
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 170 Creating A Garden Sanctuary

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/170

- Jessi: If we're depressed or stressed, what can we do to take care of ourselves, not only in creating the space for it, but what plants can we start growing in our gardens to heal our bodies, and our minds, and our spirits?
- Theresa: This is The Living Homegrown podcast, episode 170.
- 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 favorable and sustainable lifestyle, is your host, National PBS producer, and canning expert, Theresa Loe.
- Theresa: They there everybody. Welcome to the podcast. I'm your hose, Theresa Loe. 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, and 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 my living homegrown membership site, just visit, livinghomegrown.com.
- Theresa: On today's episode, we're going to talk about creating your own sanctuary in your backyard space. Now, here's the thing, life can be super busy, and life can be extremely stressful. It's really easy for us to get caught up in all of the noise of that stress. As gardeners, we usually do have a sense that connecting with nature is important. I mean, that's one of the reasons why a lot of us garden. But, what if you made that connection part of your regular routine, and you did that in your own backyard? What if you intentionally created a space that was just for you, so that you could reconnect and slow down?
- Theresa: Well, that's what today's episode is all about. I brought on my really good friend, Jessi Bloom, who happens to be one of the most nature-connected people I know. In this episode, she's going to help us create our own backyard sanctuary for recharging and reconnecting with nature. She's going to walk us through this five steps for doing that. Jessi, I want to tell you a little bit about her because she's been on this podcast before. She was on episode 32, where we talked about having chickens in your garden. She was on episode 89, where we talked

all about permaculture, and how you can tie in permaculture with what you are doing in your garden.

- Theresa: Well, today, she has a brand-new book called, *Creating Sanctuary, Sacred Garden Spaces, Plant-Based Medicine, and Daily Practices to Achieve Happiness and Wellbeing*. Even if you are thinking to yourself, well, I don't know if I want to create a sanctuary in my backyard, I really encourage you to listen because everything that Jessi talks about is good no matter what type of garden you are creating. She's going to be sharing really practical things that we can do to not only make our garden more beautiful but to help us be better stewards of the earth.
- Theresa: We're going to talk about things like, why creating sanctuary is so important and the five important steps for creating any ecological garden. We're going to talk about sheet mulching to remove weeds or lawn. We're also going to talk about why water is such an important element in any garden. Jessi also talks about the different ways that we can draw in wildlife and make our backyard a wildlife habitat, and she talks about what it means to build plant layers in our garden.
- Theresa: As always, everything that we talk about, if there is a link to a resource, we will include it in the show notes for today's episode. Now, let me tell you a little bit more about Jessi. Jessi Bloom is an award-winning ecological landscape designer, a professional horticulturalist, and she is an ISA certified arborist. She is the lead designer and owner of NW Bloom Ecological Services. Known as an inventor and leader in permaculture, and sustainable landscape design.
- Theresa: Jessi spends much of her time teaching, consulting, and speaking nation-wide. Her focus on healing the earth has led her to study different lineages of the healing arts. She now incorporates these into her work. Jessi is the author of the bestselling, *Free Range Chicken Gardens* and a co-author of the book, *Practical Permaculture*. Jessi lives and gardens in Washington State.
- Theresa: Now, before we dive into the interview, I want you to know that today's podcast episode is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my monthly membership site that gives you the tools you need to live farm fresh without the farm, and helps you mesh farm fresh living into your already busy hectic lifestyle. Now, I realize that for some of you, you just want to get started with some resources, so I have packaged together a free farm fresh resource guide for you.
- Theresa: This is a guide with my very favorite things, from my own organic garden tools to my tools that I use inside my kitchen, and so much more. You can get this PDF by going to, livinghomegrown.com/fresh, that's F-R-E-S-H. I hope you find the information very helpful for your own farm fresh journey. Okay, let's dive into my interview with my friend, Jessi Bloom, all about creating our own sanctuary.

