
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 162 Grow More Vegetables In Less Space

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/162

- Colin: I would just recommend like spending 5 or 10 minutes a day in the garden everyday. Spending 10 minutes in the garden six days a week, I think is better than spending one hour in the garden one day a week.
- Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown podcast episode 162.
- 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. Now that includes organic small space food gardening and artisan food crafts like canning, fermenting or 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. If you would like to learn more about any of these topics or my farm fresh courses, my online business coaching or my living homegrown membership then just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com
- Alrighty. Well today's podcast episode is a little bit different. It's an encore episode and I'll explain what that means in a second, but here's the deal. I've been podcasting now for about three years and we have over one and a half million downloads and I've never really taken a vacation from it. So currently, we have about a 160 episodes in the vault and many of them have PDF downloads and worksheets and recipes and all of them have a full blog post and a full transcript that can be downloaded and printed out.
- So as you can imagine, it takes my team, my little small, mighty team a lot of time to put each episode together. So when I wanted to start a new project recently, we had to figure out a way to make a little bit of a bandwidth so that I could take my team to work on this new project rather than doing the production on the podcast for just a short amount of time. So yes, I have a new project I want to dive into and we just need a few weeks to get things set up so that we can get back here to sharing brand new episodes.

So in fact, I've already got several episodes already recorded at the podcast so I don't want you to worry. The podcast is not going away. Nothing's changing. We already have several episodes already done that are all ready to go out. But rather than shut down the podcast for a few weeks while we work on this small project, I decided just to share a couple of encore episodes with you.

Now an encore episode is just an episode that has been previously published that I'm bringing back but these are just some of the more popular episodes from the past and chances are you probably missed them when they aired the first time. With so many episodes, a 160 episodes, chances are you haven't heard every single one. Although, I know there are a few of you who are big time fans and you have heard every single one. I figure for the most part, there's a few that people have missed. And with all the work that we put into this podcast. I mean it really is a passion project for me and my entire team. I just hate the idea that you might have missed some of that information.

So today's episode is one that I chose because it is so packed with information that I know you will love it. It's all about high-yield food gardening in small spaces and my guest on this particular episode was Colin McCrate. Now, Colin just happens to also be one of the instructors inside my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my membership site. And he teaches one of our master classes on designing the perfect edible garden.

If you don't know already about my membership site, I created it to help you live a more organic farm fresh lifestyle by providing expert online classes and an active community to support you. It's kind of like the podcast on steroids except steroids aren't organic, but I think you know what I mean by that. So it's kind of like the podcast on steroids though for a low monthly fee, you get access to an entire library of classes and I bring in people who are experts from all over the country to teach about everything from small space food gardening to composting, epic tomato growing, straw bale food growing to making your own yogurt and fermented food and fermented beverages and even homemade cheese. So there's a lot packed in there and all different types of classes.

So if you are interested at all in my membership, it is the sponsor for this podcast and all you have to do is just go to livinghomegrown.com/fresh. That's F-R-E-S-H and I have some free information there and a PDF download that will help you get started on your own organic lifestyle.

So before I play the encore episode, let me tell you a little bit about what we talked about on this particular episode with Colin McCrate. Specifically, we focused on high-yield vegetable gardening and how to apply some really simple farming techniques to any tiny backyard that you might be growing in so that you can get maximum yield and maximum production from a much smaller space. And if you happen to have a larger space, well more power to you

because you'll have even more production by using these same techniques. The reason I brought Colin on for this episode to talk about this is because I really wanted to get across that you don't have to have a giant acreage in order to get a lot of food. So to help us with that, Colin came on and I want to tell you a little bit about who he is.

Colin is one of the founders of the Seattle Urban Farm Company up in Seattle, Washington. And Colin and his business partner, Ben Halm, they design edible garden spaces. They are really known for blending sustainable farming practices and ecological design and they create really unique and productive outdoor garden spaces. They're so creative. Now, they work with restaurants, they work with businesses and they work with homeowners to create these types of gardens. No space is off-limits. In fact, they have created rooftop gardens for restaurants in the Seattle area complete with bees to help with pollination.

