
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 171 Growing Heirloom Flowers

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/171

Chris: So amazing. If you have not grown ... No, you have to grow them. No, you have to. I don't care. Okay. They're great dry, quote, unquote, "dried", but dude, they're born dried, right? They're born dried.

Theresa: They are.

Chris: It's crazy. So they open up, and I swear to you every time, I'm amazed. Every single time, I'm amazed when they open up.

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown podcast, episode 171.

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 and fermenting. 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 courses or my business coaching, then just visit my website livinghomegrown.com.

Theresa: Okay. So what are we going to cover today? Today, the topic is all about heirloom flowers. Here's the thing. I feel that although it's wonderful to bring in pollinators into our garden by having flowers in our backyard, I also feel that it's really important to feed our soul as well as bring in those pollinators, and heirloom flowers do that so, so well. So on today's podcast, I wanted to answer some questions for you. I wanted to answer the question of, what is an heirloom flower, and why are they so special? So we're going to explore all the different benefits of adding vintage blooms to your garden, and to do that, I brought on garden author, Chris McLaughlin, to share her insights into these treasured plants and why we need to add more of them into our backyard because for me, heirlooms hold a really special place in my heart, and I know they do in Chris as well because she just wrote a book on it.

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- Theresa: Now, you might recognize the name Chris McLaughlin because she's been on the podcast a couple of times before. She was on episode 85 where we talked all about raising backyard rabbits, and she was on episode 117 where we talked about dye plants. That's D-Y-E, and those are plants that are used for dyeing fabric and yarn and fiber for crafts and knitting and things like that. So she's been on the podcast for those two topics before, but today, she's going to talk about heirloom flowers. Now, her book that just came out is called *Growing Heirloom Flowers: Bring the Vintage Beauty of Heritage Blooms to Your Modern Garden*. And if you haven't heard Chris on here before, she's a lot of fun. We've been friends for a long time, and she's just really fun and funny, and she brings so much to the table in the way of knowledge on all things homesteading, gardening, and even crafting and working with fiber, raising fiber animals, all of that stuff. So she's super knowledgeable.
- Theresa: Now, what we talk about today is the difference between open-pollinated and hybrid plants and how that relates to what is an heirloom, and we talk about the term passalong plants and what are some of the favorite characteristics of heirlooms that we love, and we also talk about what are some of our favorite plants when it comes to making a bouquet or even for drawing and crafting with different heirloom flowers. And lastly, I have Chris share with us her recipe for lavender honey syrup, which is absolutely delicious in ice tea, and she has been gracious enough to share that recipe in the show notes for today's episode. So everything that we talk about, all of the different topics and Chris's books, and this recipe will be in the show notes, and to get to that, you just go to livinghomegrown.com/171.
- Theresa: So let me tell you a little bit about Chris. Chris McLaughlin is a northern California writer and author who's had her hands in the soil for nearly 40 years. She's the author of seven books, including *Growing Heirloom Flowers*, *A Garden to Dye For*, and *Vertical Vegetable Gardening*. Now, Chris's work can also be found in a slew of magazines, including *Hobby Farm Home*, *Urban Farm Magazine*, *The Heirloom Gardener*, and *Mother Earth Living*, and *Fine Gardening Magazine*. Online, she's written for a ton of different gardening sites, including vegetablegardener.com, finegardening.com, about.com, fix.com, and *From Scratch Magazine*. Chris and her family live on a flower and fiber farm in northern California in the foothills where they grow flowers, fruit, vegetables, and Angora goats, and you can track her down at her personal website, flowersinc.com.
- Theresa: All right. I know you're going to love this conversation. Chris is a ton of fun. So let's dive into my conversation with Chris McLaughlin, the author of *Growing Heirloom Flowers*.
- Theresa: Hey, Chris. Thanks so much for coming back on the show.

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- Chris: Oh, thanks for having me, Theresa. I love chatting with you.
- Theresa: Well, I love having you on. You have so many different topics that you have written about and so many different topics that you write about for magazines and on your website. So I guess before we start, I would love to have you tell everybody a little bit about some of the topics that you cover, some of the things that you write about.
- Chris: Let's see. I started out writing mostly about vegetables. When I first started writing books, I talked about compost and vegetables and soil and things like that, and I moved on into one of my other loves, which is farm animals. So I've written a book on rabbits, and I'm writing a book right now on backyard fiber farming. So that's fun, but in between all that, I've done A Garden to Dye For, which is D-Y-E, and it's about dye plants that you can grow in your garden and dye fibers and fabric with, which is so much fun, and then of course, I wrote this one on heirlooms, and I've written things on vertical vegetable gardening, small space gardening. So I take a lot of the stuff that I write for magazines and online publications ... I take a lot of those topics. It's a jump-off point, my books are. I just think of something in there that I really enjoy and want to tell people about, and then I write about those. I write about, really, everything that really has to do with growing and raising things yourself, whether it's the seeds and the plants or whether it's my beautiful Angora goats that I love so much.
- Theresa: Yeah. We've had you on several times, talked about so many different things, and you and I have been friends for a long time. I could just chat with you all day long because you love to do all things that I love to do, and you have more animals than I do. So you have a little more space than I do, and so it's just so fun to hear some of the projects that you're working on, and I've learned so much from you. So I really appreciate you coming back on the show.
- Chris: Thank you. I love being here.
- Theresa: Oh, good. Good. Well, let's chat about your new book, Growing Heirloom Flowers. First of all, I have to tell you the cover's gorgeous. It's so colorful like it's going to pop off the bookshelf.
- Chris: Yeah. They did a great job with that. I was so pleased when I saw it. I came out of my seat.
- Theresa: Yeah, I bet. I did, too. I was like, "Woo hoo!" When I unwrapped it, I was like, "Whoa, this is so pretty!"
- Chris: Yeah.

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- Theresa: Yeah. Well, let's talk about this. So heirloom flowers ... I talk a lot on this show about heirloom plants in general, but mostly like heirloom vegetables, like if you're going to grown heirloom apples or anything like that, but heirloom flowers are just as important, if not more important, because they kind of feed our soul instead of just feeding our bodies, and so I would love to know what made you decide to write a book on heirloom flowers.
- Chris: Well, I have actually had this idea to get a book out there on this, which, of course, there has been books in the past as well, but I saw that there was a large gap. One of the last books that was written just has been out of print for quite a long time, and I thought, "Well, that's funny," because we're all really getting to this soul flower movement because of talking about, of course, the soul food movement and doing everything a little more connected to the Earth and naturally. So it was natural progression a lot of people really are doing heirloom flowers, but there just hadn't been a recent book. So I've been trying to get this out there, and then finally, a publishing house said, "Yeah, yeah. I agree. We got to get it out there."
- Chris: So I was really happy to see this kind of come out from tucked in to my ... You have your proposals that you keep sending out, and finally, someone said, "Yes, it has a home!" So it's wonderful, and the flowers blending in with the vegetables and stuff because of course, I love heirloom vegetables, but all of these heirloom plants are so important to keep alive, and we're trying do things so much more sustainably, which is a wonderful thing because we're hanging on to some of these that were kind of dying off. We're even finding families that have seeds from plants, both vegetable and flowers, that has been in their families for a long time, and we thought they were gone, and lo and behold, they have them, and then they share them with the seed company, and the seed companies gets to put them out. So it's kind of a neat thing, and I was thrilled that I finally got to write this.
- Theresa: Yeah. That's what's really interesting about heirlooms, and we'll talk about the definition of what is an heirloom in a minute. I just want to talk about the stories that go with some of these flowers because that's exactly it is that sometimes people think that it's a lost flower that maybe they knew from their childhood or that their grandparents talked about, and you go through the seed catalogs, and you can't find it, and so you think, "Well, maybe they just don't make those anymore." And a lot of times, they are out there, but they're hidden off in someone's garden. But I agree with you about the flowers blending with vegetables, and that's something that we should definitely touch on here because I do not grow my vegetables in rows. I don't just have a green backyard garden. I have flowers intermixed with my vegetables, and it draws in the pollinators, and it draws in the birds that also can help with some of the insect control, but it also makes your garden more beautiful, and so it just has a million benefits.

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- Chris: And that was the part you mentioned about feeding your soul, too.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Chris: I mean, you give these things to people, give little bouquets cut from your garden, or you bring them into the house, and it really does feed your soul. I was actually at Costco the other day. This is such a bizarre story. I'm at Costco, and this lady who's selling the flowers there for Costco, she had cut up a bouquet and was walking around handing out one stem to each lady.
- Theresa: Aww!
- Chris: And it was so sweet, and I was standing there waiting for my medicine, and she walks up and hands it to me, and here's somebody who does grow their own flowers who has been a gardener for, oh, my gosh, forever. I started gardening very, very young, and so you would think that it would not affect me as much as it did, but I'm standing there holding my flower. I don't know. What a girl. I mean, I'm really such a girl, and I'm walking around with my flower, and I literally felt special. I literally was so happy to have my little flower. It felt like such a gift, and it's strange because I'm always around flowers and stuff, but it didn't matter. I mean, I'm holding this flower, walking around the store, and I'm just like, "Oh, I have a flower." It's like just this nice gift somebody gave me, and it made me feel good and special in some strange way. So flowers are just important. We need to feed our souls every bit as we need to feed our bodies. Absolutely.
- Theresa: I love that story, and I think it even resonates if you grow something yourself, and you give a flower or a bouquet to a friend or a neighbor. When someone does that for me, I feel like they're giving me a little bit of themselves because they put in the time to grow that, whether it's a vegetable or a flower, but flowers just make you smile.
- Chris: They really do. It's a very funny thing because like you said, it does feel personal, and also, I think it feels unexpected. You know that person went out, and they cut this, and they set them in something, whatever it is. It might even just be a hand bouquet, but they put them together in such a way that looked pleasing to them, and they brought it and handed it to you, and it literally is like they gave you ... I mean, that is so much more thoughtful, not that I want to diss anybody buying presents from the store because [inaudible 00:13:02] that's wonderful, but I mean, that's great. But I'm just saying, isn't that so touching?
- Theresa: Yes.
- Chris: And we don't get to do that all the time, especially in a day and age of technology, which also, technology, I'm loving what we're doing right now, but

I'm not able to stand here and touch your leg as I talk to you ... not in a creepy way.

Theresa: I totally knew what you meant there, Chris. No problem.

Chris: But you know what I mean, right?

Theresa: Yes. Totally.

Chris: The warm smiles and stuff ... We're over technology. So when someone hands you flowers, that's just such a connection. It's so grounding. So I agree with you anyway.

Theresa: Absolutely. And I think we should back up a little bit and go into some definitions because sometimes where I start talking about heirlooms with people, they're not exactly sure what I mean. So I think we should probably, first, back up and talk a little bit about what is an open-pollinated plant versus a hybrid and then how that fits into an heirloom.

Chris: Okay. So heirloom flowers, they're most often ... I say this because I'm going to give you a couple definitions. They're most often defined as open-pollinated plants. So what that means is the plant flowers have been naturally pollinated by insects or birds, mammals, the wind, what have you. Seeds produced by open pollination will produce future plants that look and perform like their parent. So in other words, they breed true. That's how we describe that. So, well, let's back up to the hybrids. So a hybrid is the resulting offspring of two different plant varieties that people put together. They're created so we can produce a desired trait. So maybe we want larger flowers or fruit or plant height, [inaudible 00:14:46] shorter, taller. So hybrid varieties, they have a closely related gene pool, and it leaves very little genetic diversity in the plant, and they have the kind of ... You have to keep repeating that in order to get that really cool little plant you liked. If you really like this flower that was that hybrid creation, the seeds from that are not going to breed true. They're going to be thrown back to something in their history, something else genetic back there. You don't really know.

Chris: Now, that doesn't mean they're not going to be beautiful. That doesn't mean they're undesirable. It's just not going to be what you expected. You grew some dinner plate plant, a flower, and that is not what you're going to get. So you'd have to breed those two parents together again in order to do that again, whereas you wouldn't have to do that with the open-pollinated. So the heirlooms-

Theresa: And oh, let's just say, right ... real quick, so people don't get confused. A hybrid is also not GMO. That's not what we're talking about here. So GMO-

Chris: I meant to say that.

