

TheBloomingBell

Bell County Master Gardeners Association

August 2006, Newsletter

Monthly Meeting Wednesday, August 9, 2006, 11:00 a.m.

Bell County Extension Office

1605 N. Main St., Belton, Texas 76513

Speaker

Jay Mertz of *Rabbit Hill Farm*

Subject: Vermi Composting



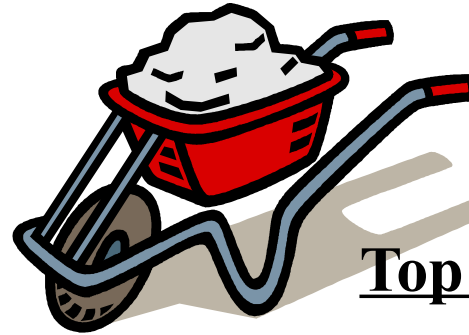
Vermi-composting is a method of composting that utilizes worms to help break down organic waste to lightweight, nutrient-rich compost.

EVENTS SCHEDULE

- Belton Greenhouse Workdays,
Wed. & Thurs., 7 am, Belton
- Burger Wednesday, 1st Wednesday
- Fall Vegetable Sale 8-10am, Aug 5th
- Fall Garden Tour, Oct 14, 2006
- Fall Seminar & Plant Sale,
8am-1pm, Oct 21, 2006

Ace Lumber

A thank you letter was sent in June to Jimmy and Jeff Parker of Ace Lumber Killeen for their generous donation of lumber, corrugated steel, screws and the delivery of these materials. This generosity allowed the Hard Hat Crew to modify the planting benches. The lumber was used to add sides to the benches and the corrugated iron was placed on the bench top and covered with a shallow layer of washed sand. These changes will reduce plant water requirements by controlling the air flow and the sand will help keep the moisture level stable. Our plants love these changes! If you have a chance to do business with Ace Lumber, please do. They are friends of Bell County Master Gardeners. They are located at 3032 South Ft. Hood (HWY 195) in Killeen.



Top Soil

Master Gardener **Tom Farr** (class 2003) has generously donated and delivered 15 cubic yards of top soil to be used at the Master Gardener Greenhouse. A thank you note was sent to Tom on behalf of the Bell County Master Gardener Association members and the Extension Office. Thank you, Tom Farr!

Not A Typo!

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Submitted by Guy Okeson

Texas Master Gardener Magazine Renewal

When time to renew your Texas Gardener Magazine please remember to send the renewal slip and the check, made payable to BCMGA, and mail it to the treasurer, Jan Anderson. She will mail the renewal slip to them with a check for a lesser amount, so the Association will make some money off of your renewal. Every little bit helps!

Bell County Master Gardeners'

Code of Conduct

I acknowledge that as Master Gardeners we volunteer our time to educate and serve the community. We also enjoy the fellowship and conviviality of other gardeners within the group. As in any group, conflicts will arise, but we agree to resolve them in a calm, kind, and diplomatic manner. We act accordingly with the

understanding that not doing so, and/or acting in an unpleasant, polarizing manner hurts the group, and may result in separation from the group at the discretion of the Board of Directors as per the Association Bylaws.

President's Corner

Fellow Volunteers:

It is now six weeks into our new year and we are now ready for our first big sale – the greenhouse volunteers have a variety of new, healthy vegetable seedlings ready for the public to buy on August 5th.

The greenhouse continues to undergo a metamorphosis, striving to accentuate its importance in fund raising and volunteer education. The new propagation tabletops are finished and in use. The compost bins have been moved to make way for the new storage building and we are readying the area for the installation of the fence to secure the greenhouse site. The Greenhouse Committee is purchasing an electric mixer to lessen the work in making our potting soil mixture. Our new water-harvesting specialists are beginning to make plans to trap enough rainwater to supply our greenhouse needs.

