
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 166 Backyard Chicken Hacks

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/166

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode 166.

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 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, just visit my website, LivingHomegrown.com.

Before we dive in to today's episode, I just want to give a shoutout to all the wonderful people who have been leaving me iTunes reviews for the podcast. So if you don't know, with iTunes, whenever someone leaves a review on the iTunes review board, then my podcast gets a little boost in engagement, meaning that more people get to hear and see and learn about the podcast. So every time someone does a review, I so appreciate it, and I read every single one. So I really appreciate it. If you ever have the time to go do a review for me for the Living Homegrown Podcast, just go into iTunes, and go to my podcast, and then click on review. You can leave a review right there. It really does help me tremendously. We already have 1.5 million downloads of this podcast, and I'm trying to get my message out to as many people as possible. So when someone does a review, it helps me on my mission, so I so appreciate it.

But I'd love to give just a little shoutout here. So the first one is from The Oily Outlaw, yeah, The Oily Outlaw. That is so funny. With iTunes, you have to create a name for yourself, so it might not necessarily be your personal name. So The Oily Outlaw left a review, and it says, "I absolutely love Theresa Loe and her guests." Thank you so much. "I am very thankful for this podcast. It inspires me and motivates me in so many ways. Thank you for your work." Well, thank you for leaving that review. That is so, so appreciated.

We also have a review here from Laura Davis, and it says, "I just love the podcast. It's everything I'm interested in all rolled up into one nice little package. The topics have a nice variety. The guests are always really interesting. My book list has grown a mile long now, and I've learned so much. On days when I feel too busy or exhausted from all the hard work that goes into this lifestyle, Theresa helps and reminds me once again of exactly why I'm doing it. Thank you so much for creating this." Thank you, Laura. That really means a lot to me, because that was my whole goal with this podcast, was I want to make it easier so that people can actually listen to the podcast while they're doing some of their homesteading activities, taking care of the animals or gardening or cooking or baking, so that they can be learning while they're doing. That was my whole point.

We have another here from TerryLin81, and it says, "I adore this podcast, so much useful information. I learn a ton." Fantastic, I am so glad, Terry, that you're learning from the podcast. So if you ever get a chance to leave a review, just know I am reading every single one, and I so appreciate it, because it helps me get the word out with the podcast.

Let me tell you a little bit about what we're going to talk about today on this particular episode. We're going to be talking about chicken keeping hacks. Now, to me, a hack is a handy hint or maybe something that will help me with my own productivity or help me do things in a faster way or a better way. It usually can involve maybe reusing or repurposing something that I might already have on hand.

The reason we're talking about this particular topic is because my friend, Lisa Steele, came out with a new book called 101 Chicken Keeping Hacks. Now Lisa, if you don't know her, is from Fresh Eggs Daily. She has this incredible blog that is so packed with chicken keeping information, but also on duck keeping. In fact, Lisa was on this episode. I think it was ... Let's see here. It was episode 84, on raising ducks. She told us all about how raising ducks might be a little bit different from raising chickens, but she does raise both. She lives in Maine, and she knows her stuff. I just find her information to be so spot-on that I love sharing anything that she has going on.

Today I had her come on to share some of her hacks, and here's just a few of some of the things you're going to learn. We're going to talk about the very first step that you need to take if you want to have backyard chickens. Then we're going to dive in to some of the hacks, such as putting herbs in the nesting boxes. Why would you want to do that? What are the benefits of fermenting your feed? She's also going to share a simple trick for increasing your chickens' water consumption. She'll talk to us about preserving eggs through the winter, and she has this really cool ninja trick for peeling fresh eggs. Now that one, that trick right there, is worth all your time on listening to this episode. Because if you

have fresh eggs, you know how hard it is to peel a hard boiled fresh egg. She has this wired so that it is no longer difficult.

