

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Christopher Griffin aka Plant Kween

JVN // Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. Now, if you listen to Getting Curious or you follow me on socials, you will know that there is almost nothing that I love more than a garden. Honey, it's, like, my family, figure skating, gymnastics, gardens. It's a trifecta. You know what I'm saying? Like, I love gardens so much. They bring me so much joy, but I need to learn more. So we're bringing more lush greenery into my home, into our world, but I need help. So I'm calling in someone who is not just a freakin' expert. They are royalty. Welcome to the show, Christopher Griffin AKA Plant Kween, who is revolutionizing plant care and education. They're the author of *You Grow, Gurl! Plant Kween's Lush Guide to Growing Your Garden* and the force behind the @PlantKween Instagram and TikTok accounts. They're also just fucking stunning, like, it's not our fault. We see—tip-top over there topless with your plants. All the girls' timbers are shivered. It's not our fault. But they do bring joy, wisdom and glamour to every plant tip that they share. And we're so honored to have them joining us today. Christopher, how are you, honey?

PLANT KWEEN // Jonathan, darling! Now that I see you and I'm sharing space with you? My day, it could not get any better.

JVN // Sidebar, I love your jewelry. It has nothing to do with plants. Well, maybe it does have to do with plants! Or do you just love them because they're, like, green, earthy, beautiful turquoise, like, gems...

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah, it's, like, I love, like, earthy green-blue tones. So I was like, let me get dressed up for Jonathan, dahling. I had to come looking a little glam!

JVN // No, you have—all the glam is glamming, also that really resonates with me. Like, like, I think jewelry like it, it's like those are really, like, Trigger City for me in a good way, like, triggering for healing, like, it triggers all my healing and like my inner sensuality, darling. So I love that. And also if you don't follow Plant Kween, like you must get your life together and do that just like pull over right now, don't text and drive or whatever. Like, Oprah told us to wait and it's true. It can't wait but just pull over, follow Plant Kween. Because I feel like I've been following you for a really long time and you are like a plant expert. You're all up on there, like, you know, the Latin names, you know the genus, you know the species, you know how to, like, deal with their illnesses. I got a fig in the next room that's fucking got—I think I talked to you about her. Did I not talk to you about? Because she's a green leafy girl!

PLANT KWEEN // You did. You did. We had a whole conversation in the DMs, yeah.

JVN // She's still alive. But she's, but she's still kind of going through it. She's just, I—I'll throw that on socials because she is pretty. I think you like her. But anyway, so I want to start by hearing about your collection because it is #plantparentinggoals, your collectch. How many plants and you live in Brooklyn, correct?

PLANT KWEEN // Yes, I live in Brooklyn, yes.

JVN // Because you already have a few gorgeous plants even joining you from behind us, which actually we did bring you a surprise for just—

PLANT KWEEN // Oh my God, an orchid! We love orchids!

JVN // Orchid perciferous.

PLANT KWEEN // I love it.

JVN // I just made that up, you guys. That's, like, that's not a word. I just said that, it's not—

PLANT KWEEN // But you know, I think the beautiful thing about language is that—and we as queer folks understand this the most—is that language is a social construct. And so we can play with names, and we can play with language. And so I say if you want to name a plant, whatever you wanna name it? Name that plant whatever you wanna name it, honey.

JVN // Oh my God. I love that. My husband is really into plants and he loves to be like fascia gerponica or, like, he loves, like, all those names. You know what I'm, like, "Honey!" I'm, like, "Is it, what is it? Is it a spell from the book that I don't even talk about anymore because of that woman or what? What is it?"

PLANT KWEEN // Hello. Hello.

JVN // Back to the story.

PLANT KWEEN // Yes?

JVN // How many plants are you currently caring for in your gorgeous Brooklyn home? I know there's at least two behind you right now.

PLANT KWEEN // Yes, I have two of my Chinese evergreens with me. I currently have a solid 200 in my apartment and this is all indoor plants. I have not been blessed yet with an outdoor space. So 200 indoor plants—or as I like to call them, green gurls—in my apartment. Yes!

JVN // I love the green gurls. I love all the series around the green gurls. What is your oldest plant in your collection?

PLANT KWEEN // Well, that's a trick question.

JVN // Oh!

PLANT KWEEN // The technical *oldest* plant in my apartment is a *Monstera deliciosa*, which is about 30 years old, which is about as old as I am. But the oldest plant that I have in my collection that I have grown and that has been with me for the longest is my marble queen pothos, which I've had for about now. Oh, it's been about, what, eight years now? It's been with me for eight years. So, longest plant with me? Eight years. Oldest plant in my apartment? 30 years old.

JVN // The 30 year old plant. Did you inherit that from somebody, or how did you get that 30 year old plant or do they get sold from the store at 30 years old, honey?

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. So that was actually from a shopkeeper who worked at one of my favorite pop-up shops in Chinatown. And they were, like, closing up for the season. And I had spotted the plant a while back and I was, like, "Oh, she's just a gorgeous monstera," and I love monstera. They're one of my favorite plants. And my friend—one of my good plant friends—was actually visiting the last day where they were there and they were, like, "Chris, they're willing to sell you this plant." And I was, like, "Oh, yeah." So plant friends are the best friends. So she purchased the plant for me, put it in a car, and it arrived at my doorstep. And so, it's currently in my bathroom, right next to my shower.

JVN // Oh my God. I love that. Who has been your, like, addition of the season? Like, you just can't help it. It's, like, the, the girl that keeps catching your eye. The green girlie who keeps catching your eye.

PLANT KWEEN // Well, it's a variety of the pothos. The Latin name is Epipremnum pinnatum, and it's actually a very large vine with, like, split leaves. It's taller than I am. And so that's been, like, the newest addition to the plant fam. She's actually, like, sitting right in front of me. And she's growing up a moss pole and she's looking lovely and wild and majestic and just serving lush lews, you know?