I am sorry to announce that our Greenhouse Manager, Karla Tomaka, has had to resign for personal reasons. I am proud to inform you that her duties have been assumed by one of our able volunteers, Raymond Marr. Keep Karla in your thoughts and prayers as she goes through this difficult period in her life, and thank her for all she has contributed to the BCMGA.

While we have a good “core” of volunteers working in the greenhouse, we could certainly use more. If you are interested in helping, contact Crystal Fisher or Lawrence Cox. Because all work and no play makes Jack a dull

boy, the greenhouse committee is working towards instituting regularly presented education sessions over a variety of topics as often as each scheduled work day.

Kim Pringle has started the first of three proposed greenhouse specialty groups. The topic of her group is Herbs. Emilie Butts has consented to start our second specialty group, dealing with Xeroscaping. Past-president Neil Cochran is heading our third, the Earthkind Roses specialty group. Anyone who wishes to become a part of either of these groups, feel free to contact the appropriate group leader.

Thanks to Joyce Pack and Joan Hinshaw, the Vegetable Demonstration Gardens continue to be outstanding. Their group, along with Charles Spencer has kept the plants happy and producing. The automatic watering has made a wonderful addition to the project, so much that we are now considering adding drip irrigation to the flowerbeds along the greenhouse fence and the rose garden located in the area just west of the greenhouse.

Six BCMGA members spent 2 days in Menard, Texas, late in June, taking a very unique course in Rainwater Harvesting. Having graduated from the course with rain barrels in hand, these volunteers now constitute the newest group of Master Gardener Specialists. Besides being fully instructed in the science of collecting rainwater, they will be able to present education programs that can be given throughout the community as part of our Speaker's Bureau. Their names are Deb Martin, Ursula Nanna, Mary Ann Everett, Nancy Hawkins, Violet Okeson, and myself.

The initial speaker's bureau training, given by Neil Cochran and Deb Martin, is now complete. Dirk Aaron is collecting information on potential speakers with their programs. Dirk is going to manage the program through the Extension Office, since they are the first to receive requests for speakers. If any members would like to be a part of the speaker's bureau, contact Dirk for an application. If you need help

in developing a topic that you would like to present, contact Dirk or myself so we can get you the help you need.

The new class committee, under the able leadership of Janice Canard and Ginger Jones, has been very active making arrangement for the new class that will start January of 2007. The programs have been set in place, the class size and tuition determined, and the call for Master Gardener applicants to fill the class disseminated. The committee has spent a lot of time reviewing the comments from the last class on each session. Because of their hard work, I

President's Corner Contd.

feel that the sessions presented to the class of 2007 will be outstanding.

Come join us in our quest to have the best Master Gardener group in Texas. Sure, there is work to be done, but it is also fun to know you are a part of a great group of volunteers working toward a common, worthwhile goal.

**Gy Okeson
President BCMGA**

Barn Swallows on My Back Porch

The cats were sitting by the window looking out at the balcony. Suddenly their tails began to twitch and they sat up alertly. Going to the window to see what had gotten their attention I noticed a barn swallow. He was sitting on the balcony railing looking up at a nest upon which sat another swallow. Happy to see them, although less happy to see the mess they made, we observed them over the next few weeks, as well as read about barn swallow behavior. What we learned is that barn swallows can be very beneficial to gardeners.

A member of the family Hirundinidae (which also includes the purple martin), the barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) with its blue-black back and rust color underside is easily distinguished from the other members of this

family by its deeply forked tail. Migrating in the spring from their winter homes in South America, barn swallows frequently return to the same area every year, and often will reuse nests. They like open areas with access to water, but they also want some kind of sheltered ledge upon which to build their nests.

