Allotment information

Help and advice from Southampton City Council to get you started

Tools you may need

Fork, Watering can, Spade, Hoe, Rake, Wheel barrow, Trowel

Getting started on your new allotment...

Congratulations on taking on an allotment plot. We hope you enjoy getting to work on your plot and find this information useful.

Ten good reasons to have an allotment:

1 Organic- you can decide whether to grow organic and know exactly what you are eating. You can reduce you and your family's exposure to pesticides, herbicides and fungicides.

2 Value for money- growing your own vegetables and fruit can save you lots of money, especially if you want to eat organic. And renting a plot costs less than you think.

3 Exercise- getting outside, enjoying the fresh air and increasing the amount of exercise you do.

4 Community spirit- allotment gardening can provide an opportunity to meet other people.

5 Family activity- people of all ages can enjoy working on an allotment. It can be a fun activity for all the family.

6 Sense of achievement- it can be very rewarding to see and taste the fruits of your labour.

7 Freshest food possible- you can pick and eat your crops within hours.

8 Good for the environment- allotments encourage environmentally friendly practices such as composting and reduce the need for packaging.

9 Good for local wildlife- allotments can provide valuable habitats for wildlife and offer green open space in otherwise urban areas.

10 Stress relief- gardening can be very therapeutic and can reduce stress.

First steps...

You have just taken over an allotment.

Firstly have a really good look at the allotment and decide what needs to be done.

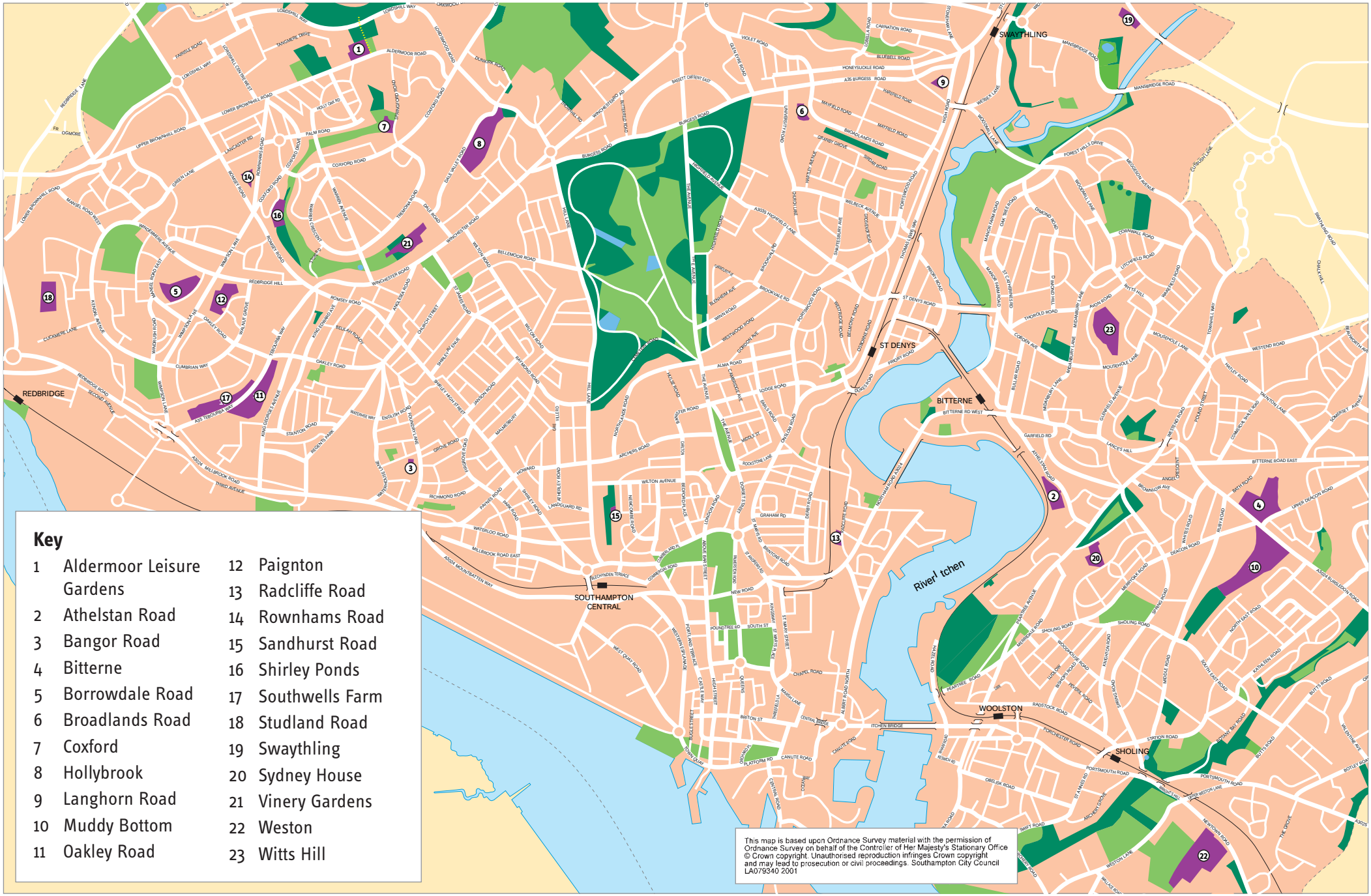
What tools will you require?