We're even going to talk a little bit about grilling eggs and how to track the age of your fresh eggs. At the end, she shares a really great holiday gift idea that you can do for anyone who owns chickens or maybe has wild birds in their backyard. I definitely am going to be doing this holiday gift for my own friends this year, so if you're listening, I've already spoiled it. But it's a really cute idea and very, very practical and simple to do. So that's what we're going to talk about in today's episode.

So let me tell you a little bit about Lisa. Lisa Steele is a top-selling poultry author, fifth generation chicken keeper, Maine master gardener, and an avid DIYer. She's the founder of Fresh Eggs Daily, the popular natural chicken keeping site, and the author of several books, including Fresh Eggs Daily, Gardening With Chickens, and her latest book, 101 Chicken Keeping Hacks. She writes for several publications, including Chickens Magazine, and has been featured in magazines and newspapers nationwide, including the front page of the Washington Journal. She also appears on the Hallmark Home and Family Show and various local morning news shows.

From her small farm in Maine, she inspires her readers with easy, fun, and accessible approaches to integrating gardening and backyard chickens together so that you have a more productive flock, a more beautiful harvest, using fresh herbs and edible flowers. She even talks about upcycling and repurposing items in the coop, home and garden. Lisa tours the country giving talks and seminars on natural chicken keeping. So if you want any more information on Lisa after listening to this episode all about her books, her website, anything that we discussed, they will be in the show notes for today's episode. To get to the show notes, you go to LivingHomegrown.com/166. I should tell you that we will have a recipe in the show notes that you can print out and download, and the recipe is for making your own homemade scratch. So if you own chickens and you want to make your own scratch, I have a recipe from Lisa that she's graciously sharing with us, and you can get that in the show notes at LivingHomegrown.com/166.

Now before we dive into the interview. I just want you to know that today's podcast is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my monthly membership site where you get access to an entire library of monthly master classes taught by experts across the country. It will help you live farm fresh without the farm. Now my membership covers everything from how to grow heirloom tomatoes and raise chickens, to how to make your own homemade cheese and fermented vegetables. Now since so many of you are interested in living your own farm fresh journey, I've put together a free PDF for you that includes my very favorite farm fresh resources. This is a listing of exactly what I use in my own organic garden and what I use in my real food kitchen to get the best flavor from my produce. If you would like a copy of this

free resource guide, just go to LivingHomegrown.com/fresh. That's F-R-E-S-H. LivingHomegrown.com/fresh, and you can download my farm fresh resource guide right there for free.

So with that, let's dive into my interview with Lisa Steele from Fresh Eggs Daily, all about chicken keeping hacks. Hey, Lisa, thanks so much for coming back on the show.

Lisa: Hi, Theresa. I am so happy to be back. We always have such a great time talking about chickens.

Theresa: Yes, we do. Yes, we do. Well, I'm really thrilled about your new book. I love the title, 101 Chicken Keeping Hacks. I thought that was really ... That grabbed my attention. If anyone knows hacks, I know it's you, and I really love some of your ideas in the book, so I'm excited to talk about it. You've been on the show before. You were on episode 84 when we talked about raising ducks, which was really fun. That was a very popular episode with my listeners, so I know they're going to be excited that you're back. Before we dive in, if someone had not heard you before on my show or they aren't familiar with you, would you mind telling everybody a little bit Fresh Eggs Daily, your blog, and what it is that you do?

Lisa: Sure. I actually am a fifth generation chicken keeper. My grandparents raised chickens. I grew up across the street from their farm, so I have been immersed in the chicken keeping world for my whole life. But I took a break, went to college, and long story short, ended up back on a farm raising chickens. I really focused on old timer's methods, things my grandparents might have done, making things simple, economical, doing it naturally, that whole thing, and I think the message has really resonated with my readers, because my blog. Then that led to books, my blog, Fresh Eggs Daily, and obviously on social media. People just really enjoy, I think, raising healthy food for their family, and, obviously, chickens are pets too, so they're kind of like the pets with benefits. It's just been a really fun journey, and I just love that people are responding to the message as much as they are, because I really enjoy what I do.