It was not long before we noticed the barn swallow parents coming to the nest with food, and soon four little heads appeared above the edges of the nest. Waiting for food they resembled muppets with their broad, open mouths. The parents were kept very busy providing enough nourishment for their always hungry offspring. Of interest to gardeners, barn swallows are insectivores, eating only insects, and lots of them. Most of their diet is made up of mosquitoes, grasshoppers, beetles, moths and other flying insects. Their swooping acrobatic flights are usually done in pursuit of prey, which they tend to catch on the wing, eating many pounds of insects each year. Swallows also get their water while flying, skimming the water surface and scooping up the water in their beaks. During breeding season, when barn swallows are feeding their young, they eat approximately one third of their weight in insects each day. To give you an idea of what this means, consider the following figures. An average barn swallow weighs 17-20 grams (0.6-0.7 ounces). Mosquitoes weigh anywhere from 2.5 mg to 10 mg. Imagine an average barn swallow to be 18 grams, so one third of it's weight would be 6 grams. For simple math purposes, let's say that an average mosquito is 5 mg. If 6 grams equals 6000 mg, dividing by 5, an average barn swallow could be eating 1200 mosquitos a day! Or quite a few crickets, or grasshoppers. Barn swallows tend to be socially monogamous, and during breeding season, couples stay together and generally produce two broods with three to seven eggs each time. Some barn swallow couples may stay together for years. Both parents participate in building the nest, a cup shaped shell of mud pellets, lined with feathers and grass. After the eggs are laid, both parents incubate them (eggs will hatch in 13-15 days), and then feed the babies. Baby

swallows stay in the nest for about twenty days before fledging, and are looked after by their parents for about a week after that. Parents help to lead them back to the nest at night. By two weeks of age the young birds have departed. A few weeks later I noticed the cats by the window again, watching with the rapt attention of children at the circus observing acrobats. Looking out I saw the young barn swallows, covered with real feathers now, swooping away from the porch and then returning, as they practiced flying. They were beautiful to watch. Of course we knew it meant that soon they would be gone and the nest would be empty. And it was. Within a short period however, the parents were back, beginning a second family. We are hoping that some of the first brood will choose to build a home nearby, for despite the mess they make they are welcome for all the bugs they eat and the lively entertainment they provide.

Submitted by Jane Capen

Rainwater Harvesting

Specialist Course By: Ursula Nanna

June 22 – 23, 2006, six Bell County Master Gardeners attended the rainwater harvesting specialist course in Menard Texas. Traveling through some historic rural areas delightfully highlighted the trip.

After driving around Menard and getting our bearings, we had lunch at Side Oats Café. It became a casual meeting place for Master Gardeners journeying in from many other counties to attend the course. We had a terrific lunch, all visiting briefly, and then time to begin our training at the meeting hall.

There was not a dull moment from start to finish as Extension Agents presented every facet of water collection...the new age-old idea begun thousands of years ago. Apparently electricity made it easier to get water for personal use rather than going to the river or the rain barrel – ya think !! ??

Menard, a rural town of 4,000 people, boasted a new, modern library which towered over all the city buildings and the feed store but was the

central feature of our training as it housed many amenities. First of these is the 3,000 gallon rainwater collection tank; next the rain collection garden, and lastly, the diverter channels.

The steel 3K gallon rainwater collection tank stores water collected from the front and back ½ of the library roof and is used for watering the strategically placed gardens of prairie grasses and Texas native plants via drip irrigation lines. The remaining back half of the library roof is used as a catchment to divert rain water to a garden dug out in such a way as to retain the rainwater no longer than 18 – 24 hours allowing the water to percolate instead of running over the grass carrying the eroded soil, pesticides and herbicides and impurities to the sewer and back to the processing plant. This garden is planted in native grasses and plants to aide in retaining the rainwater.

The remaining front half of the roof is used to collect the rainwater and divert it to 1500 gallon diverters to slow the run of the rainwater allowing it to percolate – much like the rain collection garden.

From this we visited various sites like the Stock Yard boasting collection tanks that watered gardens of native prairie grasses like side oats gamma, switch grass, little and big blue stem, and Indian grasses to name a few.

Then we visited some homesteads. Mrs. Zimmerman's place demonstrated 2 1500-gallon collection tanks. One tank was at the house and used to water the raised flower and veggie beds, while the other tank at the shed/greenhouse provided the water for the greenhouse and surrounding gardens and a beautiful 2000 gallon Koi pond/stream.