Theresa: Yeah. Yeah. So a GMO does not happen in nature, where a hybrid is a cross between two things, but it's done in a way that a bee would do it. It's cross-pollinated. Like if you had two different types of stone fruit, you can cross-pollinate them to create a different tree, but it was done in the same way that a bee would do it. The breeders do it on purpose, but it's done in the same way as a bee, where a GMO is where they are going in, and they're messing with the genetics, and it would never happen in nature. So yeah, just so people understand. I don't want them to be confused, and I want them to understand. All right. So we have open-pollinated.

Chris: And I'm glad you said that because I meant to throw that in there, but I was [inaudible 00:16:21]. Well, I did because I want people to understand that when we talk about heirlooms ... This is really important to me. When I talk about heirlooms and my love for heirlooms, in no way am I demonizing hybrids. I grow hybrids. I have a flower farm, okay? So we have to grow some hybrids because some of them just are really stoic. I mean, they are very sturdy for a long time in vases and such, and we will grow hybrids, and I love them. Nothing wrong with that. It's just that heirlooms are special, and so there's reason to talk about them and to keep them going. And yeah, the GMOs, whether you demonize them or not, whatever that is, it is definitely not ... GMOs can be in hybrids, but that doesn't mean every hybrid has GMO. So it's kind of weird, but yeah.

Theresa: Right. Right. It gets a little confusing. Right. Right.

Chris: It does. It does, but-

Theresa: No. But yeah. Absolutely. And I know you don't demonize hybrids. I grow hybrids, also, but when we talk about open-pollinated, when we're talking about saving the seeds, it's because you're passing down a seed that will absolutely reproduce what you grew. It matches the parent plant, and a hybrid will not. You just kind of get the luck of the draw of what will happen when you plant that seed. So that's why people are so passionate about saving open-pollinated seed because they stay true to the parent, and they're passed down through generations. Okay. So now, sorry to interrupt you, but ... So now, we can go on.

Chris: No. I think this is such a good topic because honestly, some of those hybrids, by the way, are patented by companies. So I just want to point that out.

Theresa: That's true.

Chris: Some of them are patented. So, okay. So the heirlooms, now, are sort of a subset of those open-pollinated plants. So most people consider a plant and

heirloom if they've been cultivated and handed down through the generations for 50 to 100 years. Now, most purists, people who are really, really into this, they're going to say the plant must be at least 100 years old. Sadly, there's no hard and fast rule to that sort of thing. This is all sort of what people say and talk about. You just have to kind of let go of the control freaky thing and go with it. You know what I mean? Just deal with it. Some people say ... Oh, and other people use 1951 as a marker, if they were produced before 1951, and everyone's growing them because that's when the seed companies began really heavily marketing hybrid seeds that they were creating.

Chris: So you see this stuff starting to waver like, "Oh, I guess that's an heirloom." But a lot of them are very clearly heirlooms, and I've mostly discussed that in the book, and then also, an additional heirloom ... I know this gets really sort of tricky, but there are ancient hybrids that are considered heirlooms, okay? So old garden roses, okay? Some of them have been bred, oh, my goodness, ages ago, and most rose enthusiasts would consider any cultivar that was bred before 1867, which is when the first modern rose was introduced, to be an heirloom variety. Other species, like, say, Japanese anemone, [inaudible 00:19:23] ... I think that's how you say it. I say [inaudible 00:19:26], which was introduced in 1858. Well, that's an heirloom. I don't care. I don't even care. That's an heirloom. That's an old plant, dude, and that's handed down and handed down. That is an heirloom, and yet, it was a hybrid.

Chris: Anyway. So that's a little tricky, but at the same time, you just can't get hung up on it. The fact is old plants that are handed down from family to family member, down generations, they also refer to them as passalong plants, which I wish I had coined that term because I think that is so cool.

Theresa: I love that term. That's such a good term.

Chris: There's a plantsman and garden writer, Allen Lacy, who actually coined that term, and Steve Bender and Felder Rushing sort of revived that and brought that to the forefront and shared with everybody in a book they'd written, and you talked about these passalong plants, which is the name of their book. Yeah, it's a wonderful book.

Theresa: So define what is a passalong plant. What do you mean by that when you say passalong plant?

Chris: What that means is basically a plant ... Honestly, it's not just heirlooms because it would just be any open-pollinated plant that's handed down from gardener to gardener. They just call them passalong plants because they realize when they save their seed and hand them to the neighbor, they are going to breed true, and that is true for open-pollinated varieties. So a lot of the times, you're not going to be able to get some of these unless they are passed along. It's amazing.