One of my very favorite gardens that they created was a display garden for the Northwest Flower and Garden Show several years ago. And with this garden, they actually created it inside of a truck and it even had a chicken coop. I kid you not. In fact, that's actually how I met Colin was that many years ago I saw this garden at the show and he was there answering questions and I was just absolutely fascinated with how they created this garden in a truck. So Colin and Ben, they're just super creative. They're really hard-working guys and they've written a couple of books together. So we talk in this episode about those books.

One of the books is really geared towards beginner food gardeners and the second one, the one that we really focus on in this episode is more for advanced growing techniques. But I don't want you to think that just because it's more advanced that you can't get something from this episode. If you are a complete beginner, you can still learn a lot. And if you really want to geek out and totally give your garden a whole new level of efficiency, well Colin is your guy and their book will help you with that. So the two books that we talked about are first of all, *Food Grown Right, In Your Backyard*. That's the beginner's guide to growing crops at home. And the second book that we talk about is *High-Yield Vegetable Gardening* and that is all about getting the most from whatever space you have.

Now remember, as always, even though this is an encore episode, everything that we discuss and everything that Colin talks about will be included in the show notes for today's episode. And to get that all in one place, all you have to do is go to livinghomegrown.com/162 and everything will be right there for you. So with that, let's dive in to this encore interview with Colin McCrate of the Seattle Urban Farm Company.

Hey Colin, thanks so much for joining me here today.

- Colin: My pleasure. I'm excited.
- Theresa: Great. Well, I gave a little information in the introduction but I would love if you would start off by telling everybody what it is that you do because it's pretty cool.
- Colin: Yeah. We have a business. It's called Seattle Urban Farm Company. And we design, build and maintain edible gardens of all scales. So we do a lot of residential landscape design and build, but all those projects are focused on the edible garden. So I think maybe in a lot of scenarios the edible portion of the garden is an afterthought or tagged on somewhere out of the way, but we work with clients to kind of highlight the edible part of the garden and make it part of their outdoor living space.
- Theresa: Do you do a lot in the front yard or is it mostly in the backyard?
- Colin: You know, it's both. It's kind of ... Every site is unique and so it's about finding locations on the property that are appropriate for growing food. As you can imagine, not every square foot of your yard is a good location for an edible garden. So we kind of have to assess this is a good spot, that is also a good spot and then what fits with the other sort of uses they have for their space. So maybe they want to hang out in this area, where their barbecue is and have a lawn for the kids over here and that means only these couple spaces are open for the garden or maybe they just want to prioritize the garden totally and just listen to whatever we say and then we get to do really cool things that way.
- Theresa: Yeah. I love it when people just want to listen to everything we say.
- Colin: It happens maybe once ever. But it's good when it does.
- Theresa: Yeah. Okay. That's fantastic. So you're you're helping people create the gardens, do you also maintain them?
- Colin: We do. Yeah. I mean not every project. So people ... We try to have a really kind of broad spectrum of services, where sometimes we just do consulting or sometimes we do consulting and design. Sometimes we build the whole project and then sometimes we also maintain it. So we kind of just want to meet people where they're at. Like what do you need help with? And how can we best help you reach your goals? But it's really fun when we get to do maintenance because then you really get to build a relationship with the client and with the space and just sort of watch it develop over time and get better and better every season.
- Theresa: And I imagine you're watching the gardener develop over time too.

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

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

Colin: So everybody wants to grow their own food for a maybe slightly different reason. And it's kind of all over the map. I mean some people are really into just sort of health and wellness. They want to eat healthier. And so they want to use the garden as a tool to make it easier for them to eat healthy. Other people, it's all about their kids. Just like getting their kids to understand where food comes from and have a good relationship with it. But what's interesting is when we started, I felt like everybody needed to rationalize and justify why they wanted to do it. And it was always part of the conversation like, "Oh well, I just read a Michael Pollan book and it changed the way I thought about it." Or you know, "This one thing happened to me and so this is why I'm doing it." But what's really cool is now I feel like it is more just part of like people want to have a sustainable lifestyle and it's almost just like this goes along with that.

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

Theresa: Exactly. I love hearing that. That is so great. Because they don't have to justify it. They don't need a reason. It's just they want to and they didn't have to explain it to their friends I guess.

