

Simplified Speech #072 – Houseplants

Episode description

Houseplants add colour and life to any room. Andrew and Suzanne talk about their love for houseplants, the plants in their collections, and their best care tips. Find out how to talk about adding a bit of nature to your home in this Simplified Speech episode.

Fun fact

Houseplants are becoming more and more popular with people who rent apartments and are not allowed to have pets. Having plants can improve mental health and air quality, and they make a space more beautiful.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To be frank
- Hard to gauge
- To stoke the fire
- Totally nerd out
- Back from the brink
- Emotional rollercoaster





Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hey, Suzanne. How's it going?

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew, doing pretty good, gotta say. And you?

Andrew: I'm a little bit sad, Suzanne, **to be frank** with you.

Suzanne: Oh no, why?

Andrew: My girlfriend gave me a beautiful houseplant about 2 weeks ago. She gave me a clipping of one of her houseplants. And it's a little tree and I'm not sure what the name of it is, but it's beautiful little tree. It's got mostly white leaves, but the leaves are green in the middle and it looks like they're almost coloured in with a coloured pencil. So it's a really beautiful tree and it's very delicate. So she took a clipping and put it in water and the branch grew some roots after about a month or 6 weeks, and she put it into a nice pot for me and gave it to me as a present. And I was really stoked because I love the colour of the leaves on this houseplant.

Suzanne: That's really nice of her to propagate that plant for you.

Andrew: Yeah, propagate—this means to grow, right?

Suzanne: Exactly. You take a small piece of something and then you grow it into its own thing. Its own tree.

Andrew: Its own tree. So, anyways, she gave me this lovely tree, but I unfortunately killed it really quickly. Within, like, 4 days, it died.

Suzanne: Oh no, how?

Andrew: I'm not sure. So I think what I did was I put it in a sunny place on the windowsill in my apartment, and this tree really doesn't like full, direct sunlight. So it was fine in the morning one day when I left for work, and when I came home in the evening, it was completely dead. And there was no way that I could resurrect it, that I could bring it back to life. So I felt so bad. She spent all this time propagating the tree for me and then it died almost immediately.

Suzanne: Oh no, that's tough. I relate, for sure. It's hard when you don't know the name of the plant, also. This can make things difficult, because you don't know what it needs, right? So it can get a little tricky, you kind of have to test, "OK, maybe this area is good lighting" or "Maybe this one will be good," you know? It's **hard to gauge**.

Andrew: It's very hard to know exactly the conditions that those plants like. And I even thought that the plant may have just been really stressed out because it was in water for the last 6 weeks, right? It grew its roots in water, and then it was transferred to soil. Then I had to take it to my house on the subway for about an hour. So it had a crazy journey and then got placed in a new environment and too much sun.

Suzanne: That's a lot of trauma, yeah.

Andrew: I just overwhelmed the little guy, so he's in plant heaven now.

Suzanne: Aw, I understand. I really love to propagate plants. I was given some plants throughout, I would say, the last couple of years as gifts, and I was not in a place where I was able to take care of them the way they needed to be taken care of because I was going through a lot of things in my life. And these friends of mine gave me plants as gifts, but I wasn't able to, you know, I just had more important things on my mind. So they almost died, and then it's like something reawoke in me, because I love gardening and love plants, but for a while I kind of didn't bother with them through the Master's program.

Andrew: You were just too busy.

Suzanne: I just didn't have time to take care of it, yeah. And so, one day I just woke up and I said, "I can save these plants." So I took pieces of them, I rehabilitated an orchid as well—and she finally bloomed this winter, actually—and I propagated two plants and repotted them. They're little, but they're doing OK, you know? They're plugging along. But it was almost like they were tapping me on the shoulder, "Hey, Sue, like, remember you like plants, come on." It kind of **stoked the fires** or, like, built my passion up again for houseplants. So since then I've been collecting more and more and really enjoy, you know, like, studying them and learning what each plant sort of needs, and yeah.

Andrew: Sue, that's so cool that your passion for houseplants has been rekindled, because this is something we have in common. I also have many houseplants at my place that I'm taking care of, so this is great. And, listeners, if you haven't guessed already, the topic for today's Simplified Speech episode is houseplants.

Suzanne: Yay.



Andrew: So, we're gonna talk all about houseplants and introduce you to some cool vocabulary and expressions that you can use to talk about them, such as words like propagate, which we've already mentioned several times.

