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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 157 Collecting & Using Vintage Books

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/157](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/157)

Theresa: Try to care for your oldest books so that they last another several hundred years going forward, because we all know in the digital era that books are a little bit less valued today than they were a hundred years ago, so when you have something old like this, it's really important that we care for them as if they are valuable, because they are.

Theresa: This is The Living Homegrown Podcast, episode 157.

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. Now, that includes organic small space food gardening and artisan food crafts, like canning, fermenting, and even baking your own homemade 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.

Now, if you would like to learn more about any of these topics or my farm fresh courses, my online business coaching, or even my Living Homegrown membership, then just visit my website, [LivingHomegrown.com](http://LivingHomegrown.com). On today's episode, we're going to talk about the magic of vintage books. Now, I'm talking about gardening books, cookbooks, even canning books that are really old. Now, I really find a ton of value in collecting vintage books. I have several bookcases full of vintage books. I've been collecting since I was 18, which was a long time ago, so I thought I would cover this topic because sometimes, people find it a little surprising that you can still glean a lot of really fun information from some of these older books.

Yes, some of the information is outdated, but if you garden at all or if you cook or can at all, you can tell which things are outdated and which are not, and I get so much inspiration from reading some of these books and from looking through the recipes, and from even trying some of the different maybe flavor combinations or spice combinations that they call for in some of their recipes. It

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can really be a lot of fun, and it's also kind of nostalgic, and it's a fun thing to collect. Whenever I go to swap meets or garage sales, I'm always on the lookout for vintage books. That's what I'm going to cover today, and I think I'll start by first explaining, "What do I mean by a vintage book?" To me, a vintage book is like 50, 60 years or older.

That to me is vintage. It's out of print, and it's not a typical book that you would find in a bookstore, but I still also like some of the newer books that are maybe only 30 to 40 years old, and maybe they're out of print as well. I find a lot of value in those books, but when I'm talking about vintage, I'm usually talking about books that are much older, 50, 60, 100 years old, or more. I have some books on my shelf that are well over 100 years old, and they are fascinating to read. It's like going back in time.

Why exactly would you want to collect vintage books? Not just for the inspiration, but the reason is that many times, you will discover things that are in these books that are just not being written online. People are not talking about these particular techniques, or they're not talking about these particular recipes because they have gone out of favor, so it really does open a door to a world that you may not be familiar with at all. Also, when I'm reading maybe a novel, a book about gardening that is written in novel style or essay style, I find so many valuable insights from the people who wrote these books because typically, they were lifetime gardeners, or they were lifetime chefs or cooks, and they really bring a lot to the table, and just because the book is out of print or they wrote the book 60, 70 years ago, does not mean that there are not valuable insights in those pages. For me, it's almost like discovering a treasure that you are uncovering.

I find so many little nuggets of truth and really innovative things in these books, and I'm going to give you some examples as we go through today's podcast. What I'm going to do here is I'm going to give you eight tips for collecting and using vintage books. These can be garden books, cookbooks, anything that is an older book that you may discover in your travels, or garage sales, or anything like that, and I'm going to talk to you about what info you can use in these books and what to be weary of, and how to find vintage books and how to care for vintage books. That is what today's podcast is all about, so let's dive right in. Number one, the number one tip I would give you is you need to pick what you are going to collect.

If you've never collected vintage books, it can be a lot easier if you start with a theme or something in particular that you're looking for. If you're not sure, absolutely you can just get a little bit of everything and test the waters of vintage books, but I find as a collector, it is a lot more fun if I'm really searching for that needle in a haystack when I come across maybe an old bookstore or an estate sale, and I'm looking for something in particular. Then, when you find it, it's actually a lot more fun. Some of the things you can do when you're looking

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for what to collect, you could collect books by theme. In other words, you could collect gardening books, or cooking books, or books on herbs. These are some of the things that I have collected.

I also have a collection of books on bees, which I find really fascinating because they usually have these incredible hand drawn illustrations that are just to die for. Another thing you could collect is to collect a certain author. As you start going through older books, you may discover that there's one particular writer that you resonate with, and if that's the case, then it can be a lot of fun to try and track down other books by that author. Some examples of writers that I collect are Rosetta Clarkson, Helen Fox, Eleanour Sinclair Rohde, and Annie Carter. Now, all of those ladies have written lovely books about herbs, and I started in vintage book collecting because I was collecting old herbals and old herb gardening books, and I love the writing of all of these wonderful women, so I have several books by each one of these writers.

