the show, but there were a couple of other things that you had on there that my audience might not be familiar with. I know they're not really common here in Los Angeles, where I am, and one of them was sorghum. Can you talk about the sorghum syrup that you use in some of your recipes?

Ashley: Absolutely. Sorghum is derived from a grass, sort of how many people think of bamboo as a tree, but it's actually a grass. It looks very similar. When it's growing, fields of it look like corn stalks, so a lot of people mistakenly think that what they've seen is corn, when it's actually sorghum. And it used to be the

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most common sweetener in the Southern Appalachians, along with honey, but the way it's extracted is the cane is grown. There's different types of sorghum. Some are ... I would say the bulk of it is grown for animal feed purposes, but there are some varieties that are known for being very sweet. A lot of people would swear up and down that their dad grew sugarcane here in the mountains, but sugarcane can't grow here, it's too cold. So, what their family was actually growing was sorghum.

The stalks are harvested in the fall before the first had freeze. The leaves are stripped off, and then the juice is pressed and extracted. Some is done mechanically, but there's been an interest, a resurgence of interest in more traditional methods of extraction, so there are several companies that do horse-pressed extraction. The horse is harnessed up to a press, and the horse walks in circles as it moves, kind of like an apple press, where the horse's motion turns the lever, and the stalks, the juice is pressed out of it.

Theresa: That's cool.

Ashley: That's really cool. And then it's boiled, similarly to the sap that comes out of maple trees. It's boiled down and rendered into syrup, and sometimes mistakenly called molasses. Molasses is a byproduct of sugarcane or beet production, so it's a bit of a misnomer. Some people will call it sorghum molasses, but it's not. They're two totally different things. Sorghum comes from the sorghum plants. And it's lovely. It's a lovely sweetener. It's not quite as overt and strong a flavor as molasses. It's not as cloyingly sweet as honey can be. It's packed with vitamins and minerals and nutrients. I use it in about six or seven recipes in the book. It's widely used. We always have sorghum in the house.

Theresa: I'm glad you brought up the part about the molasses, because I have seen it listed as that, and yeah, that would get very confusing. So, another ingredient that you had that people might not be familiar with was sumac. Can you talk to us about that?

Ashley: Right. Sumac also grows all over here. In fact, in the early part of 2001, I had a boyfriend at the time who brought me a bouquet of sumac one day. It's got a strange shape. It kind of grows up like a staff that you might imagine someone from the Lord of the Rings walking with. It's got this curved part at the top, and then all of these tiny, beautiful, deep burgundy colored berries. Those are the fruits, and that's what harvested. They're very high in malic acid, which makes them tart and lemony and flavor. The natives in this area would commonly use them to make a beverage similar to lemonade. I don't know if they sweetened it or not, but throughout the summer here in the Southern Appalachians, sumac-aid is commonly made, with honey as a sweetener. Sometimes sugar, but usually honey. And it tastes just like lemonade. It's very tart. And I use it as a

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component for Cajun seasoning for boiled peanuts, and some other things in the book.

Theresa: Wow. That's really cool. So, it sounds like it would be exactly like lemonade, which would be a fun thing to do. So, let's talk about the three Bs that you talk about, the three Bs of Southern cooking: biscuits, bacon, and buttermilk, which is like heaven to me. That's how I would define heaven, right there. In the book, you talk about the three Bs, and you go into a lot about biscuits, what you would think of as the best of a biscuit. How is it that the three Bs are a part of the whole cookbook that you created?

Ashley: For me, and most folks, when I mentioned that I solicited feedback on Facebook of "What do you think of as iconic Southern foods?" they came up so frequently, and for me personally, they're such an integral part of my culinary heritage that I knew I had to add them. If you wanted to add bourbon as a fourth component, I would not disagree. But they come up so repeatedly that I knew that they had to be in this holy trinity of Southern food.