All this was highlighted by a most delectable dinner at Billy Kniffen's house, catered by Side Oats Café and we were served by Billy's wife and 5 most wonderful Jr. Master Gardeners.

Oh, they also catered and served us the next morning at a sunrise breakfast !! OOOO la-la !!

Billy's house featured 6 rainwater collection tanks housed in a giant Quonset-type barn.

There is no other water source for his home and grounds...no well was dug. 18,000 gallons

supplies all the needs and can keep the homestead in water for a year if needs be. He also collects all the gray water for outside watering. This self-contained system uses pumps and filters and an UV light to purify the rainwater for home consumption and drinking. The water tastes terrific and even feels delightfully different to the pallet. The last half-day was spent in intensive training coupled with many questions that rounded out the course. We received demo supplies and rode home churning over what we learned. For now and for our future, rainwater collection will become mandated for new homes, malls, condominiums, and anywhere a roof can catch rainwater. Our society screams for better stewardship over our limited life-sustaining resources. Water WILL become scarcer especially at the rate we waste it driving the price higher and higher. Those of us who conserve NOW will be years ahead of the pack. Ask yourself..." If not me, then whom ...? "

I, for one, am grateful to have attended the Specialist course and now have the capacity to collect 600 gallons of rainwater and 80 gallons clothes washer gray water for outside gardening. I hope to increase this harvesting soon.

BCMGA HERB STUDY CALENDAR (2006-2007)

MONTH/YEAR	PROGRAM	HERBS
July 12, 2006	Anise Anyone	Fennel, Mexican Marigold Mint
August 9, 2006	Exquisitely Aromatic	Lavender (deer resistant), Lemon Verbena
September 13, 2006	Instant Gratification: A, B, C & D (Annuals)	Arugula (roquette), Basil, Cilantro, Dill
October 11, 2006	Mediterranean Flavors (Perennials)	Marjoram, Oregano, Poliomintha, Rosemary, Sage, Thyme
November 8, 2006	Pretty Edible Flowers	Calendulas (Pot Marigolds), Dianthus, Nasturtium, Roses, Violets

December 13, 2006	Tea Time	Scented geraniums, Chamomile, & Stevia
January 10, 2007	Herbal Topiaries: "A Twig in time becomes a tree." Latin American proverb	
February 14, 2007	Season To Taste	Chervil, Dandelion, Lovage, Parsley, Savory(winter and summer)
March 14, 2007	Cool Cucumber	Borage, Salad burnet
April 11, 2007	Stately, Classic Cottage Garden Ornamentals	Bay laurel, Comfrey, Foxglove, Lemongrass
May 9, 2007	Mingle with the Mint Family (Labiatae)	Spearmint, Peppermint, Bergamot(bee balm), Lemon balm, Catmints, Pennyroyal
June 13, 2007	Silver Herb Gardens	Artemisia, Dittany of Crete, Germander, Lamb's ear, Santolina



Meeting time is 8:25 am. Please bring your lawn chair and a cup of coffee (we will meet in the grassy area in front of green house on nice days). ***Please do **ONE** of the following to prepare for the meeting:***

- (1) Research the herbs and report something interesting you learned,
- (2) If you grow the herb, describe your experience,
- (3) Use the herbs in a project, bring a recipe using the herbs or sample to taste or
- (4) Bring a photo of herb used in the landscape.

If you can stay after the meeting, we will tend to needs of herbs and other greenhouse projects. Let's be creative and have lots of fun.

