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MAY 23, 2018

Dear Friends,

Here is the 251st issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. We really appreciate all of our readers hanging in there with us, sharing stories and inspiring us in so many ways.

Thanks so much!

This newsletter is a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith, John Ferguson and Mark Bowen (John and Mark are with Nature's Way Resources). We also have a great supporting cast of contributing writers and technical specialists who will chime in and tweak away regularly. We would love to keep receiving your input on this newsletter . . . comments . . . suggestions . . . questions. . . E mail your thoughts to: lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com. Thanks so much for your interest.

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HIBISCUS STRUTTING STUFF AFTER HARVEY ... STRANGE SAGO SAGAS CONTINUE

BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH

I often wonder what true plant experts are seeing when they look at gorgeous blooms on display or for sale compared to those of us who aren't involved in hybridizing or entering flower shows. Good opportunity to find out is coming up Sunday, June 3, when the American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star Chapter holds its annual Show and Plant Sale.

I asked Society stalwart Marti Graves what she sees with her "specialist" eye in the pictures below of just a few of the varieties they will have for sale. One thing that delights her are the " *multiple colors that blend together and yet are distinctly different. For example: the bright yellow eye contrasts with dark zone and blends into the outer edge colors, such as in African Safari.*" (center below.)

What a great comment to drop in conversations as you wander through the show entries and scrutinize flowers for sale! Here are some more of Marti thoughts and a backstory on this sample of sale hibiscus:



L to r, Baptisti, African Safari and Lightning Jack

- **BAPTISTI:** Unique form or lack thereof distinguishes this bloom from all others.
- **AFRICAN SAFARI:** The spotting & streaking of yellow on brown and the multiple colors in the eye and zone make this a vibrant bloom.
- **LIGHTNING JACK:** Different white eye streaks contrast with the orange brown body



L to r, Spectroflash & Texas Storm

- **SPECTROFLASH:** Excellent rays or streaks from the center of the bloom stands out on the lavender body and still has a 4th color with the pink edge.
- **TEXAS STORM:** Tribute to Hurricane Harvey, which hit during its development. (*Doesn't that form alone look like hurricane turbulence? Gave me goosebumps just looking at it. I want one!*)

IS IT BETTER TO GROW HIBISCUS IN THE GROUND OR IN POTS? Marti said this is the most common question society members are asked. Marti's plants are all in containers traditionally moved inside around Thanksgiving. They bring them back out in mid-March.

But, she notes, "A few of our members have them in the ground but in a very protected area from cold winds. We do not heat our greenhouses due to cost. Hibiscus do okay when temps dip to the 40°s. Any lower than that can cause death."

Sustained temps in the 20°s such as we had last year did cause members to lose plants. Marty's not sure how much of that was due to the heavy rains of Harvey, and how much was due to the two days of 22° and, a week later, two more days at 27°.

Remember, Hibiscus Society members are heavily (tho not exclusively) invested in the exotic blooms of the truly tropical hibiscus. Many of the tropical hibiscus, like native hibiscus, are also very hardy outdoor plants for this area. It's all a matter of knowing what you're buying.

That's why, generally speaking, Hibiscus Society shows are the best place to buy hibiscus. Society shows will have both kinds and members have the experience to tell you which is best for your situation.

**Sun., June 3: Lone Star Chapter Hibiscus Show & Plant Sale,
Bloom entry by 11:30am, Open to public 1-4pm
Condit Elementary, 7000 S. 3rd Street, Bellaire
lonestarahs.org/shows.html**

* * *

JUNIOR MASTER GARDENER CLASSES: Master Gardener classes are, without a doubt, the most momentous advances in our area's gardening opportunities. So it's particularly exciting now to see how many MG programs are now offering Junior Master Gardener classes.

[Texas Master Gardener programs by county](#)

These classes too will have registration deadlines. For example, Waller County's Junior Master Gardener program runs Mondays & Wednesdays, June 11-Aug. 10am-2pm. \$25). Registration deadline is Monday, May 28. Register: txmg.org/wallermg. Details: Facebook Waller County Master Gardeners or 979-826-7651

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Pictures from LuAnn Gorman's sago (insert added for plant identification)

SAGO SAGA CONTINUES . . . WHAT FUN!!!

I don't think, in all my years of garden writing, I've ever seen so much discussion of, or questions about, sagos. Thanks to (or because of) Harvey, we're seeing some strange sago growths.