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

Theresa: Yeah. That's great. Well, you have several books. You have two sitting here that I have on my desk and I recommend both of them now. I've just finished looking through your second book. But your first book, I have been recommending ever

since it came out and that's the Food Grown Right, In Your Backyard that you did with Brad Halm. Is that the way you pronounce his last name? Halm?

Colin: Yeah. It is.

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

Colin: Sweet. Thank you.

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

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

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

Theresa: Yeah. It's really ... As I was looking through, I was thinking, "Man, this is exactly that." It's taking what the farmers do and do really really good planning and get a lot of your planning done before you even plant a seed and then be very efficient. It makes you super efficient with the space that you have. And I'm very excited about the way you have all the worksheets and all the charts. I mean it's

all in there so it's not scary or overwhelming and people can take it as far as they want.

Colin: Yeah. That's the idea. I mean I think that humans are separated in a two categories. Probably those who love spreadsheets and those who fear spreadsheets. Knowing from experience, when I started growing, I was not detail oriented or interested in tracking things. I was sort of just you know I viewed as more of an art and was always shooting from the hip and just making a lot of mistakes like you do when you're gardening. And it was really like getting involved in planning and organizing and data tracking that totally changed my experience. And I can say, from experience, once you get used to using the spreadsheets we have in the book, which may at first be like, "Oh man." Like, "Do I really want to sit here and like enter in all these columns." Once you get used to using it, it's super easy. I would argue that many people could increase their yield four or five times over out of their garden in over the course of one season, if they follow some of these techniques.

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

Theresa: Well, that's what's so great about the fact that you guys wrote both of these books. If you just want to just get your feet wet, you can dive into the first book. But if you've been gardening for a while or if you want to go straight into getting as much out of your space as you can, then you can dive into the second book. And I also would think that once you've done one year of charts and graphs, you really can rely on that again going forward. You're not having to reinvent the wheel so much. So it gives you a starting point every year.

Colin: Yeah. Definitely. I mean I think you're right. I mean most of the techniques and varieties and the timing, you're going to want to just look back at what you've done in the past and replicate that or make slight tweaks to it. Like, "Oh, well the weather is a little warmer this spring so I'm going to bump up that first planting of beets." But you know exactly when you planted it last year and when you harvested it and you kind of know what to expect. So there's very little work or effort that goes into making those adjustments each season. But you have increase confidence that you know it's going to happen.

Theresa: Yes. Exactly. And your timing, the timing is so critical and I really got that from your book. And I love that you give a yield charts so you have so much in there that we don't have to go on the internet and research every little thing. You

have a lot of information that we can just look up in the book and then enter it into the charts and graphs. So let's dive into what ... Let's say I'm ready to bump up my yield, what would be the very first place to start? I've been gardening. I have a garden, but where do I start?

Colin: I think that ... I mean as a really basic concept, where a lot of this information heads is don't let make space sit and not be used. In my mind, if you have a pretty small garden space at your home, you should be making sure that you are using every square foot of it all season long as much as possible. So if you harvest a head of cabbage in the beginning of July out of the garden, you should pull out that root ball, work the soil, add some organic amendments to it and be ready to plant a new into it right away.

So one of the really basic things that people do is there's this mindset of like, "It's spring. I'm going to plant my garden and then my planting season's over." But once you really get into it and you started looking at, "Well, actually this crap only lives for 40 days and this crop on lives for 60 days and this crop lives for a 120, that means I'm going to have spaces available in my garden halfway through the growing season. And I should be anticipating that so that this cabbage is now almost ready to harvest. That means I should be starting a couple seeds in a tray over here so they can put a new transplant in, in two weeks when I pull that cabbage out." And really just getting two or three plantings into a space that in the past maybe you only put one in.

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

Colin: Yeah. Exactly. I mean on a really simple level, we always break crops into short season, half season and long season and there's subtleties in that, which overtime you'll get used to. But as basic categories, salad greens, they're like a really perfect example of a short season crop. You can plant salad greens over and over and over again over the course of the season. People call that succession planting. So that you have a consistent harvest of lettuce. But in order to do that, you have to understand that if you are direct seeding a lettuce mix, you're going to be harvesting that crop and it's going to be done maybe 40 or 50 days after you seeded it. And so you can just keep doing that and moving crops through your garden in that way. And knowing those lifespans makes it really easy because then you can predict and it's the same way with a half season crop. Like the cabbage or maybe a broccoli, something that in the middle of a summer, it's going to come out of the garden.