JVN // I love her. OK. This is, like, I, I also just want to flag, am I having the most fun that I've, like, ever had? Like, we're having so much fun, I can't stand it. How do you? Because sometimes I feel like you—like, I loved your post the other day. It was about, like, "Honey, I'm dating myself. I'm, like, oh," you were, like, on this gorgeous vacation, you were on this infinity pool. I was, like, I am, I mean, I love my husband but I do think anyone who's married is, like, whenever you see people really reveling in their singleness, you're, like, "I remember when I used to do that and I say until midnight and stuff, you know, but, like, now it's, like, when it's 9:30." But although I can't really lie, whenever it's always been 9:30 I'm always really tired. I'm just, like, not a late night girl. I can't help.

PLANT KWEEN // Ain't nothing wrong with that!

JVN // But how do you take care of all of the babies when you, because you're traveling, you're this, like, sought after plant expert going all over, like, do you have some sort of, like, irrigation humidification system? Like, what's going—do you have a, do you have a cat, a cat sitter for the plants?

PLANT KWEEN // So I do have friends that I turn to when I'm gone for more than two weeks at a time. I have a process. So, you know, in building my plant fam in the last eight years, I've really gotten to know the plants in my space and know which ones work for my lifestyle. And that's what I typically encourage folks to do. I feel like it's a dating process, right? Like, you have to figure out which plants match with you and your lifestyle. Are you a queen on the go? Are you a queen that likes to be all up on your plants and constantly loving your plants? Right? So I think it's, like, a matching process. So over the last eight years, I've been really, like, matching the plant to my needs, and if they're the plant that goes to that little botanical garden in the sky, darling, then I'm, like, "You know what, you're not the plant for me. And that is ok, darling." And so right now I have plants in my apartment that I water right before I go on vacation and they can last for about two weeks, untouched, without me. And if I'm going for more than two weeks, I'll leave my keys with a good plant friend that has, you know, a lot of plants and they know the routines. They know the ins and outs of my little indoor jungle. So, yeah. So it's understanding the plant that works for my lifestyle. But then also having a community of folk that you can turn to, to care for your garden when you're not here.

JVN // Hard-hitting journalistic question. I hope you're ready.

PLANT KWEEN // Hello!

JVN // What about those glass balls with, like, the needle that you fill up with water? Like are you pro those?

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, the self watering balls? I—

JVN // No, they can flood, they can drown, they could drown your girlie!

PLANT KWEEN // I mean, I think it's really depending on your needs, right? So I never really shun. I think it's important to, you know, get the tools that you need in order to care for your garden. I know some folks that use those, like, self-watering pots or self-watering globes as they call them. And it's helpful for some folks, especially for folks who are, like, "I cannot remember to water my plants, and I want something that's a little more

self-sustainable. I can, you know, put the water in the globe and the soil can kind of just take up as much water as it needs." I personally don't use them, but I can understand why it could be helpful for someone who would want to bring that tool into their life if that helped them grow a garden with ease.

JVN // Oh, ok. Ok. Ok. I love that. It's, like, there's, like, so many paths at the top of the gardening mountain and we all, like, take our own. I love that.

PLANT KWEEN // Hello, darling!

JVN // So, do you, are you telling me—because you said, you know, "The plants that work for you. Like, some people really like to be all up on their plants, loving them." Does that mean that some plants are, like, more okay with, like, frequent touching moving and other ones are, like, you better set it and forget it and you just can't be fucking, like, touching their leaves and stuff because they're more susceptible to, like, disease or something?

PLANT KWEEN // I think it's more so about the care needs, right? So I think there are some plants that are more of, like, a set it and forget it. It's, like, "Oh girl, I watered you once and I could probably water you in two weeks and you'd be good, girl. Like, you don't need another drink, honey, you know how to self sustain. You're good, you're fine." And then I think there's some other plants that need a little bit more attention. They take up water a little bit more frequently. They like their soil a little more damp.

JVN // Yes, hydrated!

PLANT KWEEN // Hydrated! They like hydrated soil. And so I think it's more so plants that need more frequent care. So I'm thinking of, like, a person who has good sunlight, and forgets to water their plants often, I'm thinking, like, a snake plant or a cactus or a succulent is used to these environments where they're not getting a lot, right? As compared to, like, a bonsai tree, they need their branches to be pruned and trained in order to grow in a particular way, right? So I think it's really just figuring out, like, the plant personality and, like, the kind of love you want to, to give to your garden.

JVN // Aaah! So it's not really, like, touching it so much as, like, the level of, like, how high maintenance or low maintenance it is.

PLANT KWEEN // I mean, I, I touch my plants when I'm cleaning them, but I, I generally don't because, I mean, human hands are just really dirty. So I'm usually, like, "You know what, girl, I'm not trying to touch you and give you any type of bacteria or fungus." So I tend not to be all up on my plants like that, but you know, to each his own, like, if you want to be all up on your plant, then, honey, go do it, you know, whatever rocks your boat, baby.

JVN // You're probably gonna kill a few more often, but maybe it'll strengthen its immune system, you know?

PLANT KWEEN // You never know, never know.

JVN // Let us know! Leave it in the comments! Ok. Now, I know, you're already giving me, in our first, you know, moments together. You're giving me someone who, you know, it's, like, "We're not saying always, never, we're not shunning things. We're not absoluting anything, you know, we're really just, like," I love this for us. Indoor plants, personalities. Okay? Like, the personalities of indoor plants. Who—and I love a diva, there's no negative connotation of a diva here—

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, darling!

JVN // But who are the divas of the indoor plant scene?

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, honey!

JVN // Who is just the most majestic? Who, of the indoor plant scene, if they, if some other indoor plant tries to do something at Christmas, they're like, "Actually, I'm about to—don't come from that. That is me. That is mine. And you could never have my octave and range." Because I will walk, I will literally take out traffic for Mimi. If anyone, I love, I love Mimi so much, like, she's probably up there in my—

PLANT KWEEN // You and be both, you and me both.

JVN // I love her. I love her. I love her so much. It, it hurts deep deep. It even hurts down to my ankles, like, my feet bones. Like, I love Mariah. But anyway, who is, like, the diva of the indoor plant scene? Is it—and we already said bonsai. So if that's really your truth, that's ok. But, like, is there, like—who are, like, the divas?

