

= Next (Desperate Housewives) =

" Next " is the second season premiere episode of the American comedy @-@ drama series Desperate Housewives , and the 24th episode overall . It was originally broadcast in the United States on September 25 , 2005 , on ABC . It was written by Jenna Bans and Kevin Murphy and was directed by Larry Shaw .

In the episode , Susan (Teri Hatcher) recovers from having been held hostage while Gabrielle (Eva Longoria) attempts to salvage her marriage to her incarcerated husband , Carlos (Ricardo Antonio Chavira) . Meanwhile , Bree (Marcia Cross) deals with her mother @-@ in @-@ law following her husband 's death and Lynette (Felicity Huffman) goes back to work . The episode also introduces the mystery storyline revolving around Betty Applewhite (Alfre Woodard) and her family .

According to Nielsen ratings , " Next " was watched by 28 @.@ 4 million viewers , making it the most watched season premiere on ABC in nine years . The episode also ranks as the second @-@ most watched in series history , behind the first season finale in May 2005 . The episode received general positive reviews , with Cross earning universal praise for her performance . Critics enjoyed Woodard 's acting as well as her character 's storyline .

= = Plot = =

= = = Background = = =

Desperate Housewives focuses on the residents living in the suburban neighborhood of Wisteria Lane . In previous episodes , Mike Delfino (James Denton) learns that he is the biological father of Zach Young (Cody Kasch) , whose adopted parents , Mary Alice (Brenda Strong) and Paul (Mark Moses) , killed Mike 's previous girlfriend and Zach 's biological mother years earlier . Mike kidnapped Paul and left him stranded in the desert while Zach holds Mike 's current girlfriend , Susan Mayer (Teri Hatcher) hostage as part of his plan to kill Mike . Tom Scavo (Doug Savant) quit his job and decided to become a stay @-@ at @-@ home father , forcing his wife , Lynette (Felicity Huffman) to reenter the work force . Gabrielle Solis 's (Eva Longoria) affair with her teenage gardener , John Rowland (Jesse Metcalfe) , is exposed just as she discovers she is pregnant and her husband , Carlos (Ricardo Antonio Chavira) , is sentenced to time in prison . Bree Van de Kamp (Marcia Cross) learned that her husband , Rex (Steven Culp) , died while awaiting surgery . Also , Betty Applewhite (Alfre Woodard) and her son , Matthew (Mehcad Brooks) , moved to Wisteria Lane .

= = = Episode = = =

Mike arrives home to find Zach holding Susan hostage . Before Zach has the opportunity to kill Mike , Susan wrestles the gun away from him and Zach runs away . Later , Susan discovers that Mike does not want to press charges against Zach , who is still missing . When she questions him , Mike confesses that Zach is his biological son . Susan tearfully congratulates Mike , but tells him that she cannot keep dating him if he continues to search for Zach , given Zach 's history with her daughter Julie .

Rex 's mother , Phyllis Van de Kamp (Shirley Knight) , comes to town for Rex 's funeral . She and Bree clash heads throughout her visit , especially when Phyllis claims that Bree made Rex miserable during his last years , prompting Bree to disinvite her from the funeral . Eventually , Bree reconsiders ; however , during the service , Bree discovers that Rex is being buried in his high school tie , which Phyllis insisted but Bree expressly forbade . Bree changes Rex 's tie in the middle of the funeral .

With Carlos in prison , John assumes that he and Gabrielle will continue their relationship , but Gabrielle is livid after John told Carlos about their affair . Meanwhile , Carlos demands a paternity

test if he and Gabrielle are to work on their marriage . Unwilling to actually take a test , Gabrielle obtains another patient 's results and passes them off to Carlos as her own . Nevertheless , Carlos tells her that he still is not unsatisfied .

Lynette interviews for a job in an advertisement firm . Her interviewer , an irritable woman named Nina Fletcher (Joely Fisher) , is skeptical of Lynette 's competence after learning that she has four children , but asks her to come back for a final interview with her boss anyway . After Tom throws out his back , Lynette is forced to bring Penny , her toddler , to the second interview . Despite these unusual circumstances , Lynette manages to impress Nina 's boss , Ed Ferrara (Currie Graham) , who hires her on the spot .

As Betty , a former concert pianist , continues to get settled in the neighborhood , she agrees to play at Rex 's funeral . Later , she and Matthew bring a tray of food to a chained prisoner in their basement .

= = Production = =

" Next " was written by Jenna Bans and Kevin Murphy and directed by Larry Shaw . While developing storylines for the second season , series creator Marc Cherry stated , " I want to keep finding new ways to talk about issues that relate to everyday women , " explaining that the show needs to focus on " small , real , everyday issues " in order to keep the audience interested . Cherry cited the Lynette storyline as an example of this strategy : " Lynette will have a job next season (returning to her advertising roots) , so I want to address how difficult it is to go to work all day and then come home and be expected to also take care of your house . " Huffman recognized that her character 's storylines needed a change of pace , but hoped that Lynette 's domestic life would still play an integral role this season . " My hope is to not get lost in the corporate world ; that it 's still a home and family / husband and children story , " she explained . " But how many times can you go , ' Kids , clear your plates ! ' " The episode also introduced Joely Fisher as Lynette 's new boss , Nina Fletcher . Fisher describes her character as " nasty , " elaborating : " Lynette suddenly has to come up against this tiger lady who never stops reminding Lynette that she 's childless by choice . Even though Nina is not a housewife , she is desperate in her own way . " Due to the death of his character , Steven Culp did not return to the series for the second season . For the open casket scene in " Next " , producers created a life mask of the actor . Savant was promoted to series regular after appearing as a recurring guest star throughout the first season .