Theresa: Absolutely. I'll tell you, I have a lot of listeners who are either already backyard chicken keepers or they want to be, so I know that this episode will really resonate with them, because my listeners are really about living closer to their food. Although they may want their chickens as pets and not as food, they do have the eggs, and there's so many benefits of that. I'm just thrilled that you make it a little bit easier for people. You are a very reliable source. Anything that comes out of your mouth I know is well researched. You've done not only research, but you've actually done it yourself. So I always am sending people your way, and I love your ideas, really cute stuff, really very, very fun for both the chicken owner and for the chicken. I'm just thrilled to talk about all of this.

Before we start into that, I would love for you to tell me, when you were trying to decide with the book and you were narrowing down all of your ideas, what was your definition of a hack? What would you call a hack?

Lisa: So a hack, to me, is something that makes your life easier or solves a problem. It couldn't be something that was just cute for the sake of being cute or fun for the sake of being fun. I mean, I do plenty of that kind of stuff too. Don't get me wrong. But for this book, I really wanted things that were going to be helpful to people or allow you to reuse something that you might otherwise throw away or save money or something like that. That was kind of the criteria, to narrow it down. I mean, as I was writing the book, I kept saying to my editor, are we at 101 yet? Because we have to have 101, right? Because it was 101 Chicken Keeping Hacks. So I kept asking him if we were there yet and making him count. Finally, we went way past 101, and he was like, "All right, we're good. The other things we'll just count as little mini micro tips." But it was really hard to narrow it down to just 101, because, I mean, there are just so many things I've learned over the years that have streamlined or whatever. But I did really want things that were functional, made sense, other than the chicken tutus, which are purely gratuitous, but end the book. You've got to have just a little fun in there, right?

Theresa: Oh, yeah, absolutely, and they are adorable. I even wrote you a little note, because I looked at it. I'm like, how ... At first I thought you had dyed the chicken feathers, and I'm like, she wouldn't have done that. Then I realized-

Lisa: [crosstalk]

Theresa: Yeah, yeah, no, no. Then I looked closer, and I realized that they were little tufts that you had on the chicken. But great, like you said, for a party or an event, and the chickens preen around in them. I thought that was really funny, but, yeah, totally adorable. Really, what I resonated with was that so many of these hacks made things more convenient, or even they increased my productivity, or it made me more efficient with a lot of the things that I was doing with my chickens. That's what I love. For me, it's like I want to have the best use of my time and the best use of my feed so that I can stretch the dollar and stretch my time as much as I can. I loved that, loved that. Now if someone has never had chickens yet, I just wanted us to just touch on this. I always tell people that they first need to check with their city ordinances to make sure that they can have backyard chickens. Is that usually what you tell people too?

Lisa: I do, because I hear from so many people who just kind of assume they can have them or don't care if they can have them or not. They spend the money on a coop and a run and the chickens, and they invest all this time and effort. Then somebody rats them out, or the town comes and tells them they've got 30 days to get rid of their chickens. That's really heartbreaking, so definitely just talk to

your town and find out what the rules are. If you don't like the regulations, work on changing them. I know plenty of people that have changed the rules in their town just by starting petitions or getting some other people involved. Likely, if you want chickens, there are other people that do too. So you've got to do a little background and a little research before you dive in.

Theresa: Yes, absolutely yes. I think that people have to remember, sometimes these are just ordinances that have just been in place forever. It's just a matter of educating anybody. In my town, we're allowed to have five chickens, because I'm in Los Angeles, in a little town on the outskirts of Los Angeles, at the beach. So we all have very small pieces of property, but I'm still allowed to have up to five chickens, as long as I don't have a rooster. That's been pretty easy to handle. When I did get a rooster, I had friends who had farms, so I was able to rehome them so I didn't have to cull them. I was able to get them into a new home that wanted them. With my neighbors, I just shared my eggs, and nobody's ever complained. They're all thrilled to get the eggs, so it's always worked out. I just wanted to mention that in case someone was like, well, wait a minute, how can I have that? You have plenty of information on your website, and we will link in the show notes, because if they want more information to just start out, they can find it at your website.