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, yeah. So I'm gonna name, there's one plant in particular and then I think there's a variety of plants that are divas. So I'll, I'll just say, I think the fiddle-leaf fig, also known as the Ficus lyrata, actually a cousin of the plant that you have, I think you have the Ficus Audrey. The Ficus lyrata, Miss fiddle-leaf fig, and I think a lot of plant parents would agree with me. She is quite the diva because she knows exactly what she wants. And if you do not give it to her, she's, like, "Girl, I'm leaving, like, I'm out the door, I'm going up into the sky. I'm going to go to the little botanical garden in the sky. Goodbye. Good luck. Try again next time." So she's definitely a diva, I've struggled with her. That's been, like, my problem plant for, like, so long and she has her ups and downs. So I have a Ficus lyrata, fiddle-leaf fig right now that's, like, going through, like, a little rejuvenation moment. I had to, like—she was infested with thrips, which is the annoying pest that is, like, the bane of my existence. And so she's, she's coming back, and she's growing, and I'm excited, but she's a plant that does not like to be moved around, right?

So I think we, we have to remember that plants do have memory, not in the ways that people have memory, but they establish, like, a rhythm when they're put in a place, they're expecting the sun to come at a certain time. Plants, you know, love a watering routine so that they know when water is about to come. She also likes a lot of humidity and unfortunately a lot of indoor homes, humidity is not a big thing, right? The average humidity in a home is around, like, 30 to 40%, right, in the average home. And these plants are coming from places where the average humidity is 50 and above. Right? And if you do not give her a routine, if you don't keep her in one place, that queen will literally just, like, deflate, drop leaves. And so I would say the ficus, the fiddle-leaf fig. And then second, which I know plant parents are going to agree with me are fern. Ferns—I, I just cannot keep them alive indoors. Like, if I was living in a tropical land and was able to plant them outside, I'll be, like, "Yes, girl, grow! Serve lush lewks, give me all the iridescent vibes, you got it. Let's go." But ferns, like, they're lush in these nurseries and then I bring them home, and I feel like literally the next day they're, like, "Poof!" Brittle, breaking apart. And I'm, like, "I don't understand."

JVN // Okay, wait, do you know where I've seen ferns in the wild so much, like, a lot?

PLANT KWEEN // Where?

JVN // In the upper peninsula of Michigan, by Canada. There's, like, all these ferns, like, in the woods, just, like, all these, like—but they must, like, in the winter they have, like, 8 feet of snow on them. But then in the summer they're all, like, big and major again. And yeah, ferns are cool. In, like, 2020 we, like, before the pandemic, it was, like, January 2020. We interviewed this man from the Royal—Kew Gardens, Kew Gardens in London.

PLANT KWEEN // Ohmigod, I was there earlier this year!

JVN // And he was, like, an expert in, like, fern reproduction. And they, like, spore or something, they reproduce in this like—

PLANT KWEEN // Yes, they're spores.

JVN // I wonder if that's part of why it's hard to keep the, is it because they fuck weird? Like, they reproduce weird?

PLANT KWEEN // Oh my God. You know, maybe! I think what we have to remember is that, you know, we are bringing these plants that are used to being, you know, growing outdoors in nature and we're bringing them into caves with windows, right? So I think we have to like, remember that because I know a lot of people are, like, "Oh my God, I feel like I'm a bad person because I can't take care of a plant." It's, like, "Girl, it's literally not you. It's literally either the environment you're bringing them into or the plant itself." And so, yeah, I think we have to remember that we have to give ourselves grace and understand that we're bringing these wild creatures. And yes, there have been plants that have been, you know, there are cultivars of plants that have been grown and particular gene traits have been selected to, like, help them grow better indoors. But still, at the end of the day, we're bringing wild creatures inside, and it's all an experiment, right? So, I think we have to give ourselves grace when a plant, you know, doesn't survive in a place where that's just not a natural habitat for them, you know?

JVN // Yes. So, divas, yes. Diva's Live. Fiddle-leaf fig, ficus is going. And then also maybe a fern. So that's Diva's Live, round one. I'm sure, like, when we have you back someday, we can talk about, like, the second iteration there, but it's going to get greenlit, budget's gonna be great. They're going to end up at radio city for the second one. It's gonna be great. Maybe Shania will come. What are the, what are, like, crazy, sexy, cool, TLC, like, the calm, cool collected plants. Like, they're just kind of, like, "Sorry, we, like, sell more hit records than, like, anyone and you don't even know about that fucking life." You know?

PLANT KWEEN // I got you.

JVN // Is that the cactus, is that, like, the cactus, like, succulent moment?

PLANT KWEEN // Well, you know, I think cacti and succulents, I think they really, really enjoy a lot of sunlight. So I'm not gonna say cacti and succulents because they can actually be tricky sometimes. What I'll say, there are three particular plants, and I'll always use these. Like, I'm sure there's a bunch of different videos of me saying these exact three. I'm gonna say the snake plant, I'm gonna say the ZZ plant, and I'm gonna say the pothos. And these are all very common house plants. You can find them at your corner's grocery store, you can find them at plant shops, like, they're so readily available and accessible to folks. And I encourage folks to start there. Those are some of the plants that I started with. I started with the pothos. Then I got the snake plant, and then I got the ZZ plant. And those are some of the plants that I have never struggled with. So I would encourage folks to start with those if they're, like, "Oh, I wanna dip my toe in the lush world of greenery." Then dip your toe with the pothos, the ZZ plant, and the snake plant

JVN // Because you just basically can't kill them, it's, like, they're just, like, easier.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah, they're just easy. I mean, like, you can technically kill any plant, but I would say it's really hard to kill those plants. Yeah.

JVN // Now who's, like, the best friend and who's the frenemy of indoor plants?

PLANT KWEEN // The best friend? I would say definitely the pothos because, you know, I think the pothos is also a fast grower, and who doesn't like the, you know, immediate gratification of new growth. So it makes me feel good about myself when I see my plants

growing. And so I think that's what a good friend should do, right? Make me feel good inside. Hello! The frenemy, because I can't keep them alive, and they just leave me puzzled. I'm just gonna say ferns, like, ferns are the frenemies. Like, I don't understand them. I'm trying to learn more about them, but there's just something in the formula of who they are that I'm just, like, "They are just not vibing with me." But, you know, I think there is a possibility that we could become friends in the near future. They're a challenge, so they're a frenemy for right now, maybe a friend next season.