Or maybe it'll be one seed company you find with something, but they're sold out. The only way you're going to get them is through your fellow gardeners. So it's what's really kind of exciting. Here's a funny thing. We all become part of that history. We don't think about that because we're here, and we're living, and we're breathing, and we don't think about that we are part of that history. So when you get something really cool from a neighbor or a friend or a family member, it's really great to write that down wherever, on the seed pack that you're keeping or what ever, in a diary, a garden journal because you will become part of that history.

Chris: We talk about how grandma got this from her great-grandmother or her old neighbor in Italy who handed this over. We're like, "That is so cool." That's what someone's going to say about our old bones that are going to be in the ground. That's true, though. It's true. They're going to say that. They're going to say, "My great-grandmother got it," and so that's who you'll be. So it's also important to remember how they came to you. How did you become part of this plant's history? Because seven generations from now, they're going to be saying, "Hey, this is how it got to me," and you're part of that. So I think that's exciting. That's a real exciting part to me.

Theresa: I agree, and it kind of almost becomes part of your genealogy if you have gardeners in your family that these are seeds that were passed down, like you said, that someone brought over on the boat, and people really did do that. They would sew seeds into their clothes so that they could bring part of their hometown or their home country over here with them, and then those seeds are passed own. So there's so many wonderful stories with some of these heirlooms. It makes it really fun. I think aside from that, the other benefit that I find from heirloom flowers is that they have so many unusual characteristics that maybe kind of fell out of favor. They might've had a fragrance that was awesome, but a hybrid came along that maybe had a better color or something, and it became popular, and then that heirloom falls out of favor, but it's still so valuable, and so, when we discover these, either through friends or through books like yours or seed catalogs, and we go, "Oh, wow. I did not even know that that flower came in that color or had a fragrance," because the hybrids maybe don't have a fragrance. So that, I think, is one of the things that's kind of fun to discover is the unusual characteristics.

Chris: Well, that's true, and you touched on exactly one of the main things that did happen, is that many of the plants do lose their fragrance because we wanted them to be able to travel. We wanted them to last longer. We wanted them to be bigger, perform better, get stronger, become brighter, and so we took away a lot of the scent and things like that. So that really is one of the things. One of the other things ... This is interesting, and this is basically just with the snapdragons, but snapdragons, if you've ever played with the old ones ... The originals is open-pollinated varieties. When you pull of the flower head, you can put your fingers inside the back of it and make it snap like a dragon's mouth.

They open and shut. So it's really cute. It's the thing kids would do and play with them.

Chris: Well, what ended up happening was we ended up wanting them to be a little bit bolder, better, double up on those blooms, things like that, and this is interesting. The types that were bred were called butterfly types, and those don't snap anymore. They're beautiful, but they don't snap. That was one of them, though, I believe, though ... This is also very interesting, and it's not normal. They actually bred them so they would have a scent. Snapdragons never did.

Theresa: Oh, how funny.

Chris: So to get them to have the scent ... They have the scent, but they no longer snap, which was still an old-fashioned characteristic. I'm not saying one's better than the other. It's just that you do find these surprising things that were available and were around and did other things, and you didn't know. But usually, the fragrance is the first thing to go when they're trying to create these things. So-

Theresa: Yeah, I definitely noticed.

Chris: [inaudible 00:24:49]

Theresa: Yeah. Yeah. I like fragrance, too. I definitely noticed that has happened a lot with a lot of different flowers. I'm sure as you wrote this book it was really hard to pick your favorite, but I wanted to ask you as you were researching all the different flowers, did you have any favorites that kind of stood out to you?

Chris: One of my favorite ones, which is not very ... It's unusual, and it sort of ... In some ways, you would think, "Well, would you really bring that in and put it in a vase?" And yeah, you would. It's super cool. With all the other flowers, it really adds something texturally and dramatic, is Love-Lies-Bleeding, which is *Amaranthus caudatus*, and it is so cool, and it grows like a weed. I think it's like one of those weedy plants, but when it is in a soil that it likes, which is usually not a great soil. I mean, it's just sort of very, very easy to grow by seed, and it grows really tall and drapes down, and these beautiful, gorgeous, pendulum ... They're these tassels, these long, red tassels, and so Love-Lies-Bleeding, which actually looks like someone had stuck someone with a knife, and the blood's pouring out, but it is absolutely stunning, and I have walked through gardens.