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OK, Sue, let's talk about some of the plants that you have in your house. If you had to estimate, how many plants do you have?

Suzanne: Well, I don't know if I have as many as you do, I'm getting more soon. There's some plant sales going on. Let's see, I have about, yeah, maybe, like, twelve.

Andrew: OK, so a good size collection.

Suzanne: Yeah, yeah.

Andrew: And I have a mixture of kind of big, leafy, tropical-style plants and I also have some cacti, I guess is the proper way to pluralize that word, weirdly enough, so, cacti. And succulents are plants that are quite unique looking, they often don't have flowers, they have thicker leaves.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: And they're usually found in drier, arid climates, and they don't like humidity or too much water. So it's very important that I don't overwater them.

Suzanne: Yeah, they can be tricky, right? Overwatering is kind of the easiest way to kill a plant.

Andrew: Yeah, from my Googling, I learned that the number one killer of houseplants is overwatering.

Suzanne: Yes. I think I have just, well, maybe two succulents. I have a haworthia and I have a kalanchoe, which is a succulent also. But I have a few peperomia plants, which are semi-succulent.

Andrew: Semi-succulent.

Suzanne: Yeah, 'cause they have, like, kind of thicker or waxy leaves, but they're more plant-y than succulent-y, if that makes sense. The peperomia pixie plant is fun and the—I think it's like the watermelon one. So, the leaves look like they're the outside of watermelons. It's kind of fun.



Andrew: Oh, I know what that plant is. Yeah, that one's a really cool one.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Plant names are really difficult, aren't they?

Suzanne: Yes, yes.

Andrew: It's hard for me, living in Korea, to know exactly what the plants are that are in my house, because when I go to the plant market and buy them, they have Korean names. And then so I have to first learn the Korean name and then search for the Korean name and try and find the English name. But many plants in English, they have like a nickname and scientific name, which is usually Latin based, which I think some of plants that you just named, you listed their Latin names, right?

Suzanne: Yeah, I think that's like the genus. The peperomia might be the genus, no?

Andrew: Sounds right. It's been many years since I've taken a biology class, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Me too.

Andrew: Sounds good to me.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: So, this is a challenge. Often, I don't know exactly what I buy, what plants I have, so I have to do some Googling and try and compare pictures and try and learn that way. One of my favourite plants in my collection is a coffee tree.

Suzanne: Oh, I don't know that plant. That's cool.

Andrew: Yeah, so it's just, like, you know, you like drinking coffee, I like drinking coffee. The coffee beans have to grow on a tree, and I have one of those trees in my house.

Suzanne: Nice.

Andrew: I'm lovingly caring for it in the hopes that, some day, I can produce enough beans to brew my own cup of coffee.

Suzanne: Oh my gosh, how exciting.

Andrew: My aspiration, yeah.

Suzanne: I think that's one of my favourite things about growing houseplants is seeing the new leaves or the new sprouts or the new fruit or flowers coming out.



Andrew: Yes.

Suzanne: Then you know the plant is happy and you're doing a good job nurturing the plant. We have also some air plants, some really funky plants, and even some seeds for a bonsai tree.

Andrew: Wow, cool.

Suzanne: That's kind of a crazy little experiment. We'll see what happens with that. And one of my favourite plants, too, is the pilea peperomioides. Do you know that one?

Andrew: I don't know that one. Could you describe it a little bit?

Suzanne: Yeah, so it's actually called a Chinese money plant, and it's not a money tree, but a plant. So the leaves look like round coins, like green discs, and the stems come attached to the leaves in the middle of the leaf.

Andrew: I know the one you're talking about, I think. That one is really cool, it's very delicate looking.

Suzanne: Yeah, it's cute. It's really cute and it's easy to propagate, it's very easy to propagate. So I have three offshoots that I'm gonna propagate soon and make into three new plants, hopefully.

Andrew: That's awesome.

Suzanne: Yeah, it's really fun.

Andrew: I don't know if you're the same as me, but the first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is check on my plants.

Suzanne: Totally.

Andrew: And I have a spray bottle where I can mist, because the tropical plants like more of a humid environment and you also have to be careful not to overwater them, right? So I just mist them to try and I guess reproduce some of the humidity they might find in their natural environment.

Suzanne: Exactly, exactly. I have, like, one area of my house that's like the more humid plants, and then I have another area that likes more drier environments. So this way I can put the humidifier closer to the one side of the house than the other, yeah.

Andrew: I wanna buy a humidifier. I think my plants would be really happy if I installed a humidifier near their little area.



Suzanne: They would, and you could even, like, gather them all together, put the humidifier close to them all. Like even just like every few days, you know, or once a week, and then they all can kind of get a bath of humidity together.

Andrew: Right, right.

Suzanne: Yeah and, oh, I forgot to say, I also just planted some flowers outside, and I have a little herb garden now with eight herbs, as well.

Andrew: What herbs are you growing?

Suzanne: The herbs we got were mint and basil.

Andrew: Yum, my favourite, basil.

Suzanne: Yeah, me too, I love it. Oregano, parsley, cilantro.

Andrew: Oh, my second favourite.

Suzanne: I know; I love it, too.

Andrew: Coriander, yeah?

Suzanne: Yes. We got lavender.

Andrew: Oh, it smells so good.

Suzanne: Thyme and rosemary, yes.

Andrew: Beautiful.

Suzanne: At some point, I'll take a picture of our herb garden. It may not be for a while because we have to build it.

Andrew: Has to grow a bit first.

Suzanne: And build the hanging contraption, but yeah.

Andrew: Cool. Sue, that's a great idea, actually. I'm gonna do the same thing. I'm going to take some pictures of my houseplant collection and throw them up on our Facebook and Instagram so that people can see them because I'm sure we're not alone. This is a really popular pastime, growing houseplants. So we probably among our listeners have some experts out there.

Suzanne: Oh, yeah, I bet.

Andrew: If somebody could identify what plants I have, that would be super helpful.



Suzanne: I was going to ask, I wanted to ask you, do you have that, like, very popular monstera?

Andrew: I do not have a monstera, no, but it's really cool. Do you have one of those?

Suzanne: I don't, no, but I'm thinking about it. On my wish list is the calathea—there's like a bunch of those that I love.

Andrew: How do you spell that, do you know?

Suzanne: C-A-L-A-T-H-E-A.

Andrew: Oh, yeah, those are really cool, too.

Suzanne: They're so beautiful, the leaves.

Andrew: I wanna get one of those as well, yeah, they're amazing.

Suzanne: Oh my gosh. Yeah, most of them just need humidity and medium to low light, even. They're pretty good in medium light. So you can even have them more inside your house, not, like, right by the window. Yeah.

Andrew: Last summer when I went to, where was it? Taiwan, I went for a hike in Taiwan and I saw many of the houseplants that I have just growing on the side of the mountain.

Suzanne: Oh my gosh, how cool.

Andrew: Yeah, it was really awesome. I was like, wow, this is an actual subtropical environment, these plants can grow here naturally. So that was really interesting for me, to see where some of these plants come from in their natural habitat.

Suzanne: Yeah, that's really impressive. I would **totally nerd out** on that, too.

Andrew: Yeah, I took way too many photos.

Suzanne: Oh my gosh, I would love to see that.

Andrew: Yeah, well, next time you're in Taiwan, just go for a hike and you can find them.

Suzanne: That's the thing is I would probably want to clip some things and take them home, but I think you're not allowed to do that.

Andrew: I think that's illegal, yeah.

Suzanne: Yeah, you can't bring plants. Well, you can order them through, you know, importers and stuff but, you shouldn't take them on planes.



Andrew: Yeah, that can cause some problems.

Suzanne: That's so cool. I just wanted to ask you, what's your absolute favourite plant? If you had a favourite one.

Andrew: Well, I'm pretty partial to the coffee tree. I think the coffee tree, if I had to pick one, because we've gone through some really difficult times together. I almost killed it and then I brought it **back from the brink** of death to a really healthy state. And then I went on vacation and I had my friend watch it while I was on vacation, and he really almost killed it. It lost almost all of its leaves and I thought it was dead, but I brought it back to life. And now it's really thriving again, it's doing really well. So we've been on an **emotional rollercoaster** together, and so I have a special connection with that coffee tree, I think.

Suzanne: That is something. And did you say anything to that friend when you came back?

Andrew: Yeah, he was doing it for free, so I feel like I couldn't really criticize him too much. And he did a good job with all the other plants, so, yeah, I don't know. I felt like it was my bad for leaving the coffee tree and not his bad because, you know, he doesn't really care about my plants, I think.

Suzanne: Yeah, it's hard, you know, like, it's hard to go on vacation and trust people to—it's nothing against them. You know, like, when I leave my dog somewhere and I ask someone to watch my dog, it's like your child. So you wanna make sure that they're gonna be able to take care of them, but you know people make mistakes, it's OK, it's hard. It's our plants.

Andrew: I know, it's something that I take into consideration, too. It's like, "OK, so if I go away, how will I take care of this?" Or, "Do I have somebody in my life that's responsible enough that I can ask to take care of this plant?" And, yeah, it's something you need to consider before taking this step of buying a new plant.

But just to wrap things up here, Sue, I would say that when you come back from a little trip, it might even be just a couple of days away from your house, a quick little weekend away, when you come back and you see that your plants have grown a little bit, it's so exciting. For some reason, when we see them every day the growth is hard to notice, but when you go away and then come back, then you can see they have grown a lot, it's really quite special.

Suzanne: Yeah, absolutely right.

Andrew: Well, we will leave it at that for today. Thanks, guys, as always for listening. We really appreciate it. And don't forget that the study guide for this episode is on our website, which is Culips.com. And, Sue, we're also all over the place on social media, aren't we?

Suzanne: We are, yes. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube. So just look for Culips English Podcast and you'll find us.

Andrew: Please also do us a favour, everyone, and head on over to Apple Podcasts if you're a Mac user or iPhone user and maybe even if you're an Android user, as well, and subscribe to Culips through Apple Podcasts. And if you have enough time, too, just leave us a quick 5-star rating and a couple of nice words in a review. That would be doing the podcast a huge favour, and we would really appreciate that support from you all. So please head on over to Apple Podcast and do that.

All right, we will be back soon with another new episode, so stay tuned for that, and we'll talk to you next time. Bye, everybody.

Suzanne: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To be frank

Adjective

To be frank means to be honest in a way that the person you are talking to might not expect or like. You can say this before you give your honest thoughts, or you can say it right after.

At the beginning of this episode, Suzanne asks Andrew, “And you?” to find out how he is doing. Andrew says, “I’m a little bit sad, Suzanne, **to be frank** with you.” In casual conversations like this one, most people reply with, “I’m good” without talking about their actual feelings. In this sentence, Andrew is honest about his feelings and says **to be frank** to show he is being completely honest. Therefore, one can use the phrase **to be frank** whenever he or she wants to be completely honest about something that might not usually be said.

To be frank can also be used to let someone know that what you are going to say may upset them or make them angry.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be frank**:

Annabelle: How was your brownie?

Chloe: **To be frank**, I didn’t like it. It had too many nuts.

Isabel: Did you hear how Laura just spoke to me?

Huda: She’s probably sick of answering useless, annoying questions, the replies to which, **to be frank**, are none of your business.

Hard to gauge

Adjective

Hard to gauge means difficult to measure or judge. You can also say that something is easy to gauge or difficult to gauge. This phrase is used as a way to describe a noun.

The word gauge is both a noun and a verb. The verb gauge is the act of measuring or judging something. The noun is an instrument for measuring.

In this episode, Suzanne talks about how hard it is to raise plants when you don't know what type of plant they are. "It can get a little tricky, you kind of have to test, 'OK, maybe this area is good lighting' or 'maybe this one will be good,' you know? It's **hard to gauge**." In this case, it is difficult to judge what to do to make sure the plants will grow well.

Here's one more example with **hard to gauge**:

George: The teacher said to write down how long we think the red string is.

Zaine: It's **hard to gauge** without a ruler, but it seems pretty long.



To stoke the fire

Idiom

To stoke the fire as an idiom means to make an emotion stronger or more violent. The idiom comes from the actual act of stoking a fire, which means to add fuel or to poke at a fire in order to make it burn hotter. In previous episodes, we have seen the word stoked used to mean someone is feeling excited, such as when we say, "I am so stoked." This use means that the fire of excitement is burning hotter.

Other ways to say **stoke the fire** are stoke the flames, fan the flames, stoke up, or stoke [something] up.

In this episode, Suzanne talks about saving her plants. Suzanne says, "It kind of **stoked the fires** or, like, built my passion up again for houseplants." In this example, seeing her plants growing again made Suzanne more passionate about having houseplants.

Here are a couple more examples with **to stoke the fire**:

Christine: You've been painting a lot more lately.

Ethan: Yeah, I was wandering around downtown last week and I saw this awesome mural.

Christine: Oh?

Ethan: Yeah, it was really amazing. It really **stoked the fires** of my creativity. I've got a few paintings almost done and still have ideas for more.