JVN // But keep the door open, I think that's healthy. Last question here, who are the wild cards? Is there? Like, is there ever, like, a plant who, like, people, like, it, like, has a bad rep but actually, like, sometimes it really shows up and shows out and it's, like, hardier than people think or something?

PLANT KWEEN // Mm, I'm going to say—and I think this is, like, a variety of plants—so there are plants that are variegated, and so variegated plants are basically plants that have a, a coloration in their leaves. Sometimes it's neon, sometimes it's pink, sometimes it's white, and basically means that they're the part of their leaf that lacks chlorophyll, right, or there's less chlorophyll in a certain part of the, the leaf. So I'm sure you've seen it.

JVN // It's, like, a lighter green with a darker green.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. So, like, this, this is, like, a variegation, technically—

JVN // Yes!

PLANT KWEEN // Like, see there's lighter green with a darker green. That's a variation. So, like, different levels of a chlorophyll in the leaf itself. And I'm gonna say those are the wild cards because sometimes it can be hard to gauge how much sunlight they need, because leaves with less chlorophyll are, are not able to process sunlight in the same ways. Right? So sometimes it's, like, hard. So, like, sometimes I burn my variegated plants. I'm, like, "Girl, you're not even near the window. Like, why you, why you crispy, girl! You give me burnt edges and I'm not even having you in the sun, girl." And so I'll say variegated plants are, are those queens because you have to like it's really like an experiment. You gotta like, you know, trial and error kind of situation. So I'm gonna say variegated plants are the wild cards.

JVN // Okay, you did so good on that. So I will say, I am a little basic when it comes to indoor plant care, basically because I have five cats and they just eat plants and then throw them up everywhere. But now in my offices, I have, like, more indoor plant space that I've never had before. I've been keeping my orchids in there and I've gotten into orchids. I love them. I've had a couple that I've kept alive for, like, two or three years. I will say I randomly learned about how to keep them alive from DMX, like, RIP. Like, after he passed away, I found his YouTube, and he was really into orchids. And, because I had always been putting, like, ice cubes in them, but I didn't know that that was, like, way too much fucking water and, like, shocking to their system and it was just, like, drowning the shit out of them all the time. Every last time.

Then he was, like, I'm paraphrasing here, but he was, like, "Girl!" But that's my paraphrization—but basically he was, like, "You know, they grow on trees in this, like, in China. So, like, it's only, like, naturally so, like, they only get rained when it rains and the water just, like, passes through their roots and then it, like—so they can't be, ever be, like, sitting in water." So then I learned to just, like, spray them a little bit when their leaves droop because, like, for them, it's like, not so much a schedule. It's like when the leaves tell you they need to be watered. So, ever since I've been doing that for the last, like, two years, three years, I've had some orchids, like, alive for a long ass time. But I just think orchids are so regenerative and they're so pretty and they're so interesting. So I'm, I'm good at those. But then earlier you were saying, like, the difference between an

indoor—because I was, like, “What does make an indoor, indoor,” but basically they're all outdoor plants that we just brought indoors. But I'm gonna not answer that because you're the expert here. So, but you already kind of told me it was, like, a spoiler alert. But what does distinguish an indoor plant from an outdoor plant?

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. So, indoor plant basically needs, like, a controlled environment. It's really about climate, right? So, indoor plants are typically a lot of the plants that we bring indoors are tropical plants. Right? Which enjoy humidity anywhere from, like, 40 to, like, 55% humidity. Anything higher. You risk mold and mill you in your home. Then we're not here for that, darling. And then outdoor plants are those plants that can survive, you know, in terms of different weather conditions and outdoor plants are typically, when we think outdoor plants, we think annuals, biennials, and perennials, right? So, annuals, they live a year. Biennials, they live for two years. Perennials, they live for more than two years

JVN // And which are the indoors of those three? Are they perennials because they never die? Hopefully?

PLANT KWEEN // Well, I mean, well, yeah, I would, I would hope that you're—we're, we're tricking these plants into, you know, thinking that they are in a, a beautiful lush environment that allows them to thrive. So we would consider them perennials, so living for more than two years.

JVN // Okay, so we talked about where some of, like, the easier, more low maintenance plants are to start, which I feel like that is a good place to start your collection. So let's say that you started on one of those, like, more low maintenance plants, which you can feel free to, like, say those names again because I know that one started with a “P” but I don't remember all their names. But, like, once you've brought a plant home, how does one know how to place it?

PLANT KWEEN // Yes. So I encourage folks, and I think there's such a therapeutic process to bringing nature into your home. There's so much that we can learn. So even before buying a plant, I always encourage folks to do, like, an environmental assessment of their space. One, understanding what is the average temperature and humidity levels in your space, right? Which is also just good for our bodies, right? But then also looking at how the sun moves through your space. So whenever—this is just, like, a nerdy thing, a nature nerd thing about me, I typically whip out my comp app and I'm always curious, like, what the direction of windows are. So if you have, if you have, like, a north-facing window, you're going to get a lot of ambient light, but you're not gonna get a lot of direct light. If you have east-facing windows, you're gonna get strong morning light. You have west-facing windows, you're gonna have a strong evening light. And then south-facing windows, you're gonna kind of have a, a bright light throughout the day. And obviously the changes based on the season. So the best thing to do even before buying that plant is to kind of get an idea of the scene that you're working with before you bring the Queen into your space. So it's, like, “What, what, what am I working with? Where is this sun hitting? What is the average, you know, the average temperature and humidity levels? Ok. Great. I have, like, a little synopsis of these things.” And then you can go to the plant shop and say, “Hey, I have this south-facing window and a lot of humidity because I have a bright bathroom. And so what is good for that space?” So I would reverse it and look at the space before you buy the plant so you can match the plant to your space.