Sweet Fennel Soda Bread

Rowena Fengel

Ingredients:

3 Cups All-purpose Flour
 1 Tablespoon Baking Powder
 1 Teaspoon Baking Soda
 ½ Teaspoon Salt
 1 Cup White Sugar
 1 Tablespoon Fennel Seed
 1-2 Teaspoon(s) Orange Zest
 2 Eggs, beaten
 1 ¾ Cup Buttermilk
 2 Teaspoons Melted Butter
 3 Tablespoons Butter, chilled
 1 Cup Golden Raisins (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 10" round cake pan.
2. In a large bowl, stir together the dry ingredients: Flour, Baking Powder, Baking Soda, Salt, Sugar, Fennel Seed, and Orange Zest.
3. In another bowl stir the wet ingredients: The Eggs, Buttermilk and melted Butter.
4. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients with a wooden spoon just until blended (stir in raisins at this time if adding).
5. Spoon the batter into the prepared pan. Dot with the three tablespoons of chilled butter.
6. Bake for one hour in the preheated oven, or until puffed and golden.
7. Cut into wedges and serve warm.

This is good with Applesauce or Apple butter also.



Mexican Mint Marigold Cookies

Recipe courtesy of Blue Moon Gardens, Chandler, Tx

Ingredients:

½ Cup butter
1 Cup Brown Sugar
1 Teaspoon Vanilla
1 Egg
½ Cup Sesame Seeds, toasted
½ Cup Pecans, chopped
1 Tablespoon fresh Mexican Mint Marigold,
Chopped
¾ Cup Flour
¼ Teaspoon Salt
¼ Teaspoon Baking Powder

Directions:

Cream together butter, brown sugar and vanilla. Beat in the egg. Add sesame seeds, pecans and Mexican Mint Marigold to the butter mixture. Combine flour, salt and baking powder and add to mixture. Refrigerate dough for 30 minutes. Drop in small mounds, three inches apart, onto greased baking sheet. Bake for 9 minutes at 375 degrees. Let cool slightly on baking sheet, then remove to a cooling rack.

Basil or Mint Jelly

Jeanne Richard

Ingredients:

1 Cup Basil or Mint leaves
2 Cups Water
1 Cup Vinegar (white)
6 ½ Cups Sugar

2-3 Drops green food coloring
2 Pouches Certo (Liquid Pectin)

Directions:

Combine first 5 ingredients; heat to a boil. Add liquid pectin; heat to full, rolling boil and boil one minute. Remove leaves. Jar, cap and process 10 minutes in water bath.

Mix some melted bail jelly with Worcestershire sauce, Cajun seasoning and ground cloves and baste ham with it!

A Very Short History of the innia



Did you grow zinnias when you were a child? Many of us did. Our mother or father gave us a small square somewhere in the yard to be our garden along with a package of zinnia seeds. We dug tiny rows, and planted the seeds ever so carefully, watered them, and waited impatiently. A few days later the seeds emerged, soon growing into bright colorful flowers. It was always hard to choose between cutting them to bring inside or enjoying their presence in the garden. Many of us still love them, not only for their bright colors but for these fond memories. However, zinnias were not always this colorful, or popular. Originally a smaller flower than most we see today, the zinnia is a native of Mexico, where it was called “mal de ojos” (*sickness of the eye*) by the Spanish explorers because they thought it

small and ugly. Seeds were brought to Europe in the 18th century, and the plant acquired the name zinnia for Dr. Johann Gottfried Zinn, who wrote the first scientific description of it. However it took over a hundred years before the plant, described as “a drab, purplish wildflower” by author C.H. Dole, became of interest to plant breeders. The zinnia’s popularity truly began around 1920 when John Bodger of Bodger seeds discovered a natural mutation which he bred, ultimately producing a dahlia flowered zinnia called “California Giant”.

Appealing to gardeners because it could be obtained in different colors, it won a gold medal from the Royal Horticultural Society of England. Soon after, Burpee Seed Company began hybridizing zinnias to produce even more varieties.

Today, there are over a dozen species of zinnias, although only three are generally grown by home gardeners. Within those species are a wide variety of form, height, size and color. Zinnias may range in size from six inches to four feet, and come in every color except blue. They may be single, semi double, or double, with various other forms such as “beehive”, “button”, and “dahlia flowered”. Today’s most popular varieties are more disease, heat and humidity resistant than many of their predecessors.