Perhaps the strangest I've ever seen are the photos sent in by LuAnn Gorman. When LuAnn's Southwest Houston sago produced these strange growths at left above, neighbors joked they were alien eggs that might hatch ET.

Grant Stephenson, one of my sago go-to-gurus, said not to fear. "*This is freeze damage to the apical meristem of the cycad. It the female cones popping out to produce seed.*"

Plants are like people, Grant explains. "When they are injured they send out every bit of energy to fix the problem. Their job it to reproduce and carry on by setting seed before they die. Just like we do."

The sago's finite growing point was damaged by the freeze. The caudex (trunk) is cresting, trying to produce seed. This is, in fact, the equivalent of a witches broom when the cell structure in the inner growing point started splitting and multiplying.

Grant noted similarly damaged palms and cactus may also split and form multiple heads. Be nice to these plants, give them extra water, especially if they are in full sun or hit by reflected heat from concrete.

Just as a reminder, Grant warned earlier this year not to cut off dead sago fronds until the new appearing fronds are at least 6 inches long. Cutting dead fronds off sooner will create a weight imbalance. The old fronds' weight helps keep the crown (top of caudex) open so new healthy growth can emerge.

And, this bears repeating:

DROP THE "PALM" PLEASE! Sagos are not palms, they're cycads. If it helps, palms date (no pun intended) back only 80 million years. Cycads date back between 245 and 408 million years ago, depending on which experts you believe. Just ignore Google or any other authority using "sago PALM."



FYI: WITCHES BROOMS (and similar phenomena) are freaky growth patterns triggered by one of many different organisms (fungi, viruses, etc.) that enter a plant's system either because of an overly-stressed immune system or by deliberate interference. In woody plants they're called witch's brooms from the broom-like appearances and often look like huge bird nests. They usually don't hurt the host plant, some live for generation and many become a vital part of their local natural ecological cycles. Some dwarf plants we use are the result of triggering "witches broom" type growth.

* * *

P.S. FROM READERS:

- **OLD WIVES TAILS - ED HOLLAND** points out that the "*Garden Revolution*" by Larry Weaner is available through the Houston Public Library. He also warned against following gardening advice on Facebook.
 - I totally agree, especially when it comes to those planting date charts. Most are written for the horizontal mid-section of the country -- where the most gardeners are. Always check those against a local source, especially for vegetables, fruits, bulbs and wildflowers. Our (normally) short winters, quick freezes, blasting hot, dry summers and frequent monsoon rains do make a difference in our planting times. County [Master Gardener](#) and [Urban Harvest](#) websites usually

carry local planting time guides.

- **DEER-RESISTANT PLANTS - JENNIFER** has added Asiatic lilies and society garlic to my free **No-Deer Plants** flyer. Just remember: really hungry deer will eat anything! If you have other plants your deer don't seem to find tasty, please share at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

* * *

Brenda's column in the LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener. To sign up for this free, weekly Greater Houston area gardening report or read past issues, go to natureswayresources.com

JOHN'S CORNER

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS #45

A paper in the journal "Water Resources Research" (January 2018) stated that the freshwater resources on Earth are overly enriched with phosphorus (P). This leads to potentially toxic algal blooms and less available drinking water and human health problems. The two leading causes of this problem are artificial fertilizers (38%) and human sewage (54%). This is another good reason to only use organic fertilizers and be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

One of the effects of increasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels is the decreasing nutrient density of foods. This effect is starting to have ecological ramifications. For example higher carbon dioxide levels allowed algae to grow faster. However the algae were of far lower nutrient density and did not provide the needed nutrients for zooplankton which eats algae to thrive. Without zooplankton larger organisms do not have food, and the problem moves up the food chain. Nutrient rich foods are critical to our health. Due to the changing nutrient density in foods it is estimated that 150 million people will be at risk for protein deficiency, and iron (Fe) deficiency will affect a billion pregnant women at the same time. We are just now beginning to feel the effects of this nutrient collapse caused by increased carbon dioxide and the effects it will have on entire ecosystems. Another example is the drop in protein content of pollen. As gardeners we are concerned about our pollinators like honeybees. Researchers have found that protein levels in goldenrod pollen have decreased by over 33% from 1850's levels. The reason to grow our own fruits and vegetables sustainably using organic methods continue to increase.

I read an article the other day about the common Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*). Besides being a beautiful hedge plant that is drought and salt tolerant, this native is used to make a tea that is between black tea and coffee in caffeine content. One can make the tea yourself or order it in bags like black tea. There is a local supplier in Cat Springs, Texas a little Northwest of Sealy (www.CatSpringTea.com).