JVN // Wow, that's really giving the green girlies the respect they deserve. Whereas for me, I'm more of, like, an impulsive girl, like, I just, like, “I want what I want and I want it now!”

PLANT KWEEN // Hello!

JVN // But that is good, it's better to do like a good investigation before you go in. It probably, like, saves everyone some heartache, including the plant that probably was never meant for that place. So that's true. Ok, I, I'm vibing that—that's really good. What are some common mistakes you see plant newbies making? Just, like, going for, like, too advanced of a plant or something?

PLANT KWEEN // Overwatering and underwater are typically what I see as, like, the most common mistake. I know some folks that are, like, "Oh, yeah, I water my plant every day." I'm, like, "Oooh, girl, wait, what kind of plant do you have?" First of all, plants do not need water every day. And if they do need water every day you may need to change the spot you have them in.

JVN // But that doesn't count for your vegetable garden, right?

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, yeah. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's, this is for indoor plants.

JVN // For indoor plants only.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. Indoor, indoor.

JVN // Outdoor, that's a whole other situation. That's a whole other podcast!

PLANT KWEEN // And, you know, know you're, you're the expert, darling. You actually inspire me, honey. With your, your squash, your pumpkins, your jalapenos. Your peppers—

JVN // Don't you have a little balcony, honey? In Brooklyn?

PLANT KWEEN // Dahling, it's, it's a mess. Like, I can't, it's, it's, like, my, my apartment is street-facing and so, like, I, it's, it's, it's too much, it's too much.

JVN // Oh, it's just not enough heat to really grow, like, it's just not enough sun because, like, pepper—because I was, like, "Can't you, like, one little, like, chili bush? But it's, like, too cold.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. I mean, like, and the season's about to change and I don't, like, you know, knowing that I'm gonna have to bring that plant inside and she's not going to survive inside.

JVN // Aly Raisman taught me about this one thing that you can grow food inside with, like, fake lamps that remind me of, like, weed lamps, but they're not for weed. Like, people really grow food inside with them!

PLANT KWEEN // LED grow lights, yeah! I mean, like, I have some of those, and I've actually been talking to a few brands. And if there are any folks who work in indoor vegetable gardening and want to send the kween a little something so I can, like, start my outdoor garden—

JVN // Indoors!

PLANT KWEEN // Hello, plug! But, yeah, I mean, like, I, I want to start.

JVN // Would you be into that?

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, hell, yeah. Hell yeah, I would, I would love to try it. And I think one of the most important things—and you inspire me with this, with your garden—is that one of the most important things that as humans, that we can do is learn how to grow our own food. I think unfortunately, in the world that we're living in today, we are so detached from what we eat and being able to grow your own food. It is hard. It is tedious but there is such a, a joy and a much needed skill that folks need to learn. And I think it helps you—I don't

know, it just helps you become more connected with the land that you exist on. And unfortunately, I think we're just so detached from it. I mean, like any way for me to get into that while I'm in my current space, I am down for.

JVN // I love that so much. It's, it's helped me waste less food. But okay, enough about the outdoor stuff. So ok, I'm vibing, I'm vibing. I'm learning, I'm learning. Let's talk plant first aid. So you mentioned earlier, like, those one things were the bane of your existence, like, that infested your one plant. Like, what—and I know that with my fig, like, I had to cut some leaves off. I cut some, like, some semi circles around some black spots on leaves. I tried to get her in some more sun. She seems marginally more happy because I did put her in a more sun-filled area. But we still get some of those spots sometimes, but they're, like, less and she's not *dead* but she's not, like, fucking so gloriously happy in, like, the love of her life. But she's, like, she's getting through.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah, yeah.

JVN // Kind of Reba McEntyre, Survivor is her life. She's, like, [SINGING] she's a single mom that works two jobs. She's nah nah nah, but never stops. She works in the hands of a fighter. She's a Survivor.

PLANT KWEEN // C'mon now! Survivor!

JVN // Yeah, that's her!

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah, I'm, I'm curious actually if there's, you know, potentially, like, a, a fungus and I think that's what I mentioned before. And so, yeah, if I'm ever in your vicinity and you bless me with a visit to your home, I would take, I love to take a look at the soil of that plant.

JVN // Do you think a transplant's necessary, Christopher?

PLANT KWEEN // I, I think so. So, like—

JVN // If there's fungus present?

PLANT KWEEN // If there's fungus present, I think we always have to go to the roots. The roots of the plant are always—

JVN // How do I know it's fungus? Because those, because the black circle on the leaf, that's not just, like, a dead leaf? Why are you calling her Fungusy Fig?

PLANT KWEEN // I, I, I think a, a black circle. Yeah, I would look at the root because it could be, it could be a fungus or it could be a lack of oxygen hitting the roots.

JVN // There's moss over the roots, like, there's moss on the top of it.

PLANT KWEEN // Oh, honey! Yeah. I think for, for that plant, I would actually use fir bark, which is actually, like, wood chips from the bark of fir trees, you can find it at, like, pet stores.

JVN // So take the moss off and get that other stuff to put on top of the soil.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. I would actually mix in perlite and fir bark into that mix. Make it very light and fluffy.

JVN // Is perlite that white stuff that Monty Don uses on Gardner's World to, like, aerate the soil or whatever?

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

JVN // Oh! And then you think she's gonna get happier?

PLANT KWEEN // I, I think she would be much happier. I think you may have to change her watering schedule. Right. You may have to water her a little bit more frequently.

JVN // Yeah, I'm not super consistent on her because I thought that I would, like, I didn't know what was up.

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. So, I think you need to, you need to strip all that soil off her roots. So you have an outdoor space. So I would actually take her outdoors, hose down her roost. Try to get as much as that old soil off and put her in a new fresh batch of soil with perlite and fir bark.

JVN // Mm. Ok. So what are some of the common issues that house plants can have?