Let's dive in to some of the hacks. One of the ones that I know you talk about a lot is about having herbs in the nesting boxes. So could you tell us a little bit about that particular hack?

Lisa: Yeah, that's big. I mean, I've been doing that for years. I had read a study years and years and years ago when I first started with chickens about how wild birds will line their nests with all kinds of wildflowers and plants and herbs and things. Researchers think that it's to protect their baby chicks or the baby birds, whatever they're called, baby birds, against any bugs or parasites or things that might be in the nest. So taking that into the chicken coop, I throw things like lavender and rosemary and rose petals and marigolds and all that into my nesting boxes. They look so pretty. They smell really nice, and those kind of things do have some pest repellent properties. It just makes sense that it would keep your nesting boxes free of ants or lice or mites or any of those nasty things that chickens can pick up from time to time.

Theresa: They would smell good and be pretty, and it's okay if the chicken nibbles on them, right? I'm sure-

Lisa: Oh, for sure.

Theresa: ... the rose petals, for sure. I know my chickens would probably eat up the rose petals.

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- Lisa: They love rose petals. In fact, I have rose bushes planted around the side of my run, and the chickens will stand underneath them waiting for the flowers to drop their petals so they can eat them. So I always use-
- Theresa: That is so funny.
- Lisa: ... chicken-safe herbs, and culinary herbs, things that you would grow for your family, are all safe for chickens.
- Theresa: Yes, absolutely. Lavender and rosemary definitely have some pest-repelling properties, because I've used them in my home, so, excellent, I love that. Now another one of your hacks was about fermented feed. I learned about this a few years ago, and I thought it made perfect sense, because I ferment vegetables. I ferment food for my family, and so to ferment some of your feed is actually very beneficial for the chickens as well, right?
- Lisa: That's true. I think most people are familiar with fermented foods like sauerkraut or yogurt, things like that. Fermenting is super simple to do. You're basically just soaking the chicken feed in water and stirring it up for a couple of days. You grow all sorts of probiotics, and you increase the vitamins in the feed. The chickens will eat much, much less feed if you're feeding them fermented feed, because they only eat what they need to get the energy and nutrients they need for the day. So once they've filled up on that, they'll stop eating. So if you're looking to save money on your feed, fermenting it, your feed will go way longer, and the chickens are getting more nutrients out of it.
- Theresa: Is there any particular procedure for doing that? I'm sure you have to kind of keep your nose to it to make sure that it doesn't go sour or go bad. When I've done it, it smelled kind of like beer.
- Lisa: Yes, exactly. It's yeasty. That's what you're doing is you're basically making beer for your chickens. Well, you're not letting it go that long. I mean, I only let it go a couple of days. You want to definitely make sure the feed is completely covered with water, and you have to stir it up, because you want to get oxygen in there so it doesn't mold. But, yeah, three or four days, and you should start to see some bubbles. Like you said, it smells kind of like beer. Then you're good to go. The chickens will love it. But if you're in doubt and you see any mold or anything like that, obviously, toss it out and start over again.
- Theresa: Perfect. Now I thought that was really good because of the idea that they wouldn't quite eat as much. You said that, even if we don't want to actually do the fermenting, we could just soak it in some warm water, and that gives them benefits, especially in the summer where then they'll get some more water from eating the moistened feed.

Lisa: Right. I discovered this by accident. Ducks go between their food and water, so your feed is always kind of moist, and there's also feed in the water. So then the chickens end up drinking water that has feed in it, which I figure has nutrients and stuff, so that's okay. But I noticed the chickens seemed to prefer the feed that the ducks were getting wet, so in the summer I'll just pour some cool water over my chicken feed, and my chickens think it's a treat. Conversely, in the winter, I use warm water and just make them a little mash with it, and they absolutely love it. That's a super quick easy hack that costs you nothing, because it's just water.