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- Theresa: Hey Jessi. Thanks so much for coming on the show today.
- Jessi: Thanks for having me. It's always great to talk to you.
- Theresa: Oh, yeah. You know, you're my third time on here. This is, you were on ... let's see, you were on episode 32 with Chickens in the Garden, and you were on episode 89, on Permaculture. I love that you're coming back. I don't have too many people that come back three times, so like you get a little gold star by your name.
- Jessi: Yay.
- Theresa: Well, this book is so awesome. I love it. When you first started telling me that you were working on it, I just felt like it was the perfect book for you to write because this is so you. I could feel you in this book more than any other book you've ever written, so I'm really thrilled to get to share it with my audience. Before we dive into everything about the book, I would love for you to kind of tell everybody what it is that you do with your landscape business because I really feel like your approach to landscape, so ties with what you write in the book. I think people would understand your background a little bit if they understand what it is that you do.
- Jessi: Yeah, so my day to day job is running a design-build company. What I do, as a role in the company, is help people through the process of consultation, to dreaming up what they want, to actually implementing it. The process is pretty straightforward, but what I do is I take the land stewards desires and wishes, and I visit the property, and I make sure that the land can actually support their dreams, and hopefully make it a dream come true for them.
- Theresa: Yes, absolutely. You also, you approach it like, you're real eco-friendly. It's all about balance and the whole permaculture, and all of that tied together. Someone who maybe doesn't know a lot about that, what is it that you bring to the table when you're looking at a garden? What is it that's most important to making sure that when you're saying like, it's going to support their dreams? What are the kind of things that you're looking at?
- Jessi: Well, basically, I came at this from an angle of honoring the land, and understanding the ecological systems that are existing or that need repair. So often we buy property or move into a garden that has a lot of damage done to it. What I do is I help folks repair that damage, and really honor the earth in that process. So, making sure that their dreams can come true, is really a process in making sure that they are realistic with their expectations, and what the land can support.

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- Theresa: Absolutely. What I feel is so key here with your book, *Creating Sanctuary*, is about the whole connection. I think you do that very intentionally when you are helping someone create the landscape of their dreams. And then, in the book, what you have done is given us the tools for, not only creating a landscape that can be our own sanctuary but showing us how to connect to that piece of property. You have all of that tied together. What is it that made you decide to create this book on creating a sanctuary?
- Jessi: Oh, that's a big question. I don't know how much time we have for that one, but you know, I think it's just kind of a journey of my life in that finding sanctuary for me really came through nature, and the channels that I had, and the connection that I had as a very young child. My entire career has been basically defending the sacredness that I found from that sanctuary that I was lucky enough, or had the privilege to be a part of. I'm talking about being a kid growing up building forts and playing in streams, and really kind of being wild.
- Jessi: The more I got into my career, the more I realized that people didn't come to the table with that connection. They didn't have that same love, and that desire to honor plants and land. And so, I really wanted to help people make that connection. My first book about creating gardens, or essentially sanctuaries for chickens, is really a design manual to create habitat. The second book that I wrote, *Practical Permaculture*, is also a design manual for habitat creating for humans.
- Jessi: This one is actually similar, in the sense that it's creating our own habitat, but it really brings it to a personal level, and what do we need individually, both physically, mentally, spiritually, and what feeds us, what can help restore us. A lot of this came from my own journey and experience creating a sanctuary in my own life, and in my own garden, and in helping others. It's kind of a personal, not story, but it's a personal journey that I wanted to share because I learned a lot along the way.
- Theresa: Yeah, I think that's why I was so excited when you first told me you were doing this because I've watched your journey, and I've learned so much from you about connecting to nature. You do it so effortlessly and naturally. You're absolutely correct, it does not come naturally to everybody because they may not have had the background with it. I feel that's why your book and what you do, you know, in your career, but also in your writing, is so important because in today's really busy hectic world, like people have lost touch. They've lost touch with nature, and that connection, and what it can do with them.
- Theresa: To me, my garden has always been my sanctuary, but I try to tune into it even more than I ever did before, as I get older. I think you're opening that door for everybody. I just love that. Is that really what you're finding as people are

starting to understand more about, you know, that that garden is really for them to connect? Is that really what people are learning?

Jessi: Yeah. I think one of the things that is going to really resonate with people is that we live in a culture, or in a world really, that isn't always, you know, good vibes only. We have a lot of stress. We have illness. We have things happen. There's people that we love that die or relationships that end. Life isn't always easy for us. One of the things that I really tipped off the starting point of this book, was I was diagnosed with PTSD. In my journey in figuring out how to heal from that, or how to cope, and really understand how to be, I realized that a lot of people suffer from a lot of different ailments, mentally and spiritually.

Jessi: This book really focuses on that, more so than like a physical sense. What if we're feeling anxiety? What kind of plants can we use to help that? If we're depressed, or stressed, what can we do to take care of ourselves, not only in creating the space for it, but what plants can we start growing in our garden to heal our bodies, and our minds, and our spirits?

Theresa: Yes, absolutely. Now, what are some of the things that you recommend people do, if they have a garden space and they're working on creating a sanctuary, and as they're creating it, and as they're wanting to use it? I'm thinking that there's different ways that people can use that space, like meditation, or mindful walking, things like that. Is that typically what you explain for people to do with their space?

Jessi: Yeah, really you have to find the use that you want out of it. It begins with setting intentions. If you need a space to pray, or you need a space to meditate, or maybe you want to do outdoor yoga, or maybe you just want to have gatherings. You want to start first with, what do I need? From there, start building out the space. We all different things that we want in our lives. For me, I want quiet reflection in my garden. I want to grow a lot of medicine. I do want a space for mediation. Everybody is going to have something different.

Jessi: A lot of people might want to honor ancestors or memorialize our loved ones that have passed. And so, you know, creating a memorial garden might be one thing. I show a lot of examples of different ways that we can incorporate these intentions into our gardens through case studies, and just examples that I've found as I traveled, and interviewed people, and visited gardens.

Theresa: Yeah, I love that. Everybody can create their own personal sanctuary. That's why it's so good like you gave a lot of examples, but we can do what feels right in our heart. If we decide that we're ready to tackle creating more of a sanctuary in our own space, you had this one section of the book where you walked us through five steps to creating our own sanctuary. I'd love to go through those steps with you. Does that sound good?

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- Jessi: Yeah, sure.
- Theresa: Okay, all right. The first one you had listed was clearing the space. What do you tell us to do with clearing the space?
- Jessi: Well, that can be both physically and spiritually. I see this often. Granted, I get to see hundreds of gardens every year during consultations. One of the biggest things people have to do first is get rid of stuff that they don't need anymore. Most often, it's containers, or knickknacks, or things that have just kind of accumulated in a space, or plants that are dying, and that they're not going to really thrive, or they're taking up room that may be suitable for a plant that will be happier. Clearing the space physically, getting rid of any garbage, or any clutter, things that aren't going to work anymore.
- Jessi: Sometimes we get attached to items. Maybe it's not getting rid of them or throwing them away, per se, but maybe giving them to someone else who might want them. I'm a big fan of plant orphan gifting. If you have a plant that you don't want anymore, you can dig it up, and give it to a friend, depending on the size and condition of the plant, of course. But, that's one layer of kind of clearing the space. The other, we may go into more a spiritual sense. Most cultures around the world have done a process called smudging, where smoke is used to clear the air. When I was writing the book, actually, it became scientifically validated that this actually cleanses the air.
- Theresa: Yes, I've seen articles on that. Yeah, so this is scientifically proven.
- Jessi: Yeah. One of the things that I think is fascinating is, I always try to take this back to an ecological context. How does nature clear itself? Fire is a big part of that. In fact, it's used in restoration processes, using fire to clear areas, and that actually jump starts the process of restoration through seed germination, for example. So, smudging an area can be done through ... in the book I teach people how to make their own smudges. You can also, one of my favorite tools for gardening, to weed an area, now, there's a lot of precautions around this, but flame weeding.
- Theresa: Yes.
- Jessi: It's a little torch and if you're working in gravel, or patios, or something that has a hard surface, you can actually burn the weeds. You don't want to do this with wood chips in the middle of a drought.
- Theresa: Right.
- Jessi: That's a big, big no-no. Always have a hose handy. It doesn't matter what the weather is.

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- Theresa: Yes.
- Jessi: Doing things like that to kind of clear the space and make it ready to build onto. That's a part of it. Kind of cleaning our expectations of the space too. We don't have to always have a completed drawing before we start doing work. Sometimes, if you start clearing the space, the land, and the plants around will kind of tell you what needs to happen. A big part of this book, I try to teach folks also how to tune into that, because that something that I think intuitively, we do have the ability to do. It takes some practice.
- Theresa: Yeah, you know, it's funny, when you were talking about clearing away all of the knickknacks, it's really surprising to me how many things that I have in my garden that I don't see and so if ... you said something in the book and it really resonated with me, where if there was something in the space that you're walking by and you don't even notice it anymore, and it's not important to you anymore, we can give ourselves permission to let that go. That's part of it too, right?
- Jessi: Yeah, definitely.
- Theresa: Yeah, I love that. Well, all of that, I feel is so, so important, especially like if you have a clean slate, then you can kind of envision what it is you want to do now. I know for the second step, you had improved the soil. This is important, no matter what we're doing in the garden. What are some different ways we can improve the soil?
- Jessi: Yeah, so adding biomass. If I back up and just think about soil in general, getting to know it is number one. If you don't know the soil, taking it and doing soil testing is one way, start to dig around, see what you find. Is it rocky? Does it have a lot of organic matter? Does it have organisms? In healthy soil, we have billions of organisms in just a very small quantity, but more often than not, especially in chemically treated landscapes, most of that life is gone, or if we're importing a lot of soil, sometimes it's sterile.
- Jessi: Getting the life force back into that soil is important. One of the best ways that I encourage people to do that is just mulching, and bringing in layers of organic matter. Making sure that it is absorbing water, and has nutrients and minerals for the plants to absorb. Every garden is going to be different, but it starts with getting to know it first.
- Theresa: Yes. Now, you talk a lot about doing sheet mulching, which is something where ... I'd love for you to explain what sheet mulching is because sometimes if someone has a space and they're wanting to create their sanctuary, they have a little area maybe that has like a little patch of grass that they don't want there anymore. They're not sure what to do, and sheet mulching is such a great way

to not only get rid of it but also improve the soil. Could you explain to everybody, what is sheet mulching?

Jessi: Yes. The concept is really straightforward. We're basically smothering the grass or weeds. We're using a few different materials as options. We want something biodegradable. Either cardboard or I use burlap a lot. We get it from coffee roasters. You lay that down on top of the area that you want to clear out. This saves you so much work from having to dig out weeds or grass. You lay out the material and then you cover it with an organic matter.

Jessi: That organic matter could be a number of types that you might have available to you, whether it's horse manure or wood chips. You could even use soil, or other types of material, depending on what you have access to. The idea is really we're just smothering it. If you can think too, like have a kiddie swimming pool in the middle of summer and that things full of whatever for two months, and then, come fall, you take the swimming pool away and then grass is completely dead.

Theresa: Yeah.

Jessi: It's basically that same concept except for we're building the soil on top of that. It's left for the organisms in the soil to start breaking it down and do the work so that we don't have to add so much later one. The process though takes some time. That's something to know. You can't sheet mulch and then expect to have it ready right away. It's going to take, depending on the climate, and the type of weather that we're having, anywhere from like three to six months.