I get asked a lot of questions about earthworms and many of them regard pathogen destruction in our gardens and yards. Most gardeners know that earthworms concentrate nutrients for plants and help aerate and loosen our soils along with producing plant growth hormones. Another service that earthworms provide is pathogen reduction from any source, whether from bird droppings to cat and dog feces. Earthworms kill salmonella, e-coli, fecal streptococci, shigella, helminths ova and many more things that cause human health problems. The Journal of Environmental Quality (January 2018) had a recent study on this process "A Comprehensive Review of the Fate of Pathogens during Vermicomposting of Organic Wastes". Many artificial fertilizers, pesticides, and some herbicides kill our extremely valuable earthworms. Just another reason to use modern gardening methods based on biology better known as Organic Methods.

The speakers at a recent OHBA (Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance) seminar, Dr. David Montgomery and Anne Bikle sent me a article they recently published, "Junk Food Is Bad For Plants, Too - How a steady diet of (artificial) fertilizers turned crops into couch potatoes."

<http://nautil.us/issue/34/adaptation/junk-food-is-bad-for-plants-too>

A few thoughts from their paper and I added a few comments. High yielding crops fed artificial fertilizers have lower levels of minerals and nutrients. Archived samples of wheat from 1873 to 1995 found major declines in iron (Fe) and zinc (Zn). A 2009 study found up to 40% declines in the mineral content of fruits and vegetables over the last 50-70 years. The plant breeding programs at our universities are one of the causes as the focus was on yields (profit) and not quality. One example is the russet potato, if grown on the same soil side by side a small fingerling potato. For example the small fingerling potato will have more iron per unit of biomass that the russet which is far less nutrient dense (similarly for other nutrients). Another study using USDA data found that we have to eat four ears of corn to get the same nutrition that one ear of corn had in 1903. As a result we get calories that make us fat and contribute to diabetes, not the required nutrients that make us healthy. Plants also produce phytochemicals that have many health benefits. In general the closer the crop is to its wild relatives the higher the levels of phytochemicals. Also plants grown with artificial fertilizers also have less phytochemicals in them. This is a good reason to plant heirloom varieties of vegetables and grow them organically. The obsolete methods using toxic rescue chemicals do not provide the plants with what they need to prevent disease or pests, heal from injuries, or fend off pathogens. Contrary to what the chemicals companies have taught us, fast plant growth does not equal plant health. In nature plants provide root exudates to feed the microbes and the microbes give to the plant many things from minerals and phytochemicals to vitamins. The system is mutually beneficial for both the microbes and the plants. When we use artificial fertilizers we screw up the system, the plants quit producing root exudates for the microbes, so the microbes quit giving the plants all the other good stuff and quit protecting the roots from soil pathogens. "Hence, we end up with a big fat high yielding crops that look good on the outside but are poor in minerals and phytochemicals on the inside."

Note: Other research has shown that many of the hybrid crops have lost the ability to absorb minerals and other nutrients even if they are present in the soil. Anne and David use an analogy that I like: "Soils rich in organic matter are like human diets rich in fiber. Each is an important food source for the root and gut microbiomes, respectively."

Anne Bile and Dr. David Montgomery have authored several great books and information can be found on their website: <http://www.dig2grow.com/>

As gardeners we know the importance of soil from growing plants to cleaning the water and air. However, I am always amazed at how many folks do not value soil. Below is a link to an nice article in the New York Times on the value of soil on fighting climate change that was sent to me.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/18/magazine/dirt-save-earth-carbon-farming-climate-change.html>

Another link that was sent to me is a short video on regenerative farming and how it improves the soil.

<https://www.carbonationmovie.com/about/clips/244-one-hundred-thousand-beating-hearts-short-film>

Most gardeners are very concerned about their health. Now there is an independent lab called the Consumer Wellness Center Lab that allows you to test almost anything for heavy metals, trace minerals and nutritive elements. Now you can find out whether your favorite supplements, cosmetics, super foods, drinking water, garden soil, or even hair contain heavy metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium or arsenic. With lab instrument sensitivity in the low-ppb (parts per billion) range, our ICP-MS tests can pick up almost any trace amount of toxic elements or heavy metals.