Chris: It doesn't always grow as tall as I would like it to in some places, and I think that's just a matter of finding its perfect spot, but it always grows, but I've seen them so tall. They're taller than me, and they're just draping down, and you're walking by them, and they're just fabulous, and they make great cut flowers.

You put them at the base of a flower arrangement. They're stunning. I mean, it's just ... They're very cool. So I really like that because it's different, and actually, it's a grain.

Theresa: Oh, I didn't even know that.

Chris: Yeah. It was a grain that the Aztecs and the Greeks and everything all ate it and decorated with it and everything. So it's a very cool plant, and I think, mostly, you would have to buy it by seed because I think I found one nursery in the Sacramento area that did have it, but for the most part, I've had to do it by seed. So ... And-

Theresa: But it's easy to grow, so we would be ...

Chris: It is.

Theresa: Yeah.

Chris: It is easy to grow, and that's why I don't mind so much telling people about it because it's not like ... You're not going to have a hard time growing it. That's for sure. So the other thing I really like are stocks. That's my favorite scent in a flower, actually.

Theresa: Ah. Okay.

Chris: Yes. I love the sort of carnation smell, that very spicy ... I don't want to say cinnamon-y, but it's just a very spicy, sweet smell, and I love that and stock. Oh, my gosh. It is potent. I mean, if you grow that by your front door, it is absolutely amazing. So that's one of my favorite ones. It's easy to grow. It's a cool weather plant. For us in California, you've really got to focus on growing it sort of towards the winter and then also at the very beginning of the fall because once our sunny weather hits, it kind of fries it.

Theresa: Yeah. It doesn't do so well in California's heat, but where I used to grow a stock was when we had window boxes. I grew it in there, and oh, my gosh.

Chris: Isn't it beautiful? Oh.

Theresa: Yes. And you open up the windows, and then the breeze would blow in the fragrance.

Chris: Oh, it's so beautiful. It really is, and also, depending on where you're at in California, I would think that southern California would have an extremely hard time. I'm in northern California in the foothills, and we just moved to a new farm, actually, and a little way above me, we moved down from there. They

actually get snow. So we have a little bit longer of cooling. So we, sometimes, can do it, but we don't do it as well as other states. But the point is that they're wonderful. They smell delicious. They're not hard to grow, and I can't believe this fragrance, and they're lovely. They're very lovely old-fashioned flowers. They're just gorgeous.

Chris: And then Zinnias, and I want to mention Zinnias, as boring as that may sound because Zinnias are like, "Yeah, yeah. Everyone grows Zinnias." But here's the thing about them. A, they're easy to grow. I mean, you fall off a log and grow them. They love to grow, and they are ... Well, first of all, there's so many different colors and types. Some are just really big, fat, handsome, or tiny. They're, for the most part, cut and come again. So I know there's a variety called that, but mostly Zinnias do that anyway. You cut them. More take their place. It's so much fun, and they have a long season, a long growing season, but they, also ... really important to me. They hold up in vases. These guys hold up like I cannot believe. I'm replacing other flowers, and these guys, oh, two weeks down the road, they're still sitting there. I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" Yeah, and of course, you want to recut the stem a little bit so it can take up more water and stuff, but my point just being that they hold up a long time. They're easy to grow. Butterflies love them, and they're lovely in your garden. There's little cheerful heads everywhere.

Chris: I mean, I think they're ... I don't even think sunflowers are ... Sunflowers are so cheery and wonderful, and you just smile when you see them and stuff, but I think Zinnias are the same way. I really do, and I swear, everybody can grow them. I know in some states where there's a lot more moisture than there is in California, if you plant them too close together, you might get a mildew problem, a powdery mildew. We don't tend to get them too much here because we're a little bit ... we don't have as much humidity. So the funguses don't really want to grow as much, but ... So you do want to give them a little room, but they're wonderful, and like I said, they're easy to grow. So they are one of my favorites because they're one of my go-to.