There's actually a ton of crops that come out of the garden in the middle of summer and then you just have all of these opportunity. Maybe you've already harvested all of your garlic and all of your onions and all of your spring brassica

crops and half of your garden could be open again and ready for fall planting, if you're ready to do that. And the best way to be ready is to, at the beginning of the season, sit down in map all that out and say, "Well shoot, I know that in July I can plant carrots. In all of those beds, we're going to pull out the onions and then I'm going to have an awesome fall carrot crop."

Theresa: Yeah. In the book, you talked about succession planting but you also talked about relay planting. Can you explain what that is?

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

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

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

Colin: Yeah. Without a doubt. And what's cool too is a lot of these concepts, once you consider them, they're pretty easy to employ. It's not like there's a huge barrier to figuring out how to do it. It's just, here's the timing, here's the spacing of the crops, you just go and plant those crops like you normally would and account for that.

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

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

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

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

Colin: Yeah. Exactly. There's an example. One of the things we like to do in our books are kind of provide these what we call case studies, where we call out sort of pretend gardeners like fictionalized gardeners and explain their rationale for how they set up their garden space and how they're managing it. Hoping that that kind of just like tells a story and explains it in a more real world way.

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

And we have all these charts in the book and say, "Okay. A normal serving ..." Because who knows? Nobody's typically calculating the ounces of vegetables they're eating so we have that stuff calculated. And you can say, "Okay. Like four ounces is a normal side salad. You know I need to therefore plant 12 row inches of arugula each week if I want to be able to harvest three-four ounce salads out of that space. So therefore I know that each week I'm going to go out there on Monday or whatever day I have the most time for gardening and plant one row foot." Which is a pretty small amount in your garden and that gives you parameters because it's really easy for anybody even an experience gardener to go our there and be like, "Well, there's all this space, I'm going to just plant like a whole like 10 row feet of arugula."

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

Colin: I mean everybody does. But if you have the the plan in place, you can just be like, "I'm going to do this and I'm also going to do it next Monday and I'm also going to do it the following Monday. I'm going to fill out this space. I'm going to have the arugula mature, actually tastes good. It's not all going to be ready at the same time and I can just keep cutting it and I'm going to be clearing those old patches as I go as well. So I'm going to keep opening those spaces back up and just kind of have this cycle going." And that's based on that projection of how often I eat it, how big my salads are. And then there's tons of data in our book about what is your harvest per row foot or per plant, what can you expect.

So you kind of just use those sheets in the book and make a projection about how much you should plant each week or each month to get the harvest that you want.

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

Colin: Hopefully we've done a lot of the hard work in terms of just pulling the information together from disparate sources and doing the research to say ... And obviously, everybody's going to be different. Like maybe my salads are twice as big as somebody else's, but these are based on just like general serving sizes and so people will adjust them overtime. But you're right, all that information's in there. And so what you can do when you're starting out is just put in the numbers. Like what crops do you actually use and it just sort of like spits numbers back out at you.

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

Theresa: Yes, Absolutely. I did see that and I had a note for that. So if anybody is driving in their car and thinking that they have to quick pull over to write that down. I'll have links to all of that in the show notes for this episode so if they forget, they know where to go. But I love that. And you even talk about that both on your website and in the book that there's a lot of different ways we can keep track of all of this. We could do, when we're writing, filling out our calendar, you can do it online or you could do it on paper, you could do a real spreadsheet or you could just pen and paper and do it that way. And then you even mentioned that there's some kind of farm recordkeeping place that you can go, if people are really into it and they want to get really down to the wire that for small fees, there's different programs you can go and you're basically using the farming programs to figure all this out.

Colin: Yeah. I mean I think we projected that everybody has a different threshold for detail. Some detail is a million times better than none. And also I think just like with all aspects of gardening, there's so many ways of doing it. We didn't want to just say like, "Here is the spreadsheet you have to use and if you can't use

this, you don't know what you're doing." It's more like, "Here's a bunch of different ways of going about it." And we try to provide those examples and actually lay all those options out. Because I think certain data tracking techniques will work better for different people.

