

[MUSIC PLAYING]

CATHY You know I just noticed that the program today has mostly been dedicated to the natural world if you've been listening-- climate change, efforts to build back up Minnesota's white pine forests, Minnesota geology and fossilized shark's teeth. And now using the veggies you've grown this summer for your Thanksgiving dinner this Thursday, gardener Meg Cowden will use everything she's got from her harvest this fall. She's the author of *Plant Grow Harvest Repeat* and she is back with tips on Thanksgiving cooking, finding the best produce, and her mindset and gardening during the snowy winter season. Hey, Meg, welcome back. How are you?

MEG COWDEN: Hi, Cathy. I'm great. Thanks for having me.

CATHY Good. Say, earlier this fall we talked about all of the harvesting and the canning you were doing and I commented that you must be really quite tired. And now that your garden is covered in snow, what are you up to?

MEG COWDEN: I am really trying to rest, but it's not quite happening yet. It's kind of problem. I think might share this with me. I think a lot of my identity is on productivity and something visible and so I seem to be in a cycle that I'm trying to break. So the garden is out there, though. I'm looking at it out my window and it is now sleeping. And it is trying to tell me that it is my time to rest, too.

CATHY Yes, because gardens, gardening helps you reflect on the rhythms of life. We've talked about that in the past.

MEG COWDEN: Right. And I think this off season is just an opportunity to reflect and reset. And it's really hard to listen if you're going all the time. And so this time of pause is just an opportunity for me to see the garden in a different light. Not only is it not there anymore and I have to imagine it, but just this time away from gardening and really slowing down helps me gain quite a bit of perspective on my gardening goals and really what went well. Now I can step back and really assess.

CATHY Yeah. I got to hit the pause button in a different way. Let's talk about cooking this week. I assume you're going to be using a lot from your garden to make your Thanksgiving dinner?

MEG COWDEN: Yeah. I had to buy rosemary because I forgot to dig mine up before it got really cold a couple of weeks ago.

CATHY Oh well.

MEG COWDEN: But other than that every vegetable or fruit is from the garden, which is pretty awesome. Yeah.

CATHY That is awesome. Wow!

MEG COWDEN: Yeah.

CATHY How are you going to incorporate the harvest into your Thanksgiving meal on Thursday? Tell me what you're thinking about.

MEG COWDEN: Yep. So for the first time ever, my apple pie will finally be from home-grown apples from a tree planted in 2017. So I've got a Haralson apple pie on the menu.

The other pie that I always make is pumpkin and I didn't grow pumpkin. So it's going to be a butternut pie, but we're not going to know the difference once you get it flavored and everything like that. So I'm totally cool subbing my butternut squash for a pumpkin.

So I advise people, if that's all you got, just go with it. I could also use Delicata. So those are the two winter squash I grew.

We've got lots of potatoes. I think I might have mentioned that. So our home-grown mashed potatoes are a huge hit. Brussels sprouts also from the garden.

Our herbs went into some sourdough bread that I made starting last week. And then I made another loaf earlier this week and I've turned them into croutons. So that was like an aha moment for me a few years ago.

Now people might be thinking, she is crazy. You could buy a bag of croutons at the store. And I'm like, yes, you could, but part of this is really the joy of slowing down and finding ways to just connect deeper with our food. And so I was like, why not make a loaf of bread for my stuffing?

And then I've got tons of root veggies that I will roast. So I've got turnips, and parsnips, and beets. And butternut will also go in a roasted root side dish that I always like to make. And then, of course, onions, and garlic, and herbs, and good things like that.

CATHY WURZER: Oh, gosh, that sounds great. For those of us who didn't do as well this year as you did with your garden, do you have any tips for shopping for produce this year? How do you pick the best local produce?

MEG COWDEN: Yeah, I would probably shout out to our amazing co-op system in Minnesota. We have the largest per capita number of food co-ops, I think, in the nation. I think it's a testament to the Scandinavian roots that settled here back some years ago.

So I would definitely shop my co-ops for things, like, there's going to be tons of local root vegetables that I guarantee you were harvested six weeks ago. Maybe a little longer than that, but local, the flavor is going to be better. Brussels sprouts, too, I guarantee you can find those. And you can surely find local apples.

I mean, the beauty of this local food is that it's fresher and it's obviously had less of a carbon footprint. But the fresher the food, just you just let the food sing. You cook it less.

And I'm so spoiled with the taste of food that my idea of what tastes good is probably a little different than people who don't have a garden. Our potatoes taste different because they're so fresh. And my Brussels sprouts probably taste slightly different.

But yeah, I would definitely recommend looking for-- I mean, there's tons of great farms. And if you had caught me a little bit sooner, Cathy, I would have said try to go to a winter farmer's market in the Twin Cities. There's lots of those that happen on the weekends in November. But I think we are down to the wire, so I would recommend co-ops for finding and sourcing local veggies.

CATHY Good idea. Say, what dish are you most excited for this year? It sounds like maybe your apple pie? Maybe I'm
WURZER: wrong.

MEG COWDEN: Apple pie. Yeah, no, the apple-- I make a really-- my husband loves my pies. I do, too. All butter crust. It's for the win now on that one.

CATHY Yeah.

WURZER:

MEG COWDEN: And I love our stuffing, which we put apples in, and water chestnuts, and wild rice, and celery, and onions. And so that's always one of our favorites that we enjoy. We're also smoking a turkey for the first time on a new smoker, so that is also going to be kind of exciting.

I love just the flavors together. And then every bite of food is like, oh my gosh, we grew that. Can you believe that? It's just a continued moment of awe for me.

I mean, it happens all summer when I bite into a tomato sandwich. I'm like, oh man, we grew that tomato. It's going to be the same thing on Thursday. The whole meal, looking at it, it's almost overwhelming in its simplicity and its bounty that we produced that.

CATHY It's a beautiful thing. Obviously, it means a lot to you to have a feast that comes from your very own garden.

WURZER:

MEG COWDEN: Yeah, it does. And really this feast, if you travel all the way back in time to our fruit tree, this is a sixth year in the making meal that we're going to consume over the course of an hour or so. And that's true of any meal that we eat. But because I've grown it all, I have that intimate awareness of that. And that makes it more reverent in a way, if that makes sense.

CATHY Yes, it does. Oh, my goodness, Meg. I hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving. It sounds like you will.

WURZER:

And I'm grateful for you and what you've done for the show. Thank you so much. We'll talk soon.

MEG COWDEN: Thank you, Cathy. Thank you so much.

CATHY Happy Thanksgiving.

WURZER:

MEG COWDEN: Thank you so much. Take care. You, too.

CATHY You, too. Minnesota gardener Meg Cowden, she's the author of the book *Plant Grow Harvest Repeat*. Check it out.

WURZER: She is a great guest and she knows an awful lot.