But growing up as I have, I've only lived in the Southeast US my entire life, barring a brief stint in Washington, DC in my 20s. I've developed, as you can imagine ... I'm going to be 42 soon. I'm pretty particular about what I like. Now, mind you, people have very strong opinions in the South about their biscuits, their cornbread, what makes a good hush puppy. People will hash it out. And I would in no way ever cast dispersions on someone else's preferences, but I know what mine are. I know where in town I like the biscuits, where I don't like the biscuits.

And for me, what I like is a biscuit that's cut with a biscuit cutter, versus a drop biscuit. Sometimes their biscuit dough is just kind of spread across the pan, and the whole pan is baked together. That would never work for me. I like the dough to be kind of pressed over and around itself, kind of like if you were laminating a croissant. Not anywhere near as intensively, but enough that when you cut it, you're going to get flaky layers. That's pretty important to me. And then, before it goes in the oven, I like to brush the tops with some melted butter, preferably a little bit of salted melted butter, and that just gives the most wonderful, that initial flavor that hits your tongue when you first take a bite.

I also really like buttermilk in my biscuits. It gives it a little bit of a sour tang. And then I always encourage that you use the most fresh baking powder that you can, because it make a huge difference in biscuits, and also in hush puppy making. Sometimes, if people don't bake very often, they'll just let their baking powder languish in the pantry, and that is not the time to use the old baking powder, when you want to make a really good batch of biscuits.

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Theresa: I totally agree with you on the cutting. I'm the same way. It has to be cut. I'm not a drop biscuit girl. I don't know where that comes from, but it's something about the crispness around the edges, and that you can see the flakes, and peel it. I don't know.

Ashley: I'm completely there with you. I joke that I'm like Goldilocks when it comes to my biscuits and my cornbread. It's got to be just this way, and there are a few places that hit it properly, and there are a few places that don't.

Theresa: Right, right. And I guess if someone is more of a drop biscuit person, they would like the other places, and probably not ...

Ashley: There's a place for them.

Theresa: Right, exactly. Perfect. Well, in your book, you have this fantastic recipe that incorporates two of the Bs, bourbon bacon jam. And I have had bacon jam, and it is like this side of heaven. It's so awesome. And so, I was excited when I saw that you had a version of it in the book, and I would love it if you would share the recipe, and kind of give a little overview of how you make bacon bourbon jam, because it's not canned, and that's what everyone should know. It's something you keep in the refrigerator.

Ashley: Right, exactly. It wouldn't be safe to process. So, the first thing that I will say is, growing up, and we do this now, but a lot of people that grew up in the South know about the can of bacon drippings that's always by the stove. When you cook bacon, you have that wonderful fat, don't do anything else with it. Don't give it to the dog. Just put it in a jar and save it, because it makes a wonderful fat for a multitude of uses. You can even cook hot dogs in it. There's so many uses for using bacon drippings.

In this recipe, it's incorporated as a flavor component, so that's one of the first aspects of the recipe. There's a recipe in the book for making bacon. If you want to get into making your own bacon at home, I have a friend here in Asheville, Jeremiah DuPree, and he owns a company with his partner called Intentional Swine, the intentional meaning it's mindful. The hogs are pastured. The hogs that he sources, they're locally raised. They're butchered in a humane manner. And then everything but the squeal is used, as the joke goes. All part of the pig is used, and he has a CSA that he does with all of his different products, and he provided me with a bacon recipe for this, because he's such a pro at it.

So, you can make your own bacon for this recipe, or if you want to purchase bacon and use it, that's equally fine. Whatever works. I like to bake my bacon for this, instead of frying it in a pan. Again, Goldilocks here with my bacon. I don't want it too crispy, I don't want it too flaccid, and I have found that baking it in the oven on a wire cooling rack that you might use for cooling a cake or

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cookies, that set into a baking pan allows the bacon grease to drip down, and the bacon to crisp up really nicely. So, that's the first step in the recipe, is to bake the bacon in the oven.

And then, after that's done and it's cooling, in a pan, you warm up the drippings that I mentioned, and you add an onion, and you're going to render, cook down those onions and get them really nice and soft. At that stage, then you want to ... While that's cooking, you chop up your bacon into little pieces and get that all set and ready. And then to the onions, you add some water, the bourbon, some brown sugar, some sorghum for that little extra bit of sweetness to round out against the brown sugar, and some lemon juice. And then you put the bacon in, and that's it. You can serve it immediately, or you can store it in the refrigerator. You need to eat it within a week to a week and half. And you can use it on a cracker, or you can put it into a sandwich with a fried egg. You could put it on a steak.

There's a restaurant here in Asheville that we have a very close relationship with called Rhubarb, that is all about farm to table cooking, and they did a dinner recently where they featured ... Oh, gosh I don't even know. Maybe 10 recipes from the book? They do these communal suppers on Sunday called Sunday Supper, where you make a reservation. It's a fixed price. It's three courses, and you're seated with strangers at a table, and the food is all passed family style, like in big bowls. It's really fun.

Theresa: Oh, I love that.

Ashley: It's so much fun. And they did a Sunday Supper of "Southern from Scratch," this new book of mine. What they did, they served the bourbon bacon jam on top of my peanut butter hummus, which was pretty fun. We used field peas and peanut butter to make a hummus in the book, and then they put a little dollop of the bourbon bacon jam on top, and it was delicious.

Theresa: Wow. I wish I had that restaurant close by.

Ashley: It's a wonderful restaurant. If anyone comes to Asheville, it's the first place I tell them to go.

Theresa: Oh, that's really good. I'm going to have to check that out. Yeah, that just sounds so fantastic. And that's the thing with this. You could serve it with cheese and crackers, like you said, on a sandwich, but I love the idea of putting it on an egg or a steak. I think that just sounds like, amazing. Really, really cool. Well, thank you for sharing that. And we'll also have the recipe in the show notes, so people can get that. And you have so many more recipes like that in the book.

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But one of the other things I wanted to talk about that is very Southern to me ... Here I am, California girl. But is very Southern to me, and that is talking about lard, because that's something that, when I went through cooking school, I really learned that you get the best, most flaky pie crust when you're using lard in your pie crust. And you talk about lard in the book, and so it seems like it really is a staple in Southern cooking.

Ashley: It is. It's very commonly used a lot of times you'll see it show up in the form of leaf lard, which is thought to be from the cleanest part of the pig, around its kidneys and back and belly, and leaf lard is used in making pie crust often. It yields a very white, clean, least processed type of final product, which a lot of people want in their pie dough, so that it's just a uniform color. But we use lard often. Just like bacon drippings, we always have some on hand. Some people use it in making biscuits. I use it often for popping with popcorn, which is pretty fun. It gives it a little bit of a smoky flavor. In the book, I have piggy popcorn, which is you cook the kernels in some lard and then add a little chopped up bacon to it.

Theresa: Oh my gosh, that sounds good.

Ashley: It's salty and smoky and delicious.

Theresa: Yes, yes. That sounds really good. Well, you even have a whole process in the book on how to render lard for ourselves, so we can do that. Which is essentially like cooking it down and straining it, so that you have a cleaner, more pure lard. And when we do that, if we were to render lard, how long does it usually keep? We keep it in the refrigerator?

Ashley: You would keep it in the refrigerator, and it would last for up to six months. It's actually got a pretty long shelf life.

Theresa: Oh, wow. That's really good. Okay, well, there's another terminology that to me, I learned from you, and it was ... I think you had this in your pie book, and that was a sonker, which is like a cobbler pie, right? So, tell us what a sonker is, because you did have a recipe for that in the book, too.

Ashley: If you've ever watched the Andy Griffith show, it was set in Mount Airy, North Carolina, which is sort of in the central Piedmont region of the state, kind of close to the Virginia border. And sonkers, so the mythology goes, they originated in Mount Airy. Basically, big farms, harvest time, summer, fall, there would be an abundance of some sort of fruit, and you've got to feed the staff. You've got all these ... Many hands make for light work, so you need to make sure that everyone is well-fed, and whatever fruit you might have in abundance in Mount Airy, whoever was cooking for the farmhands would put it in a big pan and then dollop it with, essentially it's a biscuit topping. And there are, across

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the United States, there are regional variations. There's betties, crumbles, grunts, slumps, all sorts of different names for basically a baked fruit dessert.

