

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 62 - Do You Have a Canning and Food Preservation Addiction?

One of the best things about living a Simple Life is friends. I happen to have one that is quick-witted and an absolute delight to spend time with. She recently sent me a photo of her food preservation pantry, which was stacked high with canning supplies and equipment.

The text portion of the message said, "I was wondering when the next meeting for Canning and Food Preservation Anonymous is. My husband says I have a problem!" And she called later to tell me that isn't even half of what she has.

My response? I told her I needed to check my schedule, but I thought the next meeting was this coming Saturday at 11.

Yes. My friend Audi and I are canning junkies. It's difficult for us to be in a bookstore in the off season, as we can spend days looking at all the canning and preserving cookbooks. We spend hours reading posts, articles, and ideas on the internet, searching for new ways to preserve a tomato. And our husbands no longer want to go shopping with us, as all we are interested in is new vegetables we can grow and how we can preserve them. So, in a way, it has become an addiction.

While I was chuckling over this, I realized I could very well be addicted to growing my own food and preserving the harvest. From my point of view, it is more than just about taste. It's healthier, saves money, and feeds my creative nature, just to name a few reasons why I love it so much.

What about you? Are you addicted to growing and preserving your own food? If you aren't sure, let's look at all the possible symptoms you could have.

Symptom #1 – Growing your Own Food. If you find it mandatory to have at least some type of garden, whether it is a few herbs on a windowsill, a container garden on a balcony, or a kitchen garden in your back yard, this might be viewed as one of the symptoms of an addiction.

The way to determine if it is a bona fide symptom, look at your reasons. First, if you can pass up the garden section at your local store, drive past a vegetable plant sale at a nearby nursery or toss seed catalogs in the trash without even looking at the cover, then you don't have to worry too much.

However, if your mailbox is overflowing with seed catalogs and you have a designated set of highlighters you use when you go through them, then it may be an indication there is a problem.

If, once you have marked every seed you could possibly ever want in the catalogs, and then look in your freezer at your Seed Bank to see what else you might need, then you can move from indication to concern.

If you actually plant those seeds, tend your garden faithfully, and think about how you can preserve those vegetables as you are pulling weeds, then you may want to move from concern to questioning.

Symptom #2 is when you find yourself asking Can I Preserve That? On a regular basis. As you wash the garden dirt off your hands so you can grab your food preserving cookbooks to see if you will have enough tomatoes to can sauce, diced tomatoes, salsa AND catsup, with enough left over to make a short batch of pizza sauce and add some to the homemade vegetable soup you also want to put up for the winter, you might be able to excuse it as just an obsession for tomatoes.

However, if you find yourself counting the cucumber, carrot and bell pepper plants while you're in the garden and thinking 25 plants of each might not be enough, go ahead and move from just a tomato obsession to a fresh food obsession.

Symptom #3 – Taking a Trip to the Grocery Store is a Test of Your Stamina. How many times have you pushed a cart through the produce section of the grocery store and thought to yourself, "I wonder if I can grow that in my garden?" As you move down the canned vegetable aisle, do you study what's available, or are you wondering how you can find room in your garden to grow not only green beans, but also red kidney beans, peas, lima beans, black beans, and other varieties that can be dried, because if you could, they would be perfect in a 15 Bean Soup mix.

If most of the time you spend in the grocery store is spent on how you can grow/can/preserve those items on the shelves – and knowing you could probably do it for a lot less money, then you may have just moved to the next step – which would be considered a problem.

Symptom #4 – You are in a position to eat processed food when dining out or at a friends' house, and struggle not to make that 'Yuck' face. (Let me guess, you're making that face right now, just thinking about it...)

There is something about growing fresh food that alters the flavors. The first time you attempt to grow any vegetable, you question whether you have done something wrong, as it doesn't taste the same as the stuff that comes out of the can. When you try and figure out what the difference is, you realize it actually has flavor. It isn't salty. It doesn't have an almost metallic aftertaste.

What you are used to eating out of a can has probably been treated with artificial flavoring and color, has been laced with preservatives, and 'infused' with vitamins and minerals – you know, just to make it sound healthier. In most cases, commercially grown produce has also been treated with insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, and a boat load of other stuff – served on the 'sides', if you get my drift.

That doesn't count the fact that most vegetables are picked before they are fully ripe so they aren't damaged in the shipping process. In addition to that, many vegetable plants are bred specifically with shipping in mind. Which, in turn, means the flavor has been bred out of them. It doesn't take long for you to figure out that homegrown produce just tastes better and is healthier for you.

Symptom #5 – You feel a deeper sense of accomplishment and contentment 'shopping for your food' right out your back door than you do fighting traffic, spending your hard-earned money, and hauling bags of groceries from the car to the kitchen.

You're not only eating healthier when you grow your own food, but you save time, money, and can avoid traffic jams – both on the road and in the aisles of the grocery store.

Now that you know some of the symptoms of a Canning and Food Preservation addiction, it's time to see how you scored.

If you only have one symptom, you have nothing to worry about. More than likely, which ever area you checked is probably just a passing phase.

If you have two symptoms, you don't really have to worry too much. You are probably content to just have a cherry tomato plant in a pot that allows you occasional snacking when the mood hits. But it also wouldn't hurt your feelings if the plant died.

If you have three symptoms, it may be time to think about whether this is an area of concern or not. To determine whether or not it can turn into a problem, see if you can pass this test. Go one year without growing anything. If you can do it, then you might be okay. If just the thought of not growing at least something gives you a case of hives, then you may still have time to get help.

If you have four symptoms, you need to recognize that this obsession could easily turn into an addiction. At this point, you have a choice - and that is only if you are capable of making it. You can either walk away and adjust your budget for more grocery store runs, and start training your face to smile when the yuck factor takes over, or just give up and give in.

If you have five symptoms, I am so sorry to tell you - you are at the point of no return. Your mind, heart, and body will not allow you to turn back. Instead, you have now instilled the importance and necessity of growing your own food in your mind. Nothing will ever taste the same, and you will find yourself saying 'I can grow it/can it/cook it better at home' any time you eat at a restaurant.

Our garden is still young yet, but the other day I walked out my back door, pulled about 7 fresh Lemon Squash and two cucumbers out of the garden. I say I walked, but it was really more like floating. I was excited to be eating fresh vegetables that didn't come from the grocery store. And we savored every bite.

With each passing day, we will be harvesting more and more, until my kitchen will be overflowing with baskets of fresh vegetables, canning supplies, and jars of deliciousness cooling on a rack on the table. And I can't wait.

Canning and preserving your own food really can become addictive. There is just something about working hard in the garden, preserving your harvest, and cooking your meals that makes it taste better and a more satisfying experience.

And if you did score a 4 or 5, then it may help to join your local group of Canning and Food Preservation Anonymous. I think the meeting is this Saturday at 11. But just so you know, in June and July, you may not find anyone there. Instead, they'll be at home - either in the garden harvesting produce, or elbow deep in canning jars.

If you're lucky, they may make the meeting somewhere around September or October. And that's only if they don't have a fall garden ready to be harvested.

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 for 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