Theresa: Yes, but it's so worth it not to have to get out there with a shovel and dig it up. It does keep all the weeds down. You know, we aren't rototilling, if you're an organic gardener, you're not going to rototill up those weeds, weed seeds. If you just keep laying and mulching on top, it then gives you this pristine area to start and the soil is so much better. So, great. I'm glad you explained that because I think that's such a key way to improve the soil and get rid of something at the same time.

Jessi: Yeah.

Theresa: The third one that you have is managing the water. Here in Los Angeles, we don't have a lot of water, but you know, I know you're up in Washington where you have a lot of water, and you do water gardens, and everything else. But, even in a garden in Los Angeles, I can have water elements, and I can manage the water that does come into my garden. Could you explain that a little bit?

Jessi: Yeah, I think water is one of the key elements. I mean, outside of soil and sunlight, you know, we need water for all life to thrive. It's something that in the

coming years we're going to really have to be paying attention to, more so, but when we do have a rain event, historically, before we built houses, and put down pavement, and created all this impervious surface, the water would absorb into the soil where it belongs. Now, it runs off and we don't get to use it as easily, and the soil and the plants suffer because of it.

Jessi: Really, this idea here with honoring the water and managing the water, it's about looking at what falls naturally and making sure that we're taking that water, and we're using it, we're not just sending it off down a pipe out to cause problems downstream. Not only in this book but Permaculture Design, this is one of the most important layers that we consider in design. Capturing the water is pretty critical in whether it's a cistern or in the soil, the cool thing about doing it in a cistern, or like a rain barrel of various sizes is that you can use it when you want to.

Jessi: Otherwise, we want to sink back into the soil where it belongs. That can be done in a number of ways. Again, it all depends on climate, but I focus in on using rain gardens, or what's called a bio-retention cell, so we're just digging in the area. There's some calculations of course, so there's further research if you want to do this, but basically, you dig a space, and then you backfill it with a spongy type of soil. It's a lot of compost usually.

Jessi: Put in it the plants that adapted for the climate so that they like water when it's available, and they can handle the drought when the water is not available. Those plants develop deep root channels and so when the waterfalls and it's directed into that space, it actually has a chance to infiltrate, rather than runoff.

Theresa: I love that, yeah. I didn't even know about that. I know you deal so much with water and how it's so important. I think really here in California, although, you know, we desperately want water, I don't think people think about it as an element in design of their garden. It should be and so that's why it's so important. What you have in the book is really good. Now, let's talk about step number four, which is provide wildlife habitat. I love this one because this is about drawing in pollinators, and also keeping in the good things that we want in our garden, but also letting nature run its course in our garden as well. Let's talk about that, providing wildlife habitat.

Jessi: Yeah, I think when we're making a sanctuary, we need to consider every organism as taking part in that sanctuary. It's not just for us. It's not just for hummingbirds. It's for all kinds of insects, and organisms. Creating spaces for them and specifically, food is a really wise thing to do, but it also can set us up for future success, just by having that biodiversity. Some ways to do this, we can actually create nesting sites, or we can provide the materials for the different critters to use.