The episode is the first to feature Alfre Woodard and Mehdad Brooks as series regulars after they were introduced in the final two episodes of the first season . Woodard played Betty Applewhite , a " deeply religious , overbearing single mother " while Mehdad portrayed her son , Matthew . In regards to the characters and their mystery storyline , Cherry stated : " They come on the street ; they seem like nice people ? but they 've got a secret . And it 's pretty gothic . It 's real and human and awful all at the same time . " Woodard commented that her character " never means harm ... Let 's just say she has flaws . She had to make some really tough decisions quick and if the law ever catches up with her , she 'll have to serve time ... But they 'll never catch her . " The final scene in which Betty and Matthew bring food to the prisoner in their basement was originally intended for the first season finale but saved for " Next " instead .

While the Applewhites are regarded as the first major black characters on the series , Cherry stated that the role of Betty was originally offered to two white film actresses , both of whom turned it down due to financial and time commitment issues . He clarified : " There 's nothing strategically black about her character . Her color is incidental . " Woodard had never seen the show before accepting the role . Desperate Housewives producers sent her fifteen episodes of the show , which she divided amongst various family members . After they compared storylines , Woodard recalled that she became " instantly hooked " on the series . Woodard reported experiencing heavy media attention after accepting the role . Both Brooks and his brother , Billy , auditioned for the role of Matthew . The final decision came down to both brothers as well as two other actors . According to Cherry , Brooks was cast because he exuded a " dangerous " element , as well as " a combination of this wholesome , sweet quality and a dark , brooding quality . "

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

According to Nielsen ratings , " Next " was watched by 28 @. @ 4 million viewers . It held a 12 @. @ 1 rating / 26 share on its original broadcast , indicating a 36 percent increase since the series premiere one year earlier and helping ABC earn its largest Sunday night audience in 10 years . Additionally , it was ABC 's most watched season premiere in nine years . The episode was the second @- @ most watched program of the week , behind only CSI on CBS . It was the most watched program among viewers 18 to 49 years of age . The episode is the second @- @ most watched episode of the series , following the first season finale in May 2005 .

= = = Critical reception = = =

Variety 's Brian Lowry gave the episode a positive review . He opined that the Lynette storyline looked " extremely promising " and enjoyed the addition of Joely Fisher to the cast as Lynette 's " tight @- @ assed new boss . " He identified the Bree storyline as " the real water @- @ cooler sequence " and complimented Marcia Cross ' performance . However , Lowry criticized the Gabrielle and Susan storylines , opining that they are " exhibiting signs of wear and tear . " Michael Slezak of Entertainment Weekly noted that the episode had " a particularly sleepy opening 20 minutes " while its exciting plot points all occurred in the second half of the episode . He praised the scene in which Bree changes the tie on Rex 's corpse and called Cross ' performance throughout the episode " pitch @- @ perfect . " Slezak also complimented Huffman 's performance , but wondered if Fisher was " a steely enough an actress to go Manolo @- @ a @- @ Manolo with Huffman every week . " Though he criticized the repetitive nature of the Susan and Gabrielle storylines , Slezak thought that the Applewhite mystery would help reduce the show 's chances of falling into a sophomore slump . He praised Woodward 's acting as well as her character 's storyline , opining , " there 's something so inherently warm and maternal in Woodard 's performance , such apple @- @ pie wholesomeness , that it makes her touches of menace all the more chilling . "

Gael Fashingbauer Cooper of MSNBC complimented that Applewhite storyline , writing : " Forget Lynette 's career stress , Gabrielle 's baby daddy drama , and even Bree 's new widowhood : This story has legs , and apparently arms . " She found it strange that the Bree , Andrew , and Danielle characters showed little emotion in regards to Rex 's death . Additionally , she noted that the Lynette and Gabrielle storylines provided comic relief while Susan , a character " so often saddled with the comic relief of the show , had a sad and serious premiere . " Sarah Gilbert of TV Squad gave the episode a positive review , stating the episode delivered " lots of juicy resolution , several power suits , and (you guessed it) lots of tears and shouting . " The Futon Critic selected " Next " as the 42nd best television episode of 2005 , writing , " Say what you will about the show 's rocky sophomore season but one can 't deny how strongly it started , " and citing the tie @- @ changing scene as the episode 's most memorable moment .

In 2005 , Bans and Murphy were nominated for a Writers Guild of America Award for Best Episodic Comedy writing , but lost to Jenji Kohan , who penned the pilot episode of the Showtime series Weeds .