What you would like to grow?

An allotment does not provide instant free food. However the longer you work your plot the cheaper it becomes. Never try and dig an allotment in one go. Dig and plant as you go, and as the seeds or plants begin to grow, hoe regularly to keep the weeds in check.

As one very experienced allotment holder told us... "you need plenty of patience and perseverance and never give up when the results are not what you expected!"

Map showing allotment sites



An Ideal Allotment Plot

	Rough dig this first, add manure and plant potatoes.	
	Then dig this area to a better standard and plant root crops e.g. onions/carrots/parsnips etc. You can also plant marrows, courgettes here.	
	Fine dig and plant with Brassicas such as cabbages/turnips/swede etc.	
	Fine dig and plant with Legumes such as peas/beans.	
Compost	Prepare and plant **permanent** plants such as: rhubarb, asparagus, blackcurrants, gooseberries, raspberries. Comfrey can be grown for compost. **Shed**	**Same**

To reduce pests and diseases and improve the soil structure crops should be rotated each year.

When you take on your new allotment plot try to dig over about one fifth of the plot, add manure and plant potatoes. Don't be too fussy with the digging as potatoes are good for clearing weedy ground. Then dig the next fifth to a better standard removing as many weeds as possible and plant crops such as onions, marrows etc. The bottom section of the plot should have a large compost bin and all permanent crops that should not be moved.

What is composting?

Composting is a natural process whereby bacteria, fungi, worms etc feed on organic waste and turn it into a useful garden product. These organisms all require a ready supply of oxygen for the process to work, and their activity produces varying levels of heat.

Composting on your allotment

It makes good sense to produce compost on your allotment:

- It reduces waste on allotments.
- It turns waste into a ready source of fertile organic matter which improves soil fertility and soil condition and adds nutrients.
- It reduces the use of natural resources such as peat.

Good compost needs:

• Fresh Material • Green Waste • Moisture • Air • Heat

What to use?

Never add cooked food to the heap as it will encourage rats.

Add

- Raw fruit & veg
- Kitchen scraps
- Wood ash
- Shredded newspaper
- General green waste
- Nettles and comfrey
- Leaves

Don't add

- Cooked food
- Potato tops and peelings as they may carry blight
- Perennial weeds
- Roots such as brassicas as they may carry club root
- Fish or meat scraps
- Weeds that have gone to seed
- Dairy products

Top tips

The secret of successful composting is speeding up the process as much as possible, which also means keeping the heap as hot as possible.

Top tips from successful allotment composters include:

- Try and mix brown and green waste to a 50:50 mix
- If the heap doesn't work well try adding a nitrogen based compost accelerator
- Shred the waste as fine as possible
- Try and build the heap and leave it for as long as possible (the less disruption the greater the possibility to build up heat), but turn the heap regularly to mix the compost and keep the oxygen flow good.
- Keep the heap moist but not waterlogged, add water to prevent the heap drying out
- A cover such as an old blanket helps to prevent waterlogging but keeps heat in
- Once you've started a heap let it get on with the composting process, if you have more material start another heap or you'll never really know when the first one is finished

What can go wrong

If your heap turns into a wet smelly mush then it has either become too wet or not enough fresh air is getting into the heap. If this happens try aerating and turning the heap and add a compost accelerator.

Pests & diseases

Potato and tomato blight

With potatoes, blackish, round patches appear on leaf edges and the leaf underside becomes downy white with the spores. If the weather remains moist the disease will rapidly spread.

The tubers then develop with a firm dry rot, which is attacked by other bacteria, causing apparently sound tubers to rot quickly when stored. Tomatoes show fewer symptoms, but the fruit is disfigured with brown leathery patches.

To reduce infection it is important not to use tubers from previously blighted crops. Early varieties are very susceptible so it is important to sow these early so that the crop is maturing before the blight starts in July.

To improve your chances of avoiding blight, remove all potential sources of infection such as small tubers and never leave old tubers in the ground. These can be burnt or composted as most infection is wind borne from external sources.