PLANT KWEEN // So, obviously pest infestation. So you have spider mites, you have thrips, you have mealy bugs, fungal gnats. So those are, like, the top four that folks will typically see. I tend to use neem oil, it's a good natural insecticide slash pesticide. And then there are also some concoctions that I use from, like, my local plant shops and so, like, they'll put a bunch of stuff together. A lot of, like, natural remedies. I try not to use too many chemicals in my home just because I'm, I just want to be better about my health and also about the wastes that, you know, go out into the world. And so whatever I can, you know, do to reduce my footprint or a negative impact in terms of the environment I try to do. So that's typically a thing. Other thing that folks, you know, need to watch out for, obviously, is root rot. That it's when you over saturate the soil. And as much as plants need water, they also need oxygen, right? So, water and oxygen are crucial when it comes to photosynthesizing.

So if a plant is sitting in water for so long, wet soil, mold starts to build. Bacteria start to build. And that impacts the plant health. And then, like, other bacteria or funguses, which I'm not too well versed in, thank God, I haven't had too many experiences with bacteria or fungus impacting my plant. But one of the ways to make sure that you are, you know, not bringing that into your home is one, to look at the plant before you bring them into your home. Inspect the leaves, look at the soil. Living in New York. I check out the soil because you never know if you're gonna bring some roaches home. A rat, mice, millipedes, anything like that. So she's always digging up in this store, always bringing, like, a nice fresh pair of gloves. I'm looking in the soil. People look at me like I'm a little weird but I'm, like, "Honey, I know my process. Let me be me." We're bringing, again, wild creatures into our home. So that's gonna come with insects and bugs and all that stuff. So I don't freak out about that stuff anymore. I used to when I was a little younger but now I'm, like, "Oh, ok, cool. You know, they're here," and it's a part of the plant parenting.

JVN // So, what does that look like? Just a shitload of, like little bugs? You're, like, "Ok, there's a bunch of fucking bugs crawling around here." And so then you're, like, do you just have to rub the neem oil all over it? Like, how do you treat an infestation?

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah. So, typically what you do, what I do is that I will wipe down each leaf. And obviously, it depends on the kind of plant, but typically the leaves and the stem. If the infestation is really bad, then I'll switch the soil out because typically it's either from the leaves itself. If you find that it's reoccurring, even after you wipe down the leaves and the stem, it's probably in the soil. So you need to change the soil. If I can soak a plant in, like, a little neem oil concoction, I'll soak the plant. So, like, fill up my bathtub and kind of just, like, soak the vines and leaves for a little bit. And then shower it down. Every so often, wipe down all your plants at some point. You don't have to do it all in, in one sitting. A little reminder that I do have 200 plants. So it does take some time. But throughout the year, I'm constantly doing preventative measures to make sure that my plants don't, you know, all of

a sudden just have little infestations, but sometimes it appears out of nowhere, unfortunately.

JVN // Does it ever get so bad that you, like, need to call in an expert for help? Or is that more of just, like, the plant's dying? And you just don't know how to fix it? But, like, you don't have, like, little critters running around everywhere.

PLANT KWEEN // If it gets too bad, I'll isolate the plant. So whenever I, you know, notice the infestation, I'm, like, "OK, girl, you gotta go into your own little world because I can't have y'all hopping from plant to plant to plant, and then Lord knows what that will look like." So I usually isolate them. And then if I don't know, if it keeps coming back, I'll go to a plant shop and I'm, like, "Hey, girl, so, like, this is what's happening. Do y'all know, do y'all have anything that I could use?" The internet is great, you know, it's a double edged sword. I like talking to people. So I'm, like, "Let me go and talk to someone and see if I can get some, you know, real time solutions to the questions that I have." If it gets to a point where it's like, "Girl, I've done everything," what I'll do—and I'm actually doing this for one of my plants. Is that I'll actually cut off all the leaves, and I've done this before. I'll cut off all the leaves, I'll strip it down to the stem, I'll take it out of the soil and I'll wash the plant. So I'm talking, like, a little bit of dish soap. I'm talking a little bit of water. Cleanse it down. And I'll propagate the plant, so I'll put the stem and root and water and I'm, like, "I'm gonna give you a chance to grow all over again." That's, like, emergency, "Girl, I've done everything I still want to keep you around, but I'm gonna give you another chance." That's typically what I do.

JVN // Mmm! And then if a plant just dies, like, you just throw her away and then buy new ones? Or you compost her.

PLANT KWEEN // I compost her. I mean, so one of the things that folks should be aware of is that you should not—and, and put in the comments or whatever if I'm incorrect, but it is my understanding that you should not compost an infested plant because then the compost can become infested and then that's just not, that's just not good. So unfortunately, if there's a plant that's, like, hella infected and it's just, like, "Girl, like, I've tried my best and these insects and these pests and these bugs just keep coming," then typically I'll just have like, have to, you know, tie her up and I'm just, like, "OK, I'm just gonna have to put you in the, in the garbage, unfortunately." I haven't had to do that often. I usually try to save the plant and, like, try to reduce, you know, any insects or anything or give it to a friend who may know how to take care of her. But yeah, you shouldn't be composting infested plants.

JVN // Christopher, darling, we've sourced some listener questions for you, for the Plant Kween themselves. Are you ready?

PLANT KWEEN // I am ready!

JVN // Ok. Does pot size really matter? That's from Lauren.

PLANT KWEEN // Oooh! Pot size does matter. I typically try to go at least two inches larger than the nursery pot. The nursery pots are, like, usually little plastic pots that the plant comes in. I try to go at least two inches larger, and that's because you want to give the plant a little bit more room to grow. So, yes, pot size does matter. You don't want to go too big because you run the risk of having a small plant in a sea of soil. And so think about when you're watering a plant and the roots are not touching all parts of the soil, right? So that means that they're gonna be soil that's not being drained from the root, which runs the risk of root rot. So, don't go too big. But also don't go smaller.

JVN // Yes. OK. Which houseplants can I grow hydroponically, indefinitely? That's from Elle Cross.

PLANT KWEEN // Oh my God. That is, oh, hydroponically!

JVN // And forever!

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah, that's a, that's a good one.

JVN // Weed. I know you can do some hydroponic weed forever—or probably!

PLANT KWEEN // You can do some hydroponic weed. Not mad at that.

JVN // That's the only kind I would want.

PLANT KWEEN // Hello.

JVN // What about a water lily?