Now you can with the **Consumer Wellness Center Lab** test kits
<http://cwclabs.naturalnews.com/CWC-Labs.html>

There was a nice short article on the health benefits of gardening in Natural News this week:
<https://www.naturalnews.com/2018-04-26-the-many-health-benefits-of-gardening.html>

* * *

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

DON'T SEE YOUR ORGANIZATION EVENT LISTED? DID YOU SEND IT IN?
NO EVENTS ARE PICKED UP FROM OTHER NEWSLETTERS, MASS RELEASES, OTHER PUBLICATIONS, ETC.

Events NOT submitted in EXACT written calendar format below may take 2+ weeks to be posted.
Adult gardening/plants events only -- If you don't see your submitted event, email us

lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

**_ IF WE INSPIRE YOU TO ATTEND ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE TELL SPONSORS YOU HEARD ABOUT IT
IN THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER**

WED., MAY 23: "TEN YEARS LATER: HCSS BIG BEND FIELD TRIP, JUNE 2008" by Wallace Ward, 7:30pm., Metropolitan Multi-Services Center, [1475 West Gray](#). Free. Houston Cactus & Succulent Society event. [hcsstx.org](#).

SAT. JUNE 2: SUCCESSFUL VEGETABLE GARDENING by HERMAN AUER, 9-11 am; Crystal Beach Fire & Rescue, 930 Noble Carl Drive, Crystal Beach. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free. Register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-309-5065. aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/

SAT., JUNE 2: A PASSION FOR PLUMERIA with LORETTA OSTEEN, 1-3 pm, Galveston County AgriLife Extension Bldg, Carbide Park, 4102 Main (Hwy 519), La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free. Register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-309-5065. aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/

THURS., JUNE 7: HEIRLOOM VEGETABLES by PAM AND LEAH GUNTER, 9-10 am; Waller County Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. Waller County Master Gardener event. Free. RSVP: wallerimgardener2013@gmail.com, 979-826-7651

FRI., JUNE 8: AQUAPONICS WORKSHOP, 9:00am-3:30pm, Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd. \$45. Harris County Master Gardener event. Register: <https://aquaponicsworkshop.eventbrite.com>

MON., JUNE 9: CHILDREN'S GARDEN GRAND OPENING, 10am-12:30pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free.

SAT., JUNE 9: PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SHOW & SALE, 9:30am-3pm, Bay Area Community Center, 5002 Nasa Road One, Seabrook. Free. thepumeriasociety.org

SAT., JUNE 9: LOW VOLUME IRRIGATION (HMNS), 9:30-11:30am, Houston Museum of Natural Science. \$30. Urban Harvest event. Register: 713-880-5540; urbanharvest.org/classes-calendar

WED., JUNE 13: BUTTERFLY GARDENING, noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens West Side Arboretum Pavilion, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

THURS., JUNE 14: 25 YEARS OF CHANGES & CHALLENGES IN THE RAINFOREST PYRAMID by Donita Brannon, 10-11:30am, Genoa Friendship Gardens Educational Center Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Pasadena. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event & plant sale. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

SAT., JUNE 16: ORCHID CARE, 10am-noon, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$40. Register: themercersociety.org/events

SAT., JUNE 16: PROPAGATION & SEED SAVING, 10:30am-12:30pm, Maud Smith Marks Library, 1815 Westgreen Blvd., Katy. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS, JUNE 14: ORGANIC ROSE PROTOCOLS & PLANT HEALTH by DANIEL MILLIKIN, 7pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavillon, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Houston Rose Society event. houstonrose.org

SAT. JUNE 16: SOIL HEALTH by JIM GILLIAM, 1-3 pm. Galveston County AgriLife Extension Bldg, Carbide Park, 4102 Main (Hwy 519), La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free. Register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-309-5065. aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/

MON., JUNE 18: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS OPEN GARDEN DAY & PLANT SALE, 9-11am, Genoa Friendship Gardens Educational Center Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Pasadena. Free. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., JUNE 19: PROPAGATION AND SEED SAVING - 6:30-8:30pm, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 930 Corbindale. Harris County Master Gardener event. Free. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., JUNE 21: PROPAGATION AND SEED SAVING, 6:30-8:30pm, Freeman Branch Library, 16616 Diana Lane. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., JULY 10: PLUMERIAS!, 7:30pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, Hermann Park Conservancy, 1500 Hermann Dr. Plumeria Society of America event. Free.