Theresa: Here in Los Angeles, we get so hot, so I'm always looking for ways to make sure that they're getting enough water. I'll give them watermelon and things like that when it's super hot. But to do that, that automatically means they're getting some more moisture, which I think is so important, so that's a great hack.

Lisa: Exactly.

Theresa: Well, now let's move on to some hacks for us for inside the house. I know one of the problems that we all have when we have chickens, especially if you have more than me, if you have more than five, you can get way too many eggs. Then in the winter time, the chickens either slow down or they stop laying, and then you can end up running out of eggs. So you have a great solution for that, and that is that we freeze the eggs. So could you explain, how would we freeze our eggs?

Lisa: So before people start writing into the station and asking you why I don't just put lights in my coop so my chickens will lay through the winter, which will force them to do that, I like to give them a break. I figure they're just trying to keep warm, especially here in Maine, so I want them to use their energy keeping warm and resting up. Then come spring, they start laying again. So, yes, in the winter, we don't have many eggs. I love to bake at the holidays, and I hate having to go to the store and buy store-bought eggs for holiday cookies and that.

So, basically, in the summer when you're drowning in eggs ... Because with chickens, it's either feast or famine. You've either got way too many or you don't have any. So in the summer when you have tons of eggs, you can freeze them. It's so super simple. In my book I do go through the steps, but you basically just whisk them up, add a little bit of salt. That keeps it from getting all grainy and the texture being weird, and then you just pour them into ice cube tray. One ice cube is basically equivalent to one egg. Once they're frozen, pop them out, put them in freezer bags, and then you've got eggs. You can use them for baking. You can also use them for scrambling, to eat. I mean, they're fine for that also. But it's a great way to extend your fresh egg season into the winter.

Theresa: Absolutely. Now what's so great about that too is I'm with you. In the wintertime, I'm doing all my baking. To just be able to pop one of those little cubes in and say, okay, there's one egg, now here's a second egg, and I don't have to go to the store ... Because I do not like having to buy eggs. That's what my chickens are for, and I want to have that fresh flavor, and I want the fresh organic eggs. But I also do what you do. I let my chickens have a rest, because I raise my chickens as naturally as possible. So I want them to have that time off. If I was a chicken, I'd want that time off too. That's a really good one. You had this really cool thing for if we are trying to get the yolk out where you use a plastic bottle. It's so clever. Sometimes when we're doing a lot of baking in the wintertime, we might have something where we need several egg yolks or we need all the egg whites. So what's the little trick that you use for getting the yolk out of the bowl?

Lisa: I think I saw it in YouTube or something. It is much more impressive when you see a video. But you just basically take enough empty water bottle, and you squeeze it, and then you hold it over the yolk and release, and it sucks the yolk up into the bottle. It's really pretty cool, especially if you have kids. You can probably give them that task while you're cooking and see if they can successfully do it. I mean, I personally just crack the yolk and separate, but-

Theresa: But it's fun.

Lisa: ... if you're having trouble, it's fun, exactly.

Theresa: I know, I was thinking, boy, if my kids were little, that's exactly what I would have done. If we were making meringues or something for the holidays, I would totally give them that job. They would probably have a ball shooting the eggs at each other with the-

Lisa: Right?

Theresa: Yeah, it might go bad since I have two boys. I can just imagine what they'd do. But I thought that was really fun, so excellent. Another thing that happens ... If you have fresh eggs and you have your own chickens, you can't get eggs any fresher. One of the big obstacles that backyard chicken keepers have to face is that it's very hard to peel their eggs when they are fresh. That's because of the air content in there. You have a really great way for being able to peel the eggs, so what is that?