Since blight spores need humidity, slightly wider spacing may help air movement and ridging or mulching potatoes prevents the spores being washed down off the leaves into tubers in the soil. If blight does strike and the weather turns dry you may save the crop by cutting off foliage and leaving for 3 weeks to harden up the tubers.

Clubroot of Brassica

This is a persistent disease on allotments. Symptoms do not become evident until a swelling forms on the roots. The above ground symptoms are wilting, stunted growth and the foliage may be a different to healthy plants. The spores can remain viable for 20 years even without the host.

The spores are carried on soil, boots and dung. Club root is most common on poorly drained soil especially in low-lying areas where flooding can introduce new spores. It is also more prolific in acidic soils where pH is less than 7.0 and in warm moist soils between October and April.

Adding lime to increase the pH above 7.0 helps but a **too alkaline soil encourages scab on potatoes and white rot of onions**.

Practice weed control to reduce clubroot on related weeds such as poppy, clover, shepherds purse, wallflowers and docks. Avoid overwatering soil using furrow irrigation if possible. Dispose of diseased material by burning or removal off site.

White rot of onions

Onion white rot also affects leeks and garlic. Apparently healthy plants suddenly start to die, older leaves turn yellow and wilt and the roots become rotten. As the disease progresses a white thread-like fungal growth can be seen with black fruiting bodies which look like black seeds. The white rot is very persistent and can survive up to 15 years without any onions being present.

The root system of onions stimulates the disease to germinate and start the cycle again. Control is mainly by 8-year rotation and removing any soil in areas affected. It would also be prudent not to grow garlic as this is deeper rooted and stimulates more white rot than onions. Destroy infected material by burning or removal from site unless you can ensure high composting temperatures.

If you have infected land it is worth growing garlic in 10cm deep holes of clean soil, so that when the roots eventually enter and trigger the white rot growth, the ground temperature will usually be high enough to halt the disease.

Similarly, leeks survive and crop well due to a combination of soil temperature and root development at a crucial time of growth. Once the white rot has germinated and infected the new crop, it dies, so you could grow an early crop and immediately lift it as infection appears, which would remove a large source of infection. This would need to be carried out every year.

Black Fly and Green Fly

Aphids, more commonly known as green fly or black fly are one of the most common pests that can attack a wide variety of garden plants. Aphids will attack all parts of a plant including leaves, shoots, flowers, stems and roots. They often cluster around young growth or on the underside of leaves and feed by sucking sap from the plant. This can lead to weak and distorted plants and if aphid numbers are very high they can actually kill the plant they are living on. The way that aphids feed also spreads plant viruses as the insects fly from plant to pant.

As they feed, aphids secrete a sticky 'honeydew' substance that drips onto lower leaves and often becomes covered in black mould. Although the mould itself is not harmful to the plant, the mould prevents light getting to the leaf causing premature leaf fall.

Aphids are generally 1-5mm long, can be found in a variety of colours and can be winged or wingless. There are over 500 species in Europe. The population of aphids rises rapidly in spring due to their life cycle.

Prevention and control to avoid black fly and green fly includes providing a healthy soil for strong plant growth and encouraging a range of wildlife that will include natural predators of aphids. You can also find resistant varieties of some crops that discourage aphids and the diseases spread by them. Regularly inspect plants and if you discover aphids on your plants remove them by hand and squash them. Heavily infested leaves should be removed and put in a bucket of soapy water. Also a powerful jet of water from a hose will dislodge the aphids. Finally, as a last resort, chemical controls can be used to target the aphids.

Slugs

Try to remove the overnight shelter by hoeing out weeds and grass. Try creating deliberate hiding places such as a few pieces of wooden planking and each time you visit the allotment, check the planks and destroy the slugs. Don't throw them on to your neighbours plot as they will come back!

Beer traps are fairly effective and should be covered to stop birds drinking from them.

One disposal point is your compost heap, slugs are excellent composters and their presence will encourage their predators to congregate and destroy them such as frogs, hedgehogs, blackbirds and thrushes etc.

Another method is to use a barrier, but these need regular replenishment and more than one material to be effective. Grit, eggshells and salt all work for a small time, but are gradually eroded by rain. Bran attracts slugs but must be kept dry. When eaten, it swells up inside the slug and eventually ruptures the slug's body, leaving the remains safe for the predators to eat, unlike chemical pellets.

The single best method seems to be the beer traps if no natural predators are available.

Allotments - basic do's and don'ts

Everything you need to know about renting an allotment from Southampton City Council.

The Allotment Acts and Tenancy Agreements dictate how allotments should be used. This means most of the do's and don'ts are legal or Southampton City Council requirements. Failure to comply could result in the termination of your agreement!