Collette: Man, our lecture was really crazy today.

Tod: I know, right? Something really **stoked up** Mr. Nash's anger.

Collette: I think it was the guy eating in class.

Totally nerd out Slang

Totally nerd out, or **nerd out**, means to get very passionate and excited about a topic that not many people would find interesting. When someone **nerds out** about a subject, they know a lot of information and talk about it with a lot of enthusiasm. When you **totally nerd out**, you are completely into the topic and probably don't realize that most people, especially the people you're talking to, don't understand or care about the topic.

The slang verb comes from the noun nerd. A nerd is a person who is seen as smart, obsessive, or not very good at speaking with people. This is very similar to a geek, which is why another way to say **nerd out** is geek out.

In this episode, Andrew talked about his trip to Taiwan and how he saw plants growing in their natural habitats. Suzanne says, "Yeah, that's really impressive. I would **totally nerd out** on that, too." She means that she would get very excited if she saw the plants and would want to spend a lot of time looking at them, talking about them, or learning about them.

Here's one more example with **totally nerd out**:

Ahmad: Did you see the trailer for the next Avengers movie?

Wayne: Yeah, man, I **totally nerded out** when I saw the new costumes!



Back from the brink

Idiom

Back from the brink means to come away from the edge of something. A brink is a point when something very bad or very good is about to happen. When you come **back from the brink**, or pull someone or something **back from the brink**, the brink is usually the edge of something bad, or the point where something bad could happen.

In this episode, Andrew talked about how his coffee plant almost died. He says, “I brought it **back from the brink** of death to a really healthy state.” This means that without him, his plant would have died, and now his plant is alive and no longer on the brink of death.

Here are a couple more examples with **back from the brink**:

Pénélope:	I saw a documentary last night about bees and how they're disappearing. It kind of scared me.
Jordan:	Oh, yeah, I saw that one, too! Did they say all the plants will die without bees?
Pénélope:	What? We've got to bring the bees back from the brink of extinction before it's too late!

Mark:	How did your game go last night?
Santiago:	Oh, man, it was so stressful! We were tied for most the game, then they scored with 5 minutes left and pulled ahead!
Mark:	Oh no! Did you lose?
Santiago:	Nope! Thankfully, we scored with seconds left and pulled ourselves back from the brink of defeat.

Emotional rollercoaster

Noun

An **emotional rollercoaster** is a situation or experience that makes you feel a lot of different emotions over a short period of time. Being on or going through an **emotional rollercoaster** will usually leave you feeling shaken or off balance.

In the conversation about his coffee plant, Andrew talked about how his plant had almost died, and then he brought it back to life, only to have it almost die again. He described the whole experience this way: “So, we’ve been on an **emotional rollercoaster** together and so I have a special connection with that coffee tree, I think.” Andrew is saying that he felt a lot of different emotions over a short period of time, and that created a special connection between himself and his coffee tree.

Here’s one more example with **emotional rollercoaster**:

Amira: Man, that movie made me laugh, it made me cry. It scared me. I’m so emotional!

Stephanie: I know, right? It was an **emotional rollercoaster**, for sure.

Amira: But, like ... In a good way.

Quiz

- 1. True or false? An emotional rollercoaster is popular ride at a theme park.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

- 2. What did Andrew say he brought back from the brink of death in this episode?**
 - a) his money plant
 - b) his pet fish
 - c) his coffee tree
 - d) his coffee mug

- 3. What is the meaning of it's hard to gauge?**
 - a) it's easy to measure or judge
 - b) it's difficult to measure or judge
 - c) it's difficult to mix or juggle
 - d) it's fun to measure or judge

- 4. Which of the following best describes totally nerding out?**
 - a) getting very excited and passionate
 - b) getting very bored and silent
 - c) getting very tired and grumpy
 - d) getting very happy and loud

- 5. Which of the following is NOT another way to say stoke the fires?**
 - a) stoke the flames
 - b) fan the flames
 - c) stoke [something] up
 - d) stoke the smoke

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do you have any houseplants at home? Which is your favourite and why?
2. What are you passionate about that would make you totally nerd out, like Suzanne does over houseplants?
3. Describe a series of events in your life that felt like an emotional rollercoaster.
4. What is something that you have brought back from the brink? How did you do it?
5. When was the last time you had to be frank with someone? How did that person react?

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.c 3.b 4.a 5.d

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