Lisa: You're right. You cannot peel fresh eggs. That's the one thing. If you want deviled eggs or if you want hard boiled eggs, they're going to be a mess if they're fresh. Not enough time has passed for air to get in through the pores in the eggshell to shrink the membrane away from the shell and make them easy to peel. So over the years, I tried everything. I tried salt in the water. I tried

baking soda. I've tried pretty much everything I've read anywhere online. Then a couple of years ago, I stumbled across something that said steam the eggs for 20 minutes, so in a bamboo steamer or even a colander or a double boiler, something like that. Then you just put them in ice water until they're cool enough to peel. I mean, I've peeled eggs that the chickens lay. I go to the coop, get them, come in the house, put them in the steamer, and peel them. I mean, it's amazing. It works every time, so easy. So that's my go-to now.

Theresa: When I read that, I was like, wow, because that has always been the biggest problem for me. At Easter time, what we do is I take some of our fresh eggs, and I just place them towards the back, and I mark the date, and I let them get old so that I can peel them.

Lisa: But who wants to eat old eggs? [crosstalk]

Theresa: I know!

Lisa: Every time I post that, people say, well, just let them get old. I'm like, but that defeats the purpose of having chickens [crosstalk]

Theresa: Exactly.

Lisa: ... you want to eat them fresh.

Theresa: Exactly. The other option is that I just sit there and pick off all those shells that are stuck. So you end up with these eggs that are not pretty. When you peel them, you have parts that the white has gotten taken off with the egg shell, so it is a problem. I know I have tried several of the things, and sometimes I could get better results, but I never could get it to be as nice as an old egg. What people may not realize, and we should talk about this, is in the grocery store, when you buy those eggs in the grocery store, they are already old. They're not fresh picked up the day or even the day before. The first time I ever experienced this myself was when I bought eggs at the farmer's market and they were fresh. Then I went to make hard boiled eggs, and I was like, what is wrong with these eggs? I can't get the shell off. But, oh, man, the ones in the grocery store are weeks old.

Lisa: Old, very old.

Theresa: This is definitely a better way to go. So you could use a bamboo steamer. You could use a colander. You could use a vegetable steamer, anything just to boil the water. So it's 20 minutes, and then plunge into ice water, right?

Lisa: I'm not really sure about the science of the whole thing. I am pretty sure it has something to do with the going from very hot to then the ice water, and it must

expand and shrink or something, but I don't understand why boiling and then ice water doesn't work like steaming and ice water, but it definitely does. That way you're not adding anything to your water, like the baking soda or the salt, which is what other people have tried, because sometimes you have an egg crack, and then now you've got baking soda and salt all over it. I just like the steamer approach. It definitely works.

Theresa: Perfect. I also saw in your book that we could, if we wanted to, put an egg on the grill and grill it for 20 minutes and then plunge it into ice water, and it should peel pretty well. We also get some smoke benefits from that. I have never tried that. Did you just discover that?

Lisa: Again, I'm always looking for things about eggs or whatever. I think it was on YouTube. There was a video. Some guys were barbecuing, and they threw some eggs on the grill. I was like, that is the neatest thing. So this summer I tried it, and it's kind of cool because, again, you've already got the grill going. You might as well throw some eggs on with your steaks. You've got hard boiled eggs for the next morning. It works pretty cool, actually.

Theresa: I'm definitely going to try that, because we're still having warm enough weather that we might do some grilling. I want to give that a try, because I was like, holy cow, that would be fun at a party. It's like, everyone could take home an egg.

Lisa: Right? New party trick.

Theresa: Yeah, and everyone could take home an egg for their breakfast. They could even get it from the coop, and we could throw it on the grill. I thought that would be fun, excellent. Now if we are a chicken keeper with backyard chickens, then the other thing that always happens is trying to keep track of which are the old eggs and which are the new eggs. Everybody kind of comes up with their own system. I have different cartons, and I kind of rotate the ones in the ... put the new ones in the back, and the ones in the front are the ones we're using. But you made it so simple. You're like, get out a pencil, and write the date on the egg. I'm like, I never thought-

Lisa: Duh.