PLANT KWEEN // A water lily? Yes. Moss balls are also, like, water plants. So I would go into, like, hydroponics is, it's really more so about water-based nutrient solutions, things like that. So, I've had, like, some pothos that have grown in water for years. I think honestly, it's, it's all about experimentation. I would encourage folks to start with the basics, right? And typically when you're starting hydroponic, whoever you're purchasing them from will say, "Hey, these are, you know, some of the plants that we typically start with and grow with." I know there are a bunch of different crops and vegetables, lettuces, but I think it's all about experimentation. I mean, it's what has got us this far, like, folks experimenting with plants and trying new things and seeing what works. So I would encourage that person to start with the basic and then, yeah, kind of explore and see what's possible

JVN // Carnivorous plants. Do they need supplemental bugs?

PLANT KWEEN // Yes, they do. Unfort—yeah, that is one of the most crucial things. If you're gonna get a venus fly trap, or the honey dew. I tried—and this is also me having experimented—a venus fly trap where I fed it dry flies, and it worked to a certain point. Obviously, if you can get, like, live insects, that's, like, the best thing, but also very tedious. So, like, if you're a person who loves being that caregiver, carnivorous plants are one of those plants that really need a lot of love. And then I tried another venus fly trap and I was, like, "I'm gonna try to give you chicken," like, real chicken. I was, like, I'm gonna see if that works. That plant died so quickly. And I was, like, "Ooooh, should I be eating this?" I was like, "Should I be eating the chicken if this plant aint' surviving on this chicken?"

JVN // It didn't like the chicken. How interesting. Better give it a beetle.

Speaker 2: It rotted. So I was, like, "Ooooh."

Speaker 1: Hm. Ok. Carrie wants to know, she's been trying to water prop a verrucosum for months. Like, water propagate a verrucosum for months. No rot but no growth. Thoughts?

PLANT KWEEN // So I'm curious when that person says growth, do they mean no leaf growth or do they mean no root growth? Right. So I think they're the difference there. So, uh sometimes we may see a growth in the roots but not a growth in, like, foliage or flowering or something like that. One of the things that they could do is get a water-soluble fertilizer so that there's some nutrients going into that water. You do wanna make sure you change the water so that there's oxygen in the water as well. And you wanna make sure that there's not algae built up in the water as well because algae is the competitor and will suck out the nutrients and oxygen from the roots of the plant that you're trying to propagate. So those are like little things. But I would be mindful of those things. And then if the roots are

continuing to grow, and the plant itself is not growing, I would just wait until the roots are about maybe 2 to 3 inches and then put that plant in some soil.

JVN // Ok, I love that. I do, I do have a few more but I want to do them rapid fire because I want to get to as many as we can. And I'm kind of curious. Ok. You ready?

PLANT KWEEN // I got you!

JVN // OK. Can plants sense stress and be harmed by it? Like, your personal stress? No, right? It's too much.

PLANT KWEEN // I, I think so because—

JVN // Oh, fuck.

PLANT KWEEN // If you are stressed and you're not caring for your plant, then yes.

JVN // But what if you're stressed out but you still take care of 'em real good?

PLANT KWEEN // Yeah, yeah, I don't think so.

JVN // That's what I thought, too. But I, I still, I like what you're going for with that, but we both said no. So, but don't forget to take care of yourself. Ok, do plants turn yellow when overwatered and brown when they're not watered enough?

PLANT KWEEN // Typically yes, but that could also mean—yellowing could also mean a lack of sunlight as well. So if it's brittle and dry, lack of water. If it's soft and brown or yellow, then there's too much water.

JVN // Third segment. We're bringing the plane home. Ok, so, because I found you on the 'gram. I found you as Plant Kween. I love Plant Kween. What has your journey been like to becoming *the* Plant Kween? Like when did you first become obsessed with plants? Has this been, like, a lifelong affliction, darling? Was it born in your—like, how long have you been loving plants?

PLANT KWEEN // Ever since my grandmother would take me on little day dates to nurseries, her favorite nurseries in Philadelphia when I was, like, five years old. So she nurtured the nurturer in me. And Plant Kween is really, like, in honor of her. She was the original plant queen. And she brought so much joy and happiness and Black joy into my life. So Plant Kween is because of my grandmother.

JVN // Oh my God, that's so fucking sweet, honey. I love that so much. And so, so what's it been like to share your love for plants with so many people?

PLANT KWEEN // Honestly, it's been beautiful. I am an extrovert. So I really love connecting with other people. I love exchanging energies with other people. And I love geek out about nature and having a platform to kind of share my nature in nerdy ways and have folks get excited and learn new things. So honestly has been a true blessing, and I just want to continue to do it. And I've been expanding to like outdoor and parks and, really getting into the history of various, you know, sections of land throughout New York, and hoping to really travel and do the same. So, really blessed, really grateful. And I love building, you know, being a community with folks who love nature just as much as I do.

JVN // You're such a joy to watch. I love following you on all the socials. So y'all, if you're not already get it together, like, I said before. And we know that you love to say, "plant care is self-care." I—that resonates with me so much. I joke in my comedy that if I would have known that, like, fruits and vegetables, like had flowers on them. I would have been, like,

growing it so much sooner. Like, they're so pretty. I didn't know. But how can plants help us care for ourselves? And what have you learned about yourself through plant care?

PLANT KWEEN // I've learned that even though I am a very social, gregarious, and extroverted person, there's something beautiful about enjoying the intimacy of my own solitude and enjoying my own company. And that's the space that I need, too, right? And so I feel like my plants allow me an opportunity to reflect on the ways that I can better care for myself. So am I drinking water? Am I getting the sunlight that I need? Am I giving myself the room to expand my root. Am I feeding my soul, mind, body, and spirit the nutrients that I need to continue to grow. Right? And so these are things that I'm constantly thinking about for my plants. And it clicked to me one day when I was talking to my mother about my, my late grandmother's garden. She was, like, "You're building your garden," and, and I, I'm not trying to get, I don't want to get too emotional. She was, like, "And I'm not talking about your plants, I'm talking about *you*, you are building *your* garden," and it was just, I don't know, just, like a, a moment of her really seeing me and the journey that I was on. And yeah, I'll never—it's, it's only forward from here. So, you know.