Another thing you could collect if you're not sure you're ever going to actually read the books is to collect a certain look, and I do this as well. I love books that are green because that is the color of my house. I have a lot of green everywhere inside my house, so anytime I come across a vintage book that is the right shade of green, I sometimes buy it even if it's not a topic that I'm particularly interested in. Another way that you might collect a book by look is if you are looking for certain color illustrations. Some of the beautiful illustrations you'll find in books have like watercolor themes, or they're black and white garden designs, and you might find a book that has a particular style of garden design or a particular style of illustration, and that's a great way to collect.

Now, while I'm talking about that, I do have to say that I never ever destroy one of these books to place one of the illustrations in a picture frame on the wall. I would never do that. I don't recommend doing it because these books really are treasures, and I firmly believe that they should all be held together. However, sometimes people have books that have been destroyed, and they have saved the illustrations from those books, and in that case, if the book is already taken apart and you come across an illustration that someone is selling that they had taken out of a book, I don't see a problem with preserving that illustration, framing it and putting it on the wall, but I would never buy a book, and then take it apart. That's not what I recommend doing at all, but you will as you start collecting books, come across illustrations that don't have a book.

The illustration has been pulled from the book because the book fell apart, or was water damaged, or whatever, but I don't condone taking a book apart to just save that one picture and throw the rest of the book away. I like to keep the book intact when possible. Tip number two, get inspired by garden books. I highly recommend if you are a gardener, that you dive into vintage gardening books, because the information can really be valuable. Now, yes, you do need to keep in mind that many times, botanical names have changed over time. That

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does happen, but the stories and the insights remain valuable, and while we're talking about gardening books and being inspirational, I find that there's really two types of books that appeal to me.

I love the essay style gardening book where someone has written about their garden, especially if they are a famous gardener, and I also love the garden how-to books. Even though a lot of the information may seem kind of archaic, sometimes they have the most incredible step-by-step instructions for something that is organic. Remember, these books, when these books were written, everybody was doing organic, and the whole organic movement coming back is really a fairly new phenomenon because everyone got into industrial type of gardening, everyone got into using chemicals, all the way in the last part of the last century, and so now, everyone's going back to being organic again. When you pull an old gardening book, it's already organic. Now, as we're talking about being inspired by garden books, you can also be inspired by a particular writer.

Like I said, Rosetta Clarkson, she is one of my favorite garden writers from the vintage era because she wrote a ton about herbs. Now, I first discovered her with one particular book, 'Magic Gardens: A Modern Chronicle of Herbs and Savory Seeds', and modern is relative because this particular book was published in 1939, and I'm lucky enough to have an autographed copy by Rosetta E. Clarkson. It's one of my favorite books because it has beautiful illustrations that are all black and white, hand drawn herb gardens, and she talks a lot about the history of herbs, and has some fantastic information. I discovered her that way, and then I started realizing that she was a very prolific writer, and she had several other books. I also have 'Herbs: Their Culture and Uses' by Rosetta Clarkson, but what I later discovered by accident was that she also had a newsletter for a long time.

She wrote an Herb Journal back in 1936. I have several full sets of the whole year of Herb Journals. It was basically a newsletter with little herbal tips and hints, recipes, potpourri information, history of certain herbs. It's a fascinating read, and tucked into the sleeves of some of these newsletters, they're all beautifully dogeared, where people have read them over and over, and tucked into the sleeves are little notes and recipes. It's just a wealth of information that I have gathered.

I've been collecting different newsletters for quite some time. When you discover a particular writer who maybe just seems to resonate with you and you're just like, "Wow. I wish I could have met this person", it can be so much fun to seek them out, and when you stumble upon something that they wrote, it's like you just found a golden nugget. In fact, you did, so I highly recommend that you dive into garden books for inspiration, and see what resonates with you. Once you discover what kind of turns you on in the gardening book world, then you can just seek out those types of books.

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Tip number three is to actually use the cookbooks. If you decide you want to collect cookbooks, you need to actually make some of the recipes. It can be so much fun, because the recipes really are timeless on a lot, a lot of the recipes that you find inside the books. Again, I collect a lot of herb books, so I love recipes that have to do with herbs because they have quite an extensive herb garden. One of the books that I have on my shelf that I've actually made recipes out of is 'The Art of Cooking with Herbs and Spices'.

This particular book was printed in 1950, and it has a ton of little Post-it notes in it of different recipes that I've wanted to try. It has a whole section on herbal jellies, and I've actually made some of the jellies in this book, and they were really unusual combinations that maybe I hadn't thought of doing on my own, like a rose geranium apple, rose petal apple, Curly mint apples. Those are just some of the recipes that I found really, really interesting. Having a cookbook does not mean that you can't make the recipes in it. I'll talk about canning books in a minute, but when it comes to cookbooks, they really are universal, and they're timeless.

A lot of bread pudding recipes are in the older books, and I love to make steamed pudding as well, and so I always draw my inspiration for my steamed pudding and my bread pudding recipes from the older books. You'll get some really great insights into different spices that you can use, and for me, the recipes have always worked. Now, another book that I have that isn't quite vintage ... It's not quite as old. It's actually a set of two books that come from the 1970's both by Grace Firth.

The first one is 'Secrets of the Still: A Zesty History and How-to for Making Spirits, Fragrances, Curables, and Other Products of the Stillroom'. The other book that she wrote is called 'Stillroom Cookery: The Art of Preserving Foods Naturally, With Recipes, Menus, and Metric Measures'. Now, these books are so fun. They have illustrations on how to create your own still. They have information on how to make perfume, all kinds of really interesting recipes, including things like barley, beer, and German beer soup.

I mean, some really unusual fun stuff. If you get really into this, you will end up reading these books like a novel. I love to read cookbooks that way. Even though these books are from the '70s, I find them really valuable, and they're both out of print. You might be able to find them at a used bookstore, but they're a little harder to track down, so I always look in bookstores for books that maybe were from the '70s, '80s and '90s.

They may be out of print, but they still have a lot of value, and you may even find really unusual flower recipes. Like a lot of the older books have recipes for things like rose cookies, which are delicious by the way, so always something new and exciting to try from your garden. Okay. Tip number four is to be careful

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when you are looking at older canning books. Now, canning has gone through quite a revelation in the last 20, 30 years, and there are definitely different guidelines today than there were when people were canning 50 years ago.

It's really important that you follow the latest and greatest guidelines when you are canning, because maybe people did things differently in our grandmother's time, but they also had not done the research or the testing, and did not have the technology to understand the science behind the canning techniques that they were doing, and there have been numerous studies and testing to make sure that what we do today is safe. When you find something dated pre-1996, it may have old, outdated guidelines that are no longer considered safe. When you have an older canning book, it may be okay to use the recipe for a canning project, something water bath or pressure canned, but you want to follow modern guidelines and techniques for how you process that recipe. That's super important. What I look at canning recipes for when they've come from an older book, I'm looking for unusual flavor combinations, maybe a different spice that I've never thought to use before, but I never ever follow their guidelines for how long to pressure can something, or even if they're saying to water bath something that I know is not safe to water bath, so you have to be leery when you're using a canning book, but you absolutely can be inspired by the recipes that you see in there.

Tip number five is to look inside these older books for notes, letters, and information that might be written either in the front and back jacket of the book, or somewhere in between. It can really be like a treasure hunt. Like when I was talking about Rosetta Clarkson, and I found a little notebook that had all of her newsletters in it, when you open it up, there was this little pocket with handwritten notes and handwritten recipes, and even a garden design by someone who had owned that particular newsletter prior to me, and I found it just fascinating. It was like I had just discovered this treasure of someone's history with their garden, and I had so much fun sitting and reading through that information. I really learned a lot both on how they had used the information from the newsletter, but on that previous owner herself, so it was kind of fascinating and fun.

When you are finding these books, I want you to always check them out, see if there's anything tucked inside, skim through the pages, and see if there's any notes. I found notes that said, "This recipe was terrible", or, "This recipe was wonderful", or, "I changed this", or, "I did this technique in the garden, but I used this particular flower instead". It's kind of fun information to look for inside the books. That's my tip for number five, is to look for secret hidden treasures inside these books. Number six is to know where to find these books.

Where do you find them? I typically find vintage books at garage sales and estate sales. Estate sales especially because that's usually when they are clearing out an entire home, and there are usually piles and piles of books, and

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you can get a feel for having an eye for looking for those older books when you see a whole bookshelf of books, and that's usually where you find the best treasures. I also look at swap meets. Now, yes, there are people who deal in books at the swap meets, but my best treasurers have been when I find one, lonely, little book sitting in a pile of a bunch of other junk inside a swap meet booth.