Theresa: Yeah, it was like a duh moment for me. I'm like, oh. That's just too easy. So I love how you're just thinking where I'm not. I'm trying to create this whole system of how we know which eggs are fresh. I told my husband. I'm like, okay, this pencil is for us to write on the eggs, and he's like, oh. It's kind of one of those moments. You're like, why didn't I think of that? Anyway, I loved it. But, also, we could test it with a little bowl of water. We could see which ones float and which ones sink, and that helps also, if you find an egg towards the back of the

refrigerator and you're not sure how old it is. Is that because of the air content that's inside?

Lisa: Right, same with the whole hard boiled egg, fresh eggs not peeling thing. As an egg ages, air does seep in through the pores in the egg shell. As more air seeps in and the insides kind of start to dry out a little bit, that egg is going to start floating basically, so after a couple of weeks, many weeks. If you put an egg in a glass of water that's very, very old, it's actually going to float in the water, and you probably don't want to eat that egg.

Theresa: Well, and it's a great thing to do this with the store-bought eggs versus what you just harvested, because then you can really see the difference. Because the egg that you just got out of the coop will sink to the bottom. It's very heavy. It has no air in it. But the one from the grocery store will either tip up or float, which usually by the time it's floating is not when we want to have it. That's why they have the dates on ... When they have that-

Lisa: [crosstalk]

Theresa: ... date on the carton, that is really a long time. They are not fresh anymore, so excellent. That's a super simple way for people to check, and writing in pencil with the date makes it even easier, which I wish I'd thought of that years ago. So there was something else in there that I loved, and you had a recipe for homemade scratch mix. So scratch, if someone doesn't have chickens, is basically like a treat. It's not their regular feed. It's a supplemental thing that you would give them. You have a recipe for making your own feed, but I loved this homemade scratch, because you had it in a jar, and you had put a Parmesan shaker lid on it so you could shake it out for the chickens, and they could scratch in the dirt and get it. I instantly thought, what a great holiday gift this would make, because we could purchase all of the items for creating our own scratch in bulk, and then do canning jars full of this and make it very pretty. You had it layered in there. We could give that as a holiday gift. Don't you think that would be awesome?

Lisa: I do. I love that idea. I discovered that by accident. We had bought the plastic container of the Parmesan in the grocery store, and the plastic bottom had a crack in it. So I was like, oh, great, what am I going to put this cheese in? Just trial and error, I found that the plastic Parmesan shaker lid actually fits on a regular narrow mouth canning jar, glass, like a Ball jar. That's when the light bulb went off, and I was like, oh, this is a great little shaker thing for our treats, because your scratch grains are going to be small grains and seeds and things like that that will fit through the holes of the Parmesan shaker thing. So that's where that idea was born. I love your idea of layering the cookie. There's recipes like cakes and things that they put layers, the flour, the sugar, the chocolate chips, the oats. I kind of layered it the same way for the book just because it was

pretty, but it would make such a great idea for a gift for anyone who has chickens or even wild birds, that they could feed the wild birds in the winter too.