- Jessi: For example, like rock piles. That's a really important one for certain types of amphibians. You can, you know, pile rocks. I know lots of people when they're digging, put plants in the ground, they find rocks. Stockpiling them and actually using them with an intention of creating wildlife habitat. Using native plants. They often don't get the appreciation I think, that they deserve. Native plants help our native wildlife. Making sure that we have trees, and shrubs, and perennials, and flowers that are native, will really help support that native ecosystem.
- Jessi: Water is another element. I talked a little bit about capturing our rainwater. We can also, if we don't have a lot of natural rainfall, or can't build a rain garden, we can also add water just by putting some out, either in a dish, you know, like a birdbath or something like that. I have a water bowl out in front of my front door. I change the water off and I see bees using it a lot. I also have a little bubbler that recirculates water for birds. There's a lot of ways we can incorporate water as a habitat element.
- Jessi: For me, and a lot of my clients who end up putting in water features, they get way more bird activity than if they don't have water features, or they notice a big contrast before and after the installation. Those are a couple of things that we can do. Just being mindful that bugs aren't bad. I think so often we have this fear that insects are, you know, going to do something to us, or damage our plants. Of course, there's such thing as pest populations that can do damage, but if we have a balanced ecosystem that's much less likely to happen because those pests will have predators. And so, making sure we attract those predators is really key in creating a balanced ecosystem that is to be our sanctuary.
- Theresa: Yeah, I always get nervous when I go through a garden tour and there isn't like one bug bite on anything. Like, I want to see those bug bites because that lets me know that it's organic and that there's, you know, actually things happening out there. I'm sure you've done it too, when you go on a garden tour, maybe a rose garden, and it's pristine and perfect. It's like, I don't want to touch anything because I'm sure it's all been sprayed massively because there's like nothing alive other than the rose. That's not what I want in my garden.
- Theresa: I love that too. Also, having pollination plants that will attract, you know, the birds and bees, and the butterflies will help if we have a food garden, because that helps with the pollination, and then we have more of a harvest. It all ties together to have that balance. That's awesome. Step number five, you have, build plant layers. This one surprised me because I was at first thinking, oh, you were just talking about, you know, like short plants in the front, and tall plants in the back, but that's not what you were talking about. You were talking about the seasonality of the plants and all of that, so could you explain building the plant layers?

Jessi: Yeah, so ecologically, the most stable and resilient ecosystems are forests, right? What I encourage people to design are the forest layers, or at least that's the goal, the outcome if you want a resilient landscape. And so, we look at this in permaculture also, most often it's focused on the food forest, or that's kind of the terminology that we would use to design a perennial food system. But really, what it's about is mimicking the way that nature stacks and functions all the different attributes of plants. Whether it's the size or sharing space in nutrient capacity.

Jessi: So, there's trees that can provide shade of course, but all kinds of other wonderful things for us. Shrubs, of course, that come in a lot of different sizes, and have features, whether it's flowers, or food, or leaves, or you know, every part of the plant should be considered. All the way down to the tuber layer, or even the fungi. When we're designing a space, we want to consider all of those layers. Of course, there's a way to place them so that they're all receiving the right sunlight, and have the correct space.

Jessi: Really, I wanted folks to think of it more of like, how to design an ecosystem. It might be that we look at annuals to fill in a space that, you know, a shrub might be slow growing. The herbaceous layer that's perennial, so plants that come and go every year, but they're adding some kind of color, or flower, or pollination service when they are here. There's a lot of layers in plants to consider. I wanted to just hone in on how to break it down for folks because the options are pretty much endless for every garden.

Theresa: Yeah. Yeah, you don't want to get overwhelmed but at the same time, I think you're making us think a little bit more outside the box of what we're used to when you just look at a typical design book, you know? That's really what I love. Like, I want to look at this in a different way. You totally did that. In closing Jessi, I'm so excited about this. I love this book. But, in closing, what would you say to someone if they were just maybe thinking like, oh, I wonder if I want a sanctuary? What would you tell them about having a sanctuary in their own backyard?

Jessi: It can be restorative, and healing, and not only for you, but for everybody in your life, and all the critters that can visit. There's so many spaces that are being degraded in this world, and development taking over. The more natural and wild spaces are disappearing. To bring a part of that into our lives that we can visit every day, I think is a part of what we're here to do as humans. We're really designed to connect with other organisms out in the world. This is our opportunity to do it.

Theresa: I love that. Well, thank you, Jessi. Thanks so much for coming on, and sharing everything about building our sanctuary. I really love it.



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Jessi: Thanks for having me.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Jessi Bloom, the author of Creating Sanctuary. Now, remember, I will have links to Jessi's website, and all of her books in the show notes for today's episode. If you would like to get my free farm fresh resource guide, then go to livinghomegrown.com/fresh. I will have it there for you. That's it for today, 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.

Bloopers