JVN // Mmm! In yoga, I feel I've heard so many teachers say it's, like, how you do anything is how you do, like, everything or, like, you learn to live your practice, like, off the mat. And I feel like caring for plants. Like, I was getting a lot of that from you and that was beautiful and you can get emotional whenever you want because that was really gorgeous. So, and I'm gonna parlay that into another emotional question, which is how does queer joy come into your work? I mean, I see it so clearly and so beautifully from just, you know, getting to observe you. I feel your joy is so attractive and engaging. So how does queer joy come into your work?

PLANT KWEEN // I mean, as a Black, queer, non-binary person, I think that queer joy, especially, unfortunately, in the world that we're living in today, especially with this country, with over 500 anti-LGBTQ+, you know, legislative bills being introduced. Queer joy is an act of resistance. Queer joy is revolutionary, queer joy is survival. And for me, you know, queer joy is a protest, right? In the face of everything that, you know, these individuals who are trying to erase us and, you know, diminish us to our bodies and stereotypes and misinformation. And in the face of all that, we are still magical, we are still joyful, we are still in community, we are still thriving, right? And so that's what queer joy means to me. And, you know, it's something that I really try to put at the forefront of, you know, my social media presence because I think it's, it's so easy to get lost in you know, the constant trauma and violence that we are experiencing. And so, you know, if that joy can inspire someone to figure out what joy means to them or to be in communities that help them to get to that place of joy—because I think there's self-care, yes, but sometimes we can't water ourselves. And so we have to rely on community. And so if I'm able to shine my light and that could, you know, spark the fire of someone else that helps them shine their light that sparks the fire of someone else and we can, you know, really shine and really, you know, shed light on pathways that folks don't know exists for themselves. Then, I am doing my job.

JVN // Ohmigod, are you doing it, ever. I mean, you really are. And I also love how you describe queer joy, that's beautiful. So, you know—well, I think you know—that I love to accessorize when it comes to plants, gardens, green girlies, what are some of your go to items, like, watering cans or scissors? Like, what are your faves? Where do you like to get them from?

PLANT KWEEN // I honestly get all my accessories from a lot of different places. I try to support the local plant shops in my neighborhood. I think it's one of the most sustainable. Local small businesses, if they are LGBTQ+-owned businesses, if they are BIPOC businesses, then they can take my money. But yeah, I try to support local small businesses

in my area. So most of my planters are all from my local plant shop that I mentioned in my book. And yeah, yeah. As long as they're coming from, you know, local small businesses, I'm here for them, so...

JVN // What's a garden or, like, indoor house plant item that's overhyped that we can just do without, honey. You don't need it!

PLANT KWEEN // This is just me. But I can understand why people may not want to—I'm not a garden glove kind of person. I really love getting my hand into the soil. So, I love, you know, scraping the dirt from my nails. Like, that's just, like, a—I'm, like, "Yes, I've had a good day in the garden if my fingernails are just, like, you know, full of soil." So yeah, I'm gonna say garden gloves because I feel like it just creates a barrier from you connecting with the land, having your body connect with the land. So I'm gonna say garden gloves.

JVN // Yes, queen! And that's what a nail brush is for. You can always clean it later. That's what I do. I love that except, unless if I'm doing lantanas and they're outside because that shit makes me fucking itch and it cuts my shit up. So then I do wear them. But, but indoor in, like, those, like, more controllable size. Yeah, for sure. OK. So what's a good gift for the indoor gardener in your life—or in someone's life?

PLANT KWEEN // Mmm, I am going to say a moss pole. So I feel like there's a lot of viny plants that we have in our home. I mean, you were mentioning the epiphytic nature of orchids. Well, a lot of the plants that we bring into our homes like to grow upward. And so I have a lot of my vine plants growing on moss poles, and it also just creates more space. So I'm gonna say a moth pole. I feel like it's an unconventional answer. But my plant parents, they'll, they'll be, like, "Yeah, girl, I could use a moss pole, honey," because they're, they're not always easy to find, either.

JVN // Final question. What's next for you? Any books on the pipeline? Where can people, like, where are you doing the most exciting stuff? Do you feel like it's really on the 'gram? Is it on the TikTok? Is it on both, kind of different? Like, where can people follow along if they're just obsessed as I know that they are?

PLANT KWEEN // So on the 'gram, you know, I'm really getting into more outdoor spaces. So folks can look forward to me, you know, more tree tours, getting into, you know, fun historical facts around different parks throughout New York City. I am working with a team on a very fun project. You'll hear about it soon where we're exploring, like, Brooklyn green scenes, which I'm really excited for. I am setting up some meetings with my literary agent for book number two.

JVN // Yes!

PLANT KWEEN // So really excited for that, very beginning stages. So look forward to that. And I think in general, like I am a, a nerd of life, like I feel like I—life is a classroom. And so I'm always looking for ways to just learn and grow and if there is a way that I can, you know, step into something, learn something, and then take that information and make it accessible and fun for people to digest. So folks can look forward to Plant Kween, you know, stepping into some other areas, darling, maybe it's fashion, darling, maybe it's, you know, how we can be more sustainable in our lives. Maybe it's outdoor gardening, darling. So, you know, Plant Kween is going to expand her, her roots, darling. She's going to bloom and blossom in new ways that folks may not be expecting.

JVN // Oh my god, we cannot wait to follow along. Christopher Griffin, we love you so much, thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious and sharing your beautiful light with us! Follow along @PlantKween, we love you so much.

PLANT KWEEN // Love you more, Jonathan! Thank you!

You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description of whatever you're listening to that show on, honey. Follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN. You can catch us here every Wednesday. Make sure to tune in every Monday for alternating episodes of Curious Now and Pretty Curious. Still can't get enough? Subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple Podcasts for commercial-free listening, and our subscription only show, "Ask JVN," where we're talking sex, relationships, and so much more. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. Our engineer is Nathanael McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Chris McClure, and Allison Weiss, with production support from Julie Carillo, Anne Currie, and Chad Hall.