The reason that they are treasures is the person selling them doesn't really see the value in that book, so I can get a book for 50 cents that to me is worth a million bucks. That was actually the case for one particular book that I stumbled upon when I was at a swap meet up in Northern California. We had just purchased our farmstead, and the one that has the heirloom orchard up in Northern California, and I was walking through this swap meet, and there was a little stack of books kind of covered up by some pots and pans and things that this person was selling, and it just caught my eye because it was my favorite color green that I collect. When I picked up this one book, it was called 'Adopting an Abandoned Farm' by Kate Sanborn. Now, it turns out that Kate Sanborn is a pretty well-known writer.

I did not know of her at the time, but this book could not have come at a more opportune time because we had just purchased an abandoned farmstead, so it was fascinating to me that I found this book with this title that was in my favorite color green, and the book was written in 1897. Trust me when I say that when I got this book for a dollar, I spent the rest of the weekend reading it, and it was such a fun read. Things like that are what make collecting these books so much fun. You can also find vintage books of course at rare bookstores, although, if it's anything special that you're looking for, they tend to be a little bit higher priced. However, if you are collecting a certain author, and there's one particular book that you're looking for, this may be the best way to find it.

You know what? It's a great thing for people to track down for you when they're trying to find a special birthday present for you, so I always let people know if there's something I'm looking for. You can also find books on eBay, and even on Etsy. You can find old cookbooks. You can find gardening books. You can find all sorts of fun vintage books when you look on any of these resources. All right.

Tip number seven is to care for your older books properly. Now, I have several books that are from the 1800's, and most of them are Victorian language of flower books. Now, if you're not familiar with the Victorian language of flowers, during the Victorian era, they would give each flower in a bouquet a certain meaning, and you could convey a message to someone by using certain flowers that you brought together to give them a message of love, or friendship, or remembrance, or anything like that. They created these dictionaries during the Victorian era that would list all the different plant material and what they meant, and it could be kind of fun to put together different bouquets. I became

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really fascinated with the Victorian era many, many years ago, and I started collecting different Victorian language of flower books.

I have several that are from the 1800's. I also have several gardening books that are from 1830's, and they are really fascinating to read as well, but as you can imagine, they are very, very delicate, and you have to be super careful how you store and take care of them. What you want to do whenever you have any vintage book, is you want to be the caretaker of that book so that it can carry on for another hundred years to many, many generations after us. What I do is I always keep my books away from direct light, so if I have a bookshelf that's right next to a window, I will not be placing my vintage books in that bookshelf. I keep all my really old books in a darker section of my living room, or in my office so that they are not in direct light.

I also keep my oldest books inside a glass lawyer cabinet. Those are the bookcases that have the glass that opens and closes in the front. I have two cabinets like that, and I bought them specifically to store my vintage books. You don't have to go out and get a special cabinet, but if you have a glass cabinet, and you have some very old books that are like 100, 150 years old, you may want to place your books inside that cabinet, and it keeps them from getting a lot of dust or dirt on them so that they don't have to be handled very much to keep them clean. One thing I do not recommend that you do with any of your vintage books is I do not recommend that you store them in cardboard boxes in the garage.

The reason I say this is I find a lot of people do that. They don't want the books to be hurt or damaged or handled, so they pack them in cardboard boxes, or even plastic, and they place them in the garage. You don't want to do this for a couple reasons. First of all, the cardboard will attract silverfish, which will eat the paper of your vintage books, and secondly, you don't want to store them any place that is super damp like in the basement, or super hot like your attic or garage. If you can, you want to store them where you would be comfortable, which would be inside your home.

That's why I say to keep them on a shelf where you can see them and enjoy them, and if you can keep them behind glass, that's even better, but don't pack them away where first of all, you really aren't getting to enjoy them, but also where they may not be that safe. You don't want them to get really hot, damp, or be bait or attractive to silverfish or any little critters that are going to eat the paper or damage those books, so try to care for your oldest books so that they last another several hundred years going forward, because we all know in the digital era that books are a little bit less valued today than they were a hundred years ago. When you have something old like this, it's really important that we care for them as if they are valuable because they are. All right. Tip Number eight is share what you learn in these vintage books.