So we try to give people options and say like, "Here's one way to keep track of it. Here's another way to keep track of it." Like find what it's best for how you garden and how you're going to learn because really a lot of it is about individual learning. I mean the microclimate at your house and the microclimate at my house are going to be different, even if we both lived in the same city. And so ideally, you're kind of learning from yourself over time. You're taking the tools that we created but you're actually learning a lot from what you see happening in your space and using that to guide when you plant things and when you expect things to be ready to harvest. Because honestly, it can be totally different than somebody else who's lives a mile away from you.

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

Colin: Yeah. Exactly.

Theresa: There's another section of the book that I really loved that you included and that was the section on timely harvesting and storage. And the part that I really love that you included was about harvest times. How some things are better harvested in the morning and some things maybe are better harvested in the afternoon. So could you talk about that a little bit?

Colin: Yeah. It's kind of fun actually knowing things like when the best of the day to harvest a crop is and to see how much longer it lasts when you harvest it the right time of the day. So one of the crops we talked about in the book and I think again is relevant because everybody loves salad greens, at least I hope, are salad greens. And we recommend harvesting them first thing in the morning. And the idea is that the plants, the biological activity happening in the plant is pretty slow at that point. It's more less dormant and the weather is usually cooler. There's usually dew on the plants. And so if you harvest it in the morning, before the plant has to kind of wake up and really start respirating and doing a lot of work, it'll actually retain better structure of the leaves, more moisture and keep a lot better in your fridge. So you can maybe even double the storage time of a crop if you just pick it at the right time of day so that it's ready for harvest.

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

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

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

Colin: Yeah. So it's a little known fact that most garden hoses actually have lead. And if you look at a new garden hose at the store, it will even have a tag on it that says, in really small letters, "Do not use for drinking water." Like, "Contains lead." I can't explain why this has been the status quo for so long but but we would recommend not using an old garden hose to drink out of or wash your vegetables. Fortunately, these days you can actually get non-lead garden hoses and they're a lot more available than they were even a year or two ago. So polyethylene is a good plastic to get for a hose. Most irrigation supplies are made out of polyethylene. It's a more stable plastic. So it's not supposed to leach anything into the water and I would recommend using a hose like that if you're going to be washing your vegetables.

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

Colin: Yeah. It's nice. I mean and again I wouldn't what anybody to be really concerned if they had been using a lead hose because I think people have for decades. I spent most of my childhood drinking out of a garden hose. So-

Theresa: And look how good you turned out.

Colin: The damage has already been done.

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- Theresa: Right.
- Colin: But I think now that you know I mean it's just one of those things that's easy. It's toxin, once you know, you might as well stop using it.
- Theresa: Well, one last question that I'd love to ask you is if you could recommend any particular fruit or vegetable that you like to grow in your garden that has a really high yield. Like are there any favorites that you think, man, you just plant one or two seeds of this and you'll have it forever?
- Colin: Well, that would be nice. There's a few ... Like basil is a huge giver. If you put in a couple basil plants and you manage them properly, you can get unbelievable yields off of them. I'm also a really big fan of bush beans. I like pole beans too, but bush beans are cool because you don't need to trellis them so you can plant them in more spaces in the garden and they grow a lot more quickly. And the yield, just unbelievable amounts for the space that they take up. And those are also kind of half season crops and so you can plant them multiple times over the course of the year and get it as a lot. I also ... One of the crops that half of my garden is planted is in kale every year. So-
- Theresa: Yeah. Me too. I grow a lot of kale.
- Colin: It's awesome. I mean you can use it in any recipe that you're making and it can provide for months. And in our climate and I think if you cover them in a lot of climates, they can even live for the winter and then start producing again in the spring for you.
- Theresa: Yeah. Mine actually did. I had a little section that did survive but I'm in Southern California, but they did survive. And the thing that I also love about kale is it's so beautiful in the garden.
- Colin: It is. It's an amazing plant. And the flowers are beautiful and you can eat the flowers. And I don't know if this is already well-known, but there's a variety that we really love. It's called rainbow lacinato.
- Theresa: No, I've never heard that.
- Colin: Yeah. So it's a hybrid of redbor and just Tuscan like normal lacinato kale. And it's just awesome because it's beautiful. It's like red veins in a green leaf and it's got that kind of crinkled that the lacinato does but the leaves are really big and it's super healthy, really really productive.
- Theresa: Awesome.
- Colin: So if you like kale, I would totally recommend looking into getting some of that.

