

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 46 - Planning Your Garden

One aspect many of us have included in our Simple Life is having a garden. Our goal is to provide food for our family, seasonings for the food we create, or even just being able to walk outside and gather a bouquet of fresh flowers to decorate our home. The question then becomes, what exactly do we want?

When we talk about gardening, you often hear the words 'type' and 'style'. A type of garden would refer to what you grow – vegetables, herbs, flowers, fruit, or other things. A garden style is how you grow your plants. This can be in raised beds, containers, or inground. You can also have a Theme style of gardening, which simply means to grow several plants in close proximity to each other, where each plant contributes to a specific theme.

Let's talk a bit about both types and styles.

As far as types go, I already mentioned the main ones – vegetables, herbs, flowers, and fruit. Some of us may enjoy growing succulents and other things, but for today, we are going to stick with those four basics.

When it comes to vegetables, you could probably spend most of the day listing all the different ones in existence. But when it comes to planting them in your garden, you need to consider the space you have. Since most of us don't have space in our back yard for a truck garden, you need to balance your space with the vegetables you and your family will eat.

The benefits to growing as much of your own food as possible includes saving money on your grocery bill; having enough to eat fresh and preserve the rest for winter meals; and having a tastier selection than those you can get at the grocery store.

Growing flowers can make your yard a beautiful showcase. When you cut a few to bring inside, you also add smiles, joy, and beauty to your home.

Herbs can be used for seasonings, medicinal purposes, and with some craft projects. Another benefit when it comes to growing any type of garden is it can be healthy. It gets you out into the fresh air, working your garden provides exercise, and there aren't any preservatives in fresh food.

One of the drawbacks of gardening is it is a 'weather permitted' activity. Around here, it rains so much from January to April, we often catch ourselves looking for an ark to come floating out of the pond. I enjoy a good rain, but not as much as the weeds do. Trying to pull weeds from muddy soil though, can create problems, as you run the risk of pulling up your plants as well.

On the flip side, in late spring and summer, the rain just dries up, and we have to deal with the drought. That means pulling out water hoses, hooking up the irrigation systems, and making sure there is enough water to keep the plants alive.

And then you have to keep the harmful insects away yet encourage those that are beneficial. That means refraining from using pesticides on your plants, as those will take them all out – good and bad.

If you are a seasoned gardener, I can already see you shaking your head. None of these things are really drawbacks – they are just a glitch to work around. And truly? They are just a part of gardening. Like most everything in life, you have to accept the good and the bad, and keep moving forward.

As for the 'styles' of gardening, the list can be long. The three primary styles are containers, raised beds, and inground. But no matter what you use to grow your garden in, there is what I call a sub-category to styles.

Each primary style is fairly self-explanatory. A container garden means you use some type of containers for your plants. These can be simple terra cotta or plastic pots you purchase, and those range in size from 4" to half-whiskey barrels. Some gardeners get creative and use old boots, vintage suitcases, enamelware pots, and even watering cans and kitchen strainers. If it will hold water and dirt, it is a good possibility you can grow something in it.

Raised beds come in sizes from 2-foot square to 5-foot galvanized watering troughs. The traditional size is 4' x8', and often the sides are landscape timbers, old tin, or even plastic. The purposes of a raised bed range from being able to have a garden even if your ground isn't conducive to planting – such as if you have more rocks than soil, or poor drainage – to not having enough room in your planting area to have an inground style.

There are benefits to raised beds, as well. Growing a garden in raised beds means you can easily reach the middle of the garden from any side of the bed. This means you don't walk in the garden and compact the soil. Instead, it stays loose and viable, which are great growing conditions for your plants. Another benefit is that they no longer have to be at ground level. If you have physical limitations, you can build or purchase elevated beds which prevents you from having to bend over.

But there is at least one drawback to raised beds. It takes soil to fill them, and that can get expensive. Many people use a mixture of peat moss, potting soil and compost to fill theirs. You can also cut the expense by using the Hügelkultur method. This is when you start with old, partially rotted limbs, leaves, and other natural items, stack them up, and then cover it all with soil. Over time, the limbs break down, leaving healthy soil behind.

Inground gardens can be of any size and shape and is simply just that. You dig up a space in your yard, create rows, and plant.

The sub-category of garden styles is where it can get fun. We talked earlier about Theme Gardens. With these, you can narrow it down to a certain focus. Let's call them recipes. Your garden will be planted according to the ingredients in your recipe. A salad garden may consist of a few types of lettuce, radishes, and maybe green onions, or a favorite herb or two.

A soup garden would take a bit larger container but will call for a trellis to grow snap beans, add a tomato plant, a few carrots, and maybe some trailing thyme. Or a theme garden can combine two different recipes. You can grow a tomato plant in the center, and then grow basil and oregano for spaghetti, and add cilantro plant to use in salsa. Theme gardens can be planted in one large pot, or you can grow even more by adding smaller pots around the main one. Your only limitations are your imagination and your space.

You may like the style of a Shaker Garden. The Shaker's grew primarily vegetables, herbs, and fruit. These were planted inground, and meticulously spaced, composted, and mulched.

Or, you may want to focus on a single style, such as medicinal gardens or crafting gardens. Within these styles of gardening, your focus would be on plants that fit your needs. Medicinal gardens would include herbs to use for medicinal purposes, as well as possibly a shrub, such as elderberry.

A crafting garden would include flowers that could be used for creating dyes, or possibly even vining plants, such as grapes, to create wreaths. There are many flowers which can be dried and used in flower arrangements and for other art purposes.

Are you a tea lover? You may want to consider growing herbs to create your own tea blends. If you love making your own bath and cleaning products, you may want to grow lavender, roses, and other fragrant herbs to add to your creations.

One style of gardening works perfectly with any type and style you can create. It's what I call a Prayer Garden. Whether you plant vegetables, herbs, fruit, or flowers, and regardless of whether you plant in containers, raised beds, or inground – any and all gardens serve as a place to just enjoy the beauty of the plants, and share a quiet moment in prayer with the One who created the very first garden.

The beauty of gardening types and styles is you can create them to fit what you love to do. For me – I love it all. I have a container herb garden, raised beds – which we plan on refocusing on this year to grow strawberries and asparagus; an inground garden for our vegetables, and an orchard in the front for our fruit trees and vines.

My one wish is I could create a bread garden. In this, I would grow wheat one year, and corn the next. That way I could grind my own flour and cornmeal. Unfortunately, I've run out of room, and the Country Boy frowned on my suggestion to tear his shop down, as it would be a perfect place to add another garden.

If you are a seasoned pro, I hope this podcast gave you a bit of food for thought. But if you are, I'm willing to bet you are already outside looking to see where you can either add a new style of garden or extend the one you have.

If you are new to gardening, I highly recommend you try it. Even if you start small, you will not only get some freshness added to your life, whether that is through vegetables, herbs, fruit, or flowers, but you may just find you have added a whole new layer of enjoyment to your life.

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand just visit my website at www.thefarmwife.com.

If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie