

Author Stacy Lyn Harris: 5 Things You Need To Know To Create A Successful Vegetable Garden To Grow Your Own Food

An Interview With Martita Mestey

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As we all know, inflation has really increased the price of food. Many people have turned to home gardening to grow their own food. Many have tried this and have been really successful. But others struggle to produce food in their own garden. What do you need to know to create a successful vegetable garden to grow your own food? In this interview series, called “5 Things You Need To Know To Create A Successful Vegetable Garden To Grow Your Own Food” we are talking to experts in vegetable gardening who can share stories and insights from their experiences.

As a part of this series, we had the pleasure of interviewing Stacy Lyn Harris.

[Stacy Lyn Harris](#) is a southern lifestyle guru, television host, celebrity chef, best-selling author of [Love Language of the South: A Celebration of the Food, Hospitality, and the Stories of My Southern Home](#) (Worthy Books, March 5, 2024). Host of The Sporting Chef on Outdoor Channel, the Alabama native and mother of 7 has built an engaged social following of 250k+ with her simple approach to sourcing and preparing meals –bringing seasonal ingredients straight from her garden, pasture and woods to create rustic elegant meals.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit more. Can you tell us a bit about your “backstory”?

I grew up in the South enjoying my Granny’s slower lifestyle, eating her fresh from the garden foods, and soaking up all I could learn from her. I have an undergraduate degree in psychology. I then went on to get a law degree and practice law before “living off the land” with my husband and kids. I am a homeschooling mom of seven children. Each has a love for learning, the outdoors, gardening, and great food.

I wrote my first book, *Happy Healthy Family Tracking the Outdoors In*, in 2013, which led to my blog, StacyLynHarris.com, 4 books about great food, gardening, sustainability, wild game, and television career evolving with my growing family and homesteading journey.

My latest cookbook, *Love Language of the South*, is a cookbook/memoir about Southern culture, hospitality, and my very favorite Southern recipes I cook on a regular basis. I study southern culture and love having the opportunity to share it.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

To me, everything pertaining to my career has been interesting and exciting. Each new venture leads to the next exciting venture. I couldn’t dream of having a more exciting life.

Besides writing books and hosting a television show, I’ve been honored and astonished about being asked to present several times for groups of writers and experts in sustainable agriculture.

Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

Perseverance, passion, and a love for people. My mother taught me from the very earliest age that “nothing worth having is ever easy.” I had a friend in the entertaining teaching space once tell me to “show up every day with the same fervor as the day before and you’ll succeed.”

As with any business, especially the entertainment space where you interact with the public, there will be naysayers, haters, and plenty of “no’s.” To continue in the face of rejection and criticism has no doubt been instrumental to my success. Most people give up. If you’re the last one standing you’ve succeeded.

I’ve been told I’d never be able to get a book published, to host my own television show, or to make income from what I am doing. Showing up every day, doing what is required is the key to my success. I have always felt that if I do the hard work God will see to it that I succeed.

Without passion, I do not believe a brand can survive. For me, being authentic has kept my passion alive. I’ve been asked to endorse products that I wouldn’t ordinarily use or write books that I am not passionate about. Though very lucrative, it would have been a mistake to have entertained them due to the fact I would have burned out. There is no way to sustain unauthenticity. Staying true to one’s passion is the only consistent way to success.

Lastly, the most significant trait that I believe has brought success is my deep desire to make people's lives better because I truly love people. Nothing else matters in the world. Bringing joy to people through entertaining them or being able to teach something that will add value to them and others around them is what keeps me going. It drives my perseverance and my passion.

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

I've noticed in life that no one thing or one day, no matter how great, is wrapped up in a perfect package with a bow on top. I've also noticed that when you feel like you are living your worst day, there's always something good in your life to be thankful for. So, I like to say, "There's always good with bad, and bad with good. Life is great, but it's always a little messy."

Another quote that means a great deal to me is penned by Winston Churchill: *Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.* I've always believed that failure is necessary to get you to the place you are meant to be. It is never fatal, but quite the opposite when you act with courage to take the next steps that will eventually lead to success. In the same way, success is not final; it's the journey that matters and the journey rarely ends with successful people. There's always the next venture that may end in success or failure, but neither stops the courageous.

Probably at least once a day I think about one of these two quotes. Knowing that failure isn't fatal, and that there is always something good, even on bad days, presses me to do the next right thing in my life and business. I can walk in gladness knowing all will be well, no matter the outcome.

Are you working on any interesting or exciting new projects now? How do you think that will help people?

I just completed a book, *Love Language of the South: the Stories of the Food, the Hospitality, and My Southern Home*. It's a love story in a way. This book encompasses my love of the South and those people who have impacted my life, the lessons I've learned, and the food relating to these stories. In the South, food is our love language and is present at just about every event. It's imperative to have your arsenal at the ready for celebrations, holidays, or just when a neighbor stops by looking for their dog!

This book gives everyone, even those that don't know how to cook, an arsenal of recipes and meals for every occasion you find yourself in. Having your arsenal full will give you the ability to show true hospitality by giving you the time you need to form relationships, meet needs, and enjoy the people you love in your life. The anxiety of knowing what to prepare will be gone.

In addition to making hospitality easy, my hope is the readers will relate to my stories and they will be inspired and encouraged, or they may give them a bit of refreshment as they escape a while into my Southern world.

Ok super. Let's now shift to the main part of our discussion about creating a successful garden to grow your own food. Can you help articulate a few reasons why people should be interested in making their own vegetable garden? For example, how is it better for our health? For the environment? For our wallet?

Gardening is one of the greatest joys in life at just about any age. Aside from growing and eating the best food life has to offer, gardening is therapeutic and healthy, encourages deeper family relationships, develops life skills that everyone needs to know.

The health benefits are overwhelming when you grow your own and harvest when vegetables are meant to be harvested. For instance, there are more vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and flavor in vine-ripened tomatoes. Another benefit is the ability to plant a variety of

vegetables and fruits that you can't get from the grocery store.

Lastly, growing your own garden cuts down on the grocery bill, at least after the first year. Startup years cost a little more due to having to have nutrient rich soil and other necessities.

Where should someone start if they would like to start a garden? Which resources would you recommend? Which plants should they start with?

My recommendation to anyone starting a garden is to find a local gardener. They are going to know what grows best in your zone and area. When encouraging others to garden, I always guide them to start with an herb garden. Herbs are so incredibly easy to grow and elevate just about every dish.



Can you please share your “5 Things You Need To Know To Create A Successful Vegetable Garden To Grow Your Own Food”?

1. Soil Prep. Soil prep is essential for a pest-free, nutrient rich garden. Have your soil tested every year to see what you need to amend your garden for optimal growth.
2. Seed Prep. Partnering with another garden from your area will help you with seed selection. Making sure that the vegetable and fruits seeds that you purchase will grow in your area will dictate your garden's success or failure.
3. Fertilization. Without fertilizing your plants, whether organic or otherwise, your plants will not flower, bud, or produce.
4. Pest Control. Pests can wipe out your garden in a night. I've had that happen, especially with squash. Finding out what works best takes a lot of trial and error.
5. Harvesting, Pruning, and Composting. These three go together. Harvesting at the right time is imperative to great food and more productive plants. When you harvest, pruning some of the spent vines or plants and then composting them will create a better garden for the next year. Compost also plays a big role in a garden.

What are the most common mistakes you have seen people make when they start a garden? What specifically can be done to avoid those errors?

The primary mistake people make when gardening is planting too early or too late for your area or planting the wrong seeds for the area in which they are planting. A few other problems I see are watering too much or too little, and not pulling weeds and harvesting the garden regularly.

This is a little embarrassing, but I planted my first garden with seeds from a supermarket! To say the least, I didn't see many vegetables that year. Talking with seasoned gardeners in your area will keep you making this costly mistake.

What are some of the best ways to keep the costs of gardening down?

Saving seeds is by far the best way to keep the cost of gardening down. They must be heirloom seeds in that hybrids won't produce the same fruit after the first season. Buying from a reputable heirloom seed store is imperative. After buying them the first year, you'll never have to buy them again. Most vegetables and fruits go to seed toward the end of their growing season. Collecting them and keeping them in a cool, dry location is all that is necessary.

If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?

There are two movements I would like to inspire. Like Billy and Franklin Graham, I'd spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and share the grace and eternal life he gives. There is so much peace in that and most of the world is looking for peace. There is only one way to obtain that and that is in the person of Christ.

The second movement I'd like to inspire is to educate and provide every community in the world with seeds that would grow in their area. I'd send "gardening missionaries" to every location in the world. If there are places with no water, then that would be addressed with engineers; if the soil is lacking, amendments would be made.

Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why?

Ben Carson. I know that may sound odd from my business model, but in my opinion, he is truly a dynamic man. His interesting and full life reveals a life of faith, hope, generosity, integrity, humility, and hard work. He is confident, steady, and fearless. I believe he cares about others more than himself and is willing to sacrifice tireless hours to care for others in his career as a surgeon and as a Godly man in politics. His mission is for others and it is self-evident. I'd love to pick his brain on many subjects!

How can our readers further follow your work online?

I send out a weekly newsletter from my website, [StacyLynHarris.com](https://stacylynharris.com). You can find me on your favorite social networks @stacylynharris. Stacy Lyn Harris' [Website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#) and [YouTube](#)

Thank you so much for the time you spent on this interview. We wish you only continued success and good health.