And so, the sonker was commonly served with ... You choose your fruit, you put the biscuit topping on, and then it was served with what's called dip, which is basically just like a sweet glazed powdered sugar. For me, it's a little bit too much. I have it in "A Year of Pies." In my pie book, I have a sonker with dip, but I didn't include the dip in "Southern from Scratch," because I don't often use it. I have cut back sugar consumption so much that I'm so sensitive to what's sweet now, which is great, especially in a house with kids who love sweets.

Theresa: Yes, absolutely.

Ashley: But, yeah, a sonker. It's a North Carolina dish.

Theresa: That's so cool. Well, absolutely. I think when you cut back on sugar, then the fruit does taste sweeter.

Ashley: Everything. I had a latte yesterday, and just the milk in the latte. I had no sugar. Just, you can taste the lactose from the milk.

Theresa: Yes.

Ashley: It's remarkable how you can hone your palate to sweetness.

Theresa: Yes, and to me, that means it's bringing out all the flavors, what we really want. And being kind of a foodie myself, I want to taste everything, and you don't need to cover it up with tons and tons of sugar. So, fantastic.

Well, I really love that you were able to come on, and I love that you're sharing so much in your book, and that you came on to the podcast to share. So, what I'd love to ask you as the final question is, what do you hope readers of your book learn by diving more into whole foods and Southern cooking?

Ashley: I hope that they learn that Southern food can be healthful, flavorful, fun, and it's evolving, too. All throughout the Southeast US right now, there's all sorts of culinary mashups happening, with biscuits with a side of kimchi, and Korean barbecue, and I love that. I love that it's not static, that Southern food is, it's vibrant, and dynamic, and kinetic. That's what I wanted to do in this book. I wanted to take these 50 Southern staples that are iconic across the Southern Appalachians, and then give them a little bit of modern flair.

I have a Southern shakshuka. Shakshuka is a North African egg dish, which is the base of my shakshuka, but then I added some pickled okra. And instead of serving it with pita, which is commonly done in North Africa, I had it served with

hoecakes, which is made from cornmeal. So, I wanted to take Southern food and bring it to the international table, while also hewing closely to this sort of canon of Southern food, too, that's what I hope people take away from it.

Theresa: Well, I think you totally succeeded.

Ashley: Thank you.

Theresa: I do. And then, by weaving your stories into it, and your personal story with it, and where these recipes came from, and how they were handed down, it just tied it all together with a big, fat bow. So, I am just thrilled with your book. Thank you. Thank you very much for coming on today.

Ashley: Thank you so much. I really ... And I'm a mutual fan of yours, so it's such an honor to be on the show.

Theresa: Thank you.

Ashley: Thank you.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Ashley English, the author of "Southern from Scratch." Now, as I mentioned before, if you want a PDF download, a printable of her bourbon bacon jam recipe, then just go to [LivingHomegrown.com/149](http://LivingHomegrown.com/149). I will have the PDF recipe for you, and we'll have information about all of Ashley's books, her website. And I'm also going to link to a blog post that she did all about making biscuits, because we talked about that as well, and it has a recipe in there, in her blog post. So, I will include that link in our show notes, as well.

And as a reminder, today's podcast episode was brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my membership site, and if you would like the free PDF Success Path that my students use inside my membership, then just go to [LivingHomegrown.com/path](http://LivingHomegrown.com/path), and I'll have it there for you for free.

I hope you enjoyed today's interview, and until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care, everybody.

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.

Theresa: Okay, now I'm hearing you better, so do that for both input and output.

Ashley: Okay.



*Live farm fresh without the farm®*

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Theresa: And now you should be hearing me.

Ashley: Oh, I hear you in my head.

Theresa: I can be scary!

Ashley: Voices in my head.

Theresa: Voices in your head. Okay.