Theresa: And that's really good to know about the spacing because here in ... I'm in southern California, so I didn't realize that they could get mildew, but yeah. If you have some space so they can get some circulation, that's a really good tip.

Chris: Exactly.

Theresa: So you, also ... I noticed just as I was thumbing through that a lot of the heirlooms were also really good as dried flowers, and I love dried flowers because then, of course, they last longer with the color. So would it be hard to have you pick what's your favorite flower that could also be a dried flower?

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- Chris: It's straw flowers. Straw flowers are so amazing! If you have not grown straw ... No, you have to grow them. No, you have to. I don't care. Everybody [crosstalk 00:31:05]
- Theresa: They don't look real. They look like your-
- Chris: They don't.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Chris: They don't. And so what happens is ... Okay, they're great "dried" ... quote, unquote, dried flowers, but, dude, they're born dried, right? They're born dried.
- Theresa: They are.
- Chris: It's crazy. It's like ... So they open up, and I swear to you. Every time, I'm amazed. Every single time, I'm amazed when they open up. So they're so pleasing. I love them. One thing about them, though, is that their stems don't dry well. So what happens is when you cut them for drying, because they'll last forever after that as long as you don't crush them, you either can use them ... The stems will dry and shrivel up, and they will kind of be gone. They don't hold up at all. They just fly away, and then you have the heads. So that's great if you were to, say, glue them to something. You could use them that way, but if you wanted them to stay with the long stems for a dried arrangement, you would want to take floral wire and actually stick the wire through the bottom of the head and back down again and make a fake stem for yourself-
- Theresa: Oh, okay.
- Chris: ... and then that dried stem will fall off, but you'll still have a stem with a flower on it albeit the stem is wire, but you have to do it that way. But I love them. They grow well. There's so many different colors. The pure white is so white, and they're so cool. I have to have those in my garden, and again, they're great for even the flower farm because then, you can have all these dried flowers and sell them in the winter as dried. So that's always-
- Theresa: Ah. Yeah.
- Chris: Yeah. That's always nice. [inaudible 00:32:32]
- Theresa: Yeah. Oh, that's really good. I just have to say I'm still laughing that you said, "Dude, they're born dried."
- Chris: They are, though. Oh, my gosh. I don't know how to explain it.

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- Theresa: No, I remember when they grew. The first time I ever grew them, I kept touching them. As they're in the garden, I'm like, "These are alive, but they're dry."
- Chris: They're not.
- Theresa: Yeah. I know. It's really weird.
- Chris: Oh, it's a very strange phenomenon, and so what makes them so fun ... See, I think, in my opinion, they would be super exciting to show children because that's weird. [inaudible 00:33:05] Well, and the other thing I love to show children ... because I used to ... When I taught 4-H, I did a gardening class, and to get the boys in there, I wanted them to see that gardening is not just for girls, not at all, in fact, and it was funny because I would lure them in, in October with the Venus flytraps.
- Theresa: Oh, yes.
- Chris: So they would join my group just so they could do the man-eating plant. It was super [inaudible 00:33:28]. Anyway, but I could see the straw flowers being like that. It's just fascinating. And the other one is *Lunaria annua*, which is the honesty plant or money plant.
- Theresa: Oh, yes.
- Chris: Love this thing. In fact, I have some growing right now because they're biennials. So yeah. So I planted them in the summer, and they're nice little tiny plants right now, and then what will happen is they will ... In the early summer, they're going to produce flowers, and they're kind of nondescript. They're cute. They're little pink flowers, whatever, little plant, but then they produce these gorgeous seed pods, and it's funny. At first, you're like, "Where are the gorgeous seed pods? These are just flat, weird-looking, solid things," but the neat thing is when you take your fingers and rub these coins, that outer shell falls off, and these silvery, moon-type things are left, and they're beautiful. They're beautiful in dried arrangements. If you go to Michael's, they sell them there. I mean, these are plants that people use all the time for all different sorts of crafting. In fact, I haven't been able to find an example of this, but I am hunting it down, but I was told that these guys were used, sometimes, as little canvasses, and the Victorians used to paint little vignette images on those little silver coins, and I thought, "I need to [inaudible 00:34:47]." And I heard this, but I can't find them. So I'm really interested in somehow finding that because I think that'd be really, really exceptional. That would be really crazy.
- Theresa: Yeah. Well, I remember that I saw those. I first saw honesty plants when I was little, and they felt very magical to me. So I think that's another plant that if you

have kids or grandkids that it would be a fun thing to grow so that they could see that whole transformation.