WED., JULY 11: PUTTING WETLANDS TO WORK IN YOUR HOMETOWN, noon - 2pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens West Side Arboretum Pavilion, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

SAT., JULY 21: MONARCHS ON THE MOVE, 10am-noon, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$40. Register: themercersociety.org/events

FRI., JULY 27: HOUSTON FOOD PRODUCTION CONFERENCE, 9am-3:30pm, University of Houston Downtown, 201 Girard. Harris County Master Gardener event. \$50 (\$30/students).

SAT., AUG. 18: THE ART OF KOKEDAMA: JAPANESE GARDENING, 10am-noon, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$40. Register: themercersociety.org/events

THURS., SEPT. 6: ROSES by GAYE HAMMOND, 9-10 am; Waller County Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. Free. Waller County Master Gardener event. RSVP: wallermgardener2013@gmail.com, 979-826-7651

SAT., SEPT. 15: TERRARIUM TIME, 10am-noon, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$40. Register: themercersociety.org/events

If we inspire you to attend any of these, please let them know you heard about it in . . .
THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!
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PLEASE READ BEFORE
SUBMITTING AN EVENT FOR THIS CALENDAR.

Events **NOT** submitted in the **EXACT** written format below may take two weeks or longer to be reformatted/retyped. After that point, if your event does not appear, please email us. Sorry, no children's programs. - Submit to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

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ABOUT US

BRENDA BEUST SMITH

WE KNOW HER BEST AS THE LAZY GARDENER . . .

. . . but Brenda Beust Smith is also:

- * a national award-winning writer & editor
- * a nationally-published writer & photographer
- * a national horticultural speaker
- * a former Houston Chronicle reporter

When the Chronicle discontinued Brenda's 45-year-old "Lazy Gardener" print column a couple of years ago, it ranked as the longest-running, continuously-published local newspaper column in the Greater Houston area.

Brenda's gradual sideways step from Chronicle reporter into gardening writing led first to an 18-year series of when-to-do-what Lazy Gardener Calendars, then to her *Lazy Gardener's Guide* book and now to her *Lazy Gardener's Guide* on CD (which retails for \$20. However, \$5 of every sale is returned to the sponsoring group at her speaking engagements).

A Harris County Master Gardener, Brenda has served on the boards of many Greater Houston area horticulture organizations and has hosted local radio and TV shows, most notably a 10+-year Lazy Gardener run on HoustonPBS (Ch. 8) and her call-in "EcoGardening" show on KPFT-FM.

Brenda recently ended her decades-long stint as Production Manager of the Garden Club of America's **BULLETIN** magazine. Although still an active horticulture lecturer and broad-based freelance writer, Brenda's main focus now is **THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER** with John Ferguson and Mark Bowen of Nature's Way Resources.

A native of New Orleans and graduate of St. Agnes Academy and the University of Houston, Brenda lives in Aldine and is married to the now retired Aldine High School Coach Bill Smith. They have one son, Blake.

Regarding this newsletter, Brenda is the lead writer, originator of it and the daily inspiration for it. We so appreciate the way she has made gardening such a fun way to celebrate life together for such a long time.

JOHN FERGUSON

John is a native Houstonian and has over 27 years of business experience. He owns Nature's Way Resources, a composting company that specializes in high quality compost, mulch, and soil mixes. He holds a MS degree in Physics and Geology and is a licensed Soil Scientist in Texas.

John has won many awards in horticulture and environmental issues. He represents the composting industry on the Houston-Galveston Area Council for solid waste. His personal garden has been featured in several horticultural books and "Better Homes and Gardens" magazine. His business has been recognized in the Wall Street Journal for the quality and value of their products. He is a member of the Physics Honor Society and many other professional societies. John is the co-author of the book *Organic Management for the Professional*.

For this newsletter, John contributes articles regularly and is responsible for publishing it.

MARK BOWEN

Mark is a native Houstonian, a horticulturist, certified permaculturist and organic specialist with a background in garden design, land restoration and organic project management. He is currently the general manager of Nature's Way Resources. Mark is also the co-author of the book *Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas*, the author of the book *Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast*, co-author of the *Bayou Planting Guide* and contributing landscape designer for the book *Landscaping Homes: Texas*.

With respect to this newsletter, Mark serves as a co-editor and periodic article contributor.

PABLO HERNANDEZ

Pablo Hernandez is the special projects coordinator for Nature's Way Resources. His realm of responsibilities include: serving as a webmaster, IT support, technical problem solving/troubleshooting, metrics management, quality control, and he is a certified compost facility operator.

Pablo helps this newsletter happen from a technical support standpoint.



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