



A simple recipe for the Greenhouse Effect

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The climate change is a daunting subject for most people, in terms of science, complexity, implications, and ethics. It touches on the way we live. While most climate scientists seem to agree that changes in the greenhouse gas emissions have a measurable impact on earth's climate (IPCC, 2007), the rest of the society is more divided. Hence efforts towards mitigation and adaptation to a changing climate are painstakingly slow. One factor in this picture may be that climate change is a fairly unfamiliar concept for the general public, and that there is little appreciation of the science involved – beyond the very simple concepts of a 'blanket that keeps the world warmer'. The common simple presentation may be too much of a metaphor that merely illustrates, but doesn't explain the greenhouse effect (GHE) or convince that it is actually real. The question is whether more effort should be spent on actually trying to do a better job explaining the GHE in sufficiently simple terms that a greater portion of the general public can follow. Is it possible to present the GHE as a robust 'back-of-the-envelope' physics problem that gives a convincing explanation for the most essential features? It may be worth pursuing different ways to communicate the meaning of a climate change – as it may be seen as a paradox that the world affords to host annual climate meeting on the top political levels (COP X), while a large fraction of the population remain unconvinced about the problem these meetings are meant to address.