Chris: Absolutely. I totally agree. They're like little fairy plants. It's like magic.

Theresa: Yeah. That's ... Yes.

Chris: Yeah.

Theresa: Yeah. They are. They're like little fairy plants. Well, Chris, you had something else in the book, which I thought was kind of fun. You had a little section that had recipes of things that we could do with some of the heirloom plants that we grew, and there was one recipe in there that caught my eye, and it was for lavender honey simple syrup, and I would love for you to share that recipe if you can. You can just give us a synopsis of how it's done because it was so simple, and yet, as soon as I read that, I thought, "What a great thing to put in your ice tea in the summertime," is to make this, and-

Chris: Oh, absolutely.

Theresa: Yeah. It would be really good.

Chris: Absolutely. If you're having a little party or something, can you imagine telling people, "Have some of lavender honey simple syrup. Yes." And they're just staring at you going, "Oh, my gosh." So anyway, it's really simple. So you just take water. I mean, I have here just a small amount, so a cup of water. You bring the water and a tablespoon of organic lavender flower. So remember, you're not going to want to just gather these somewhere where, perhaps, someone sprayed something. So you want to make sure of that. And you put it in the water, and then you bring that to a boil over medium-high heat, and then you add a cup of honey to that and also, a half a cup of sugar, and then you stir it until it's dissolved. You reduce the heat and let it simmer for 10 minutes. Then you take the pan from the heat, and you just let it steep. So it's literally drawing out the essential oils of that lavender. So you don't even have to go buy these essential oils. You're making your essential oils. [inaudible 00:36:47] Yeah, right? [inaudible 00:36:49] stuff. I can get it straight from my plants. Hello?

Chris: And then you pour the syrup through like a mesh strainer into sterilized glass jars or one glass jar in this case. It's not that much, separating the lavender buds from that syrup, and then once it cools, you put it in the refrigerator, and it stores for up to two weeks. And yeah, I mean, you could use it for your iced tea. That's my favorite way. I'm a huge iced tea drinker. So everything, I have to try in my iced tea first. You can flavor your coffee with it, I mean, sweeten your coffee, your hot chocolate, cocktails or mocktails. Anything you can do with these plants and make a cocktail, just keep the alcohol out of it if it's a mocktail,

add all the other stuff. And yeah, you can literally ... Anything you want to sweeten with this ... I mean, it's wonderful. I mean, just keep it in there and test it out on some things that you're drinking or eating.

- Theresa: Oh, I love it. Yeah. This is so good. Well, thank you for sharing that because I thought that, as I was reading it, I'm like, "That's so simple," and ha ha, simple syrup.
- Chris: It's simple syrup. Yeah.
- Theresa: But it's so simple and easy, and then you get to have something of your garden that you can also share with people who come over. So I really love that.
- Chris: Absolutely.
- Theresa: Well, Chris, I just want to thank you for coming on. This is so awesome. I really love how your book is probably, maybe opening the eyes for people who didn't really understand how important heirlooms can be, not just for their beauty, but like I said at the beginning, for our soul, and that's what heirlooms mean for me, and they add so much to my own garden, and I'm really excited that you're sharing this information because other people need to know some of these plants that maybe have fallen out of favor that they've never even heard of, and yet, they are so valuable or they wouldn't have been passed down through the generations, and through your book, they're going to learn about that. So thanks for coming on.
- Chris: Absolutely. No, thank you so much for having me again. I love doing this with you, Theresa. It's wonderful.
- Theresa: Aw. Thanks.
- Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that conversation with Chris McLaughlin, the author of *Growing Heirloom Flowers*. Now, as promised, she has the recipe for her lavender honey syrup in the show notes for you to download. So you can get that and all the information on Chris and her book in the show notes at livinghomegrown.com/171. I hope that this episode inspired you to add some heirlooms to your own garden, and until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care, everybody.
- Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown podcast. Visit livinghomegrown.com 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.