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- Theresa: Yes. I'm writing that one down and the thing when you were talking about managing basil and managing bush beans that in case anyone doesn't know, you mean by picking off the flowers so that ... Because once basil goes to flower, it dies. So if you keep the basil picked, the flowers picked, and you use it and the flowers are delicious too, then it will last longer in the garden. And with bush beans, I'm assuming you also meant, we have to keep harvesting because if you stop harvesting, it stops producing.
- Colin: Yeah. Totally. I mean basil is one of those crops. It's pretty funny because it's like the more you harvest, the more you get. Because every time you pinch off a branch, you get two branches that come out. A well-managed basil may only be 18 inches tall but it could have 60 or 80 branches coming out and just be giant mob of basil. And if you don't pinch it, you know you have like two branches and they're super spindly and tall and then it flowers.
- Theresa: Yes.
- Colin: So yes. Just learning how to harvest it. And then just being willing to harvest it whenever it needs it. And sometimes I honestly recommend harvesting even if you're not ready to harvest, if the crop is ready to be harvested. So for basil, it's almost like sometimes it's better to harvest basil and compost it than to leave it on the plant because in the long term the plant will produce more basil for you that way.
- Theresa: Yes. Good.
- Colin: And with bush beans, yeah, it's totally like you just want to be out there picking them because even though bush beans kind of fruit in a relatively short period of time. like a lot of the fruit already almost at the same time, you want to go out there picking the biggest ones every day so the small ones can size up more quickly. And also just so you don't let them overgrow because when they're huge, they don't taste very good.
- Theresa: Yeah. Their texture is not so good.
- Colin: Yeah. They go pretty fast. And that's the other thing like a lot of crops have a pretty narrow harvest window. So one of my general really basic, easy recommendations is, if you want to increase the yield of your garden, I would just recommend spending 5 or 10 minutes a day in the garden everyday. Spending 10 minutes in the garden six days a week I think is better than spending one hour in the garden one day a week. Because you just sort of like every time you go out there, you see something new and you can always sort of like really be on top of changes that are happening.

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

Theresa: Yeah. That's so funny that you said that because I was just talking to ... I interviewed Susan Morrison, but I don't know if you know her, but she's at all the garden shows that we go to. And we were talking about walking through your garden every day and I was saying that I go through every morning with a cup of coffee. I walk my garden and it's not only that I catch things really early but I also get more enjoyment out of my garden from doing that because I get to experience it every day, whether it's at the beginning of the day or the end of the day.

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

Colin: Yeah. I totally agree with you and I think it's funny, in the intro of the book it's one of the things that we talk about is that in order to be I think successful, I'm making air quotation, "successful" because as a gardener, I think you really have to maintain that love of it overtime because I've run into people who just get really frustrated when something doesn't go well in their garden and they convince themselves like, "Oh, I can't grow this crop." Or like, "This terrible thing always happens in my garden. I just am tired of dealing with it." And what I find is it if you maintain that real appreciation for it and that love of being in it everyday and just seeing what's happening, even accepting and dealing with the things that aren't going as well as you want them to, then that in and of itself will make you a more productive gardener.

And I think you're right, that's kind of just what it's about. You're there because you love doing it and if you love doing it then you can find opportunities to do it better and get more food out of it and that will hopefully also increase your appreciation of it.

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



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I'm really encouraging everyone to get both of your books because they can take your gardening to a whole nother level. So thank you very much.

Colin: Yeah. It was fun. I appreciate the opportunity.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that encore episode with Colin McCrate of the Seattle Urban Farm Company. Now as always, we have in the show notes for today's episode, everything that was discussed. And you can get the show notes, including the full transcript at livinghomegrown.com/162. So thanks so much for joining me today for this encore episode 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.