In 2000 the National Garden Bureau “ngb.org” selected the zinnia as their “Plant of the Year”. So if you have not grown zinnias since you were a child, perhaps it is time to do it again, or to give some other child her own garden space and a package of seeds.

Submitted by Jane Capen

Greenhouse News

You can earn **2 hours of service credit for each hour** served working in the greenhouse, on Wednesdays and Thursdays during the months of August, September, and October. This applies to Sale/Yard Tour as well! Depending

upon the response, the offer may be made to apply to other days in the week at a later date. Come and enjoy the camaraderie of your greenhouse.

The Board is looking for volunteers to ***mow the grass around the extension office once a week.*** The more volunteers we get, the less often each will have to do it. We have a brand new mower that is self propelled. Anyone interested please contact Guy Okeson or Mary Ann Everett.

E-mail Changes

Crystal Fisher - cfisher@earth-comm.com

YARD WORK – AS VIEWED FROM HEAVEN_ *(overheard in a conversation between God and St. Francis):*

God: Francis, you know all about gardens and nature; what in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought, and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees, and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

St. Francis: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. They are called the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God: Grass? But it is so boring, it's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees or birds, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with

temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want grass growing there?

St. Francis: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it....sometimes two times a week.

God: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

St. Francis: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis: No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God: Now let me get this straight...they fertilize it to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis: Yes, sir.

God: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God: No way! What do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

St Francis: After throwing the leaves away, they go out and buy something called mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God: And where do they get this mulch?

St. Francis: They cut down the trees and grind them up to make mulch.

God: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

St. Catherine: "Dumb and Dumber," Lord. It's a really stupid movie about....

God: Never mind--I think I just heard the whole story from Saint Francis.

Submitted by Betty & Don Lowe



St. Francis: You aren't going to believe this Lord, but when the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God: What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep the moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves become compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

St. Francis: You'd better sit down, Lord. As soon as the leaves fall, the Suburbanites rake

Synopsis of B.C.M.G.A. **Board Meeting Minutes 7/26/06**

Beverly Zendt from the Belton Chamber of Commerce presented 2 projects they are working on - Harris Park and South Belton Park. Sweetbriar Nursery is donating cuttings that BCMGA has been asked to "baby" till planting occurs in Sept/Oct '07, and assist with the planting. ***This project was approved.***

Jan Anderson presented the treasurer's report. As of June 30th our bank balance was \$11,874.12. She will also send out past due notices to members who haven't paid their dues for the coming year. Jan Anderson also reported that there are 24 applicants for the New Class for 2007. The maximum number will be 25.

Payment for class must be completed by Sept., 2006.

By-Laws revisions were presented by Rutha Leffel. The changes were accepted by the board and will be presented to the general membership for their approval.

D.J. Campbell requested a plaque of appreciation for Mr. Jim Apple, whom we purchased our lawn mower from.

Kevin Canfield has 6 1,000 gallon water tanks that he wants to donate to our rainwater collection project. Each tank is 5' x 8'.

Gy Okeson presented storage building estimates for a shed to hold all the non-greenhouse items currently stored in the greenhouse. *After review, the Board voted to accept T & T Carport's bid of \$2,245.* They will erect and level it for us.

Karla Tomaka presented a proposal that we give a greenhouse worker credit for 2 hrs. of service for 1 hour of actual work during the months of August, September and October this year, and to possibly consider extending this next year to include the months of June and July.

Our president, Gy Okeson has asked that I do a synopsis of the Board actions monthly.

Marty Portmann, Recording Secretary

FALL GARDEN TOUR

Sue Morgan needs volunteers for the fall yard tour. Those who would like to show their yards should contact her as soon as possible since she needs to know by September. 1) E-mail her at txmorgan2@earthlink.net or 2) call her at (254) 698-8668.

COMMENTS FROM YOUR COORDINATOR

By: Dirk Aaron – CEA Bell County



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