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If you are reading a cookbook and you are hearing all this wonderful information about these different recipes, that's why I recommend you actually make the recipe and share that recipe with friends, because otherwise, the book kind of doesn't exist. You're keeping that book, and the author's memories, and the author's insights alive by sharing their information, their recipes, and things that you pick up from what you learned reading those books. Let me share a couple little notes that are written in one of the herb books that I picked up. This was written by the person who purchased the book, and they had notes in the margins, which I thought was really fun. It's written in this beautiful old-fashioned handwriting, so it's a little tricky to read, but these are some of the notes that she put.

She had, "Place a rose geranium leaf or a bit of lemon verbena under the paper your cupcakes are baked in. No other flavor is needed." That's a great tip. Okay. Here's another one she had. "Dried catnip makes good tea."

Then, she had, "A small bag of camomile and poppy seed steeped can be put over a wound to ease pain." Also, she wrote, "Camomile tea is a sedative", which we all know now today. Here's a little excerpt from Rosetta E. Clarkson. This is from her Herb Journal, dated February, 1937. This is journal number five. She has a little thing here about different types of herbs and how you can use them, what they taste like when you use them in different ways.

"Lemon balm has a lemon taste, which is distinctively noticeable in hot infusions. Basil somewhat resembles pepper for which it is often substituted in tomato cookery, and has a spicy clove taste. The leaves of burnet taste so much like cucumber that a burnet vinegar in which it's made, can be used as a salad oil, French dressing, and has a definitive cucumber taste, much appreciated by those who cannot digest cucumbers. Borage also resembles cucumbers in taste, and the anti-cucumberites will still enjoy the flavor by eating greens made of the young leaves." That's kind of fun information, isn't it?

Here is an excerpt of the book, 'The Art of Cooking with Herbs and Spices'. Under the heading of Lavender, it says, "The brave culinary souls who flavor a cooling summer drink with a few petals of fresh lavender, or place a petal or two in the bottom of a glass of jelly. Those who are not given to such exotic experimenting will be content to enjoy the aroma of dried flowering tips, tucked among the linens." Then, towards the back of the same book, there is a recipe for tomato ketchup spicy. It says, "It takes two hours to make, and it includes medium size tomatoes, about 17 of them, three-fourths cup chopped onion, one three-inch piece of cinnamon", a cinnamon stick I'm assuming, "One large clove of garlic chopped, one cup cider vinegar, one-half cup sugar, one and a quarter teaspoon salt, one teaspoon paprika, one-eighth teaspoon cayenne pepper, and one teaspoon whole cloves", which is very unusual for a tomato ketchup.

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That is the ingredients, and it tells you how to cook it all up. Boil it down, and make it into a tomato ketchup, which sounds really interesting. You can sit and be really inspired, and you can get some new ideas from looking at some of these older cookbooks. I hope you enjoyed getting a little insight into one of my passions, which is collecting vintage books, but not just collecting, but actually enjoying the books. Don't collect them if you're just going to pack them away in the attic or not really use them or read them. I really feel that if you're going to be the person who buys this book, that you're kind of the steward of that book.

You're the caretaker in making sure that that information is preserved and goes forward, and since so many of my listeners are into preserving food and preserving all of their harvest, I think you would probably be interested in preserving books as well. If you're interested in seeing a list of some of the books that I mentioned in today's podcast, you can get that information in the show notes for this episode. To get that, you go to [LivingHomegrown.com/157](http://LivingHomegrown.com/157). I hope that you will now be seeking these books out whenever you happen to see a garage sale in your neighborhood, or you happen to be walking through a swap meet somewhere. Keep an eye out for those books.

I look high and low and under things. I find the best stuff is buried, and that's why I always look that way. Now, this particular episode today was brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my monthly membership site where you get access to an entire library of monthly masterclasses that help you live a farm fresh lifestyle. In my membership, we cover everything from how to grow heirloom tomatoes and raise chickens, to making your own homemade cheese, yogurt, and fermented vegetables. Now, I believe that learning an organic farm fresh lifestyle is really just a journey in learning, and we're all in different places on that path.

If you're looking to create a farm fresh lifestyle for yourself, and you're curious where you may be on that path, 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 in your own farm fresh journey, the characteristics of that stage, and some action steps and information to take you to the next level. To get to the Success Path PDF, just go to [LivingHomegrown.com/path](http://LivingHomegrown.com/path). That's P-A-T-H, and you can download it there for free. That's it for this week.

Be sure to go out and look for some of those vintage books, and if you have one on your shelf, I really invite you to spend a little time with it this week and see what new insights you can gain. Until next time. Just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care, everybody.



*Live farm fresh without the farm®*

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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.