- Theresa: So even if maybe you only have a few friends who actually have backyard chickens, you could still make your scratch feed, and it would be perfectly fine for the wild birds.
- Lisa: Right.
- Theresa: Fantastic. So if we want to make our own homemade scratch, how do we go about that? What kind of things can we put in scratch?
- Lisa: So like you mentioned, scratch is a treat. I don't really recommend mixing your own feed, although I do have a recipe in the book for it. But I did speak with a feed company who actually put the recipe together for me, because it has to be super balanced. They have to have the right nutrients and all that to lay eggs and be healthy, but scratch, pure treats. Think like a trail mix or a granola that we might eat. You can put literally whatever you want in it. You can use cracked corn, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds. You can put oats or wheat or barley. I love putting dried fruit, especially for this gift idea, because it would be pretty, some dried cranberries, some dried raisins, dried blueberries. I mean, chickens love all of that, so pretty much anything you've got, feeds, grains, nuts, dried fruit, any of that kind of stuff.
- Theresa: What about peanuts? Is it okay to give chickens peanuts?
- Lisa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Theresa: Cool. I know sometimes you might see in the wild bird section, so sunflower seeds. Millet is another thing that I've seen at the pet store for the wild birds. Those are okay for chickens as well.
- Lisa: Sure, safflower. With the nuts, you just want to get unsalted, so you don't want to buy the fancy nuts like the Planters in the container. You'd want the baking nuts, like the walnuts or the slivered almonds, things like that that are unsalted. Those are all fine.
- Theresa: Great, really good point. You don't want anything salted, nothing with preservatives. We want the raw nuts and the raw grain. So we can just mix this up and put it in the jars, and if we have any of those Parmesan shakers, I thought that was brilliant, you're able to do that. So I think that's really, really good. You also mentioned in there that sometimes if we go to the store and we've bought berries, those plastic berry boxes, you're always looking for different ways for us to reuse something. If you have chickens that are kind of cooped up in the coop for winter, this can be a great boredom buster. Boredom

isn't a thing that I have to deal with here in California, because my chickens are out all year long, but you have snow, so your chickens will be closed up a little bit more in the wintertime, and they get bored. So you take the scratch, and you put it in the berry box, right?

Lisa: Right, yeah. I mean, it's a great way to entice your chickens outside in the winter. I'll shovel their run, put down straw, because they don't like walking on the snow. But then you need something to actually get them to come outside, so filling one of those berry boxes that has the slats in it, so things come out of it, so cracked corn and sunflower seeds, things like that. Fill the box up with that, put it in the run, and, I mean, it's really fun to watch them kicking it around, because once they learn they have to kick it or knock it to make the feeds come out, it can keep them busy all afternoon.

Theresa: It reminds me of a toy we have for my chocolate lab. Labs, they get kind of feisty. They need a lot of action and mental action as well as physical action, so there's toys where you can put the treats in, and the dog rolls the toy for the treats to fall out. So this is the same thing, and they pick up on that. That must be a hoot to watch, very, very cute. Lisa, these are all such great hacks, and the book is filled with, like you said, 101 of them. These are just a small handful. I really, really love that you put this together, because there's really great tips. I have it already earmarked and little Post-it Notes and everything else. If any of my friends who are chicken keepers are listening, just so you know, you're getting some homemade scratch mix for Christmas for your chickens. But, also anyone-

Lisa: Nice.

Theresa: Yeah, and I'm going to be giving it to people who don't have chickens too so that they can feed the wildlife in their backyard. I think it'll be fun. But I just wanted to say thanks for coming on, and thanks for creating this book. I really loved it. It was a lot of fun. But thanks for coming on today.

Lisa: Thanks for having me. I'm so glad you loved it. I love when another chicken keeper who kind of raises their chickens the same way as I do appreciates what I do, because that really makes it all worth it. The book is coming out October 9th, so it's available for preorder before then. Then obviously it'll be available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, bookstores, all that kind of good stuff after October 9th.

Theresa: Fantastic, thanks so much.

Lisa: Thanks, Theresa.



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Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Lisa Steele from Fresh Eggs Daily all about chicken keeping hacks. Now, remember, everything that we talked about, including links to Lisa's website, all of her books, and the recipe that Lisa is sharing with us on how to make your own homemade scratch ... It will be a PDF that you can download. All of that will be in the show notes for today's episode. To get to the show notes, just go to LivingHomegrown.com/166, and it will be right there for you. As a reminder, today's episode was brought to you by the Living Homegrown Institute.

To help you on your own farm fresh journey, I've put together a free PDF of my favorite farm fresh resources. To get your copy of my farm fresh resource guide, go to LivingHomegrown.com/fresh, and it will be right there for you.

I hope you enjoyed this episode and it gave you some new ideas on things you can do with your own backyard flock. 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 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.