Do's

- You **must** erect a clearly visible number on your plot.
- If your site has gates you **must** always ensure you lock them behind you when entering and leaving the site.
- You **must** cultivate at least 50% of your plot and the remainder must be cut down and free from weeds. From the start of your tenancy agreement you have a three month period in which enforcement for non cultivation is not applicable.
- You can plant herbs and flowers as well as fruit and vegetables.
- You can have a small lawned area as long as it's regularly mown.
- You can build a pond, as long as it's built in a way that's not dangerous to people and animals. For advice contact the Allotment Officer.
- If you have fruit bushes/trees etc, you **must** maintain the area around them.
- Paths either side of your plot **must** be maintained.
- Use water sparingly, you can use a hand held hosepipe to water your crops or fill up a water butt, please note that at certain times there may be restrictions.
- Compost and recycle as much as you can.
- You **must** get permission from the Allotment Officer if you wish to erect sheds, greenhouses, poly tunnels etc, or if you wish to keep chickens on your plot.
- You can bring your dog on site as long as it's kept under control.
- You can bring children onto the allotments but they must be closely supervised at all times.
- Report damaged fences to the site rep or the Allotment Officer.
- Keep an eye out for anybody you don't know on site and don't be afraid to ask them what they are doing.
- You **must** pay your allotment rent within 30 days of receiving an invoice, discounts apply to plot holders over 60 and Smart City Card holders.
- Always inform the Allotment Officer if you change address.
- If you vacate your plot you **must** remove all belongings within two weeks.

Don'ts

- You are **not** allowed to sublet your plot.
- You are **not** allowed to use your plot for any trade or business.
- You are **not** allowed to use carpets on allotment plots.
- You must **not** bring in or store rubbish on site.
- You must **not** use on site skips for disposing of anything other than your own non-recyclable allotment waste.
- You are **not** allowed to block communal pathways.
- You are **not** allowed to dig up or obstruct paths between plots.
- You must **not** use a sprinkler to water crops.
- You are **not** allowed to have bonfires that cause a nuisance, or leave fires unattended. Only burn dry material on suitable days.
- You are **not** allowed to cause a nuisance to other plot holders or neighbouring properties - nuisance could include bad or racist language, getting drunk, playing loud music, bonfires etc.
- You must **not** use any abusive or threatening behaviour on site, be it physical or verbal.
- You are **not** allowed to go onto other people's plots unless they have given you permission to do so. If you have children on site they are not allowed to wander around.
- You are **not** allowed to move sheds unless given permission by the Site Rep or Allotment Officer.
- You are **not** allowed to give your key to other people or allow them to visit your plot unsupervised.
- You cannot plant any trees other than fruit trees.

Name	Time to sow	When ready	Comments
Artichoke, Globe	March and April, 2-3ft apart	June to October	These do not bear well the first year.
Bean, Broad	November to January, 2-3ft between double rows	June and July	Need well manured soil
Bean, Dwarf French	May, 9in apart and rows of 1ft in length	June and July	Very early and late crops must be sown under glass
Bean, Runner	May and June, rows 6-8ft apart	July to October	Early crops should be sown in boxes and planted out in June
Broccoli	March to May, 12-15in apart	September to June	All plants should be transplanted as soon as possible
Brussels sprouts	May and June, rows 2-3ft apart	November	Ideally should be picked after frosts. Do not cut tops until stalks have completely ripened.
Cabbage (Spring)	August	September to February	Requires a well manured soil in good position. Should be hoed occasionally.
Cabbage (Autumn)	March to May, rows 18-24in apart	May to July	Requires a well manured soil in good position. Should be hoed occasionally.

Name	Time to sow	When ready	Comments
Carrot	March to August	June onwards	Requires a well cultivated soil. In October lift and store in ashes.
Cauliflower (Winter)	May, rows 24-30in apart	January and March	-
Cauliflower (Summer)	April - June, rows 24-30in apart	April onwards	-
Cucumber	May, 4ft between rows	August to September	Requires plenty of manure and moisture
Garlic	Mid October -November 1in under surface, 4in apart. Rows 18in apart	July - August	Pick when half the leaves are green and the other half are truning brown
Leek	February and March, 18in between rows	Can be left in ground until required for use in winter	Large specimens require plenty of manure. Blanch by covering with collars of brown paper
Lettuce	March, continue sowing throughout summer	June onwards	Moisture promotes rapid growth which is necessary. Soil should be prepared some time before planting
Onion (Spring)	February, under glass. Plant out in May, 9-12in between rows	September	Can be hung up and kept a winter in a dry place
Onion (Winter)	August, set out in February	June to October	Useful for supplementing spring sown stock.

Name	Time to sow	When ready	Comments
Parsnip	February and March, 18in between rows	November to March	-
Potato (early)	February to March, 18-24in between rows	June	-
Potato (main crop)	April, 18-24in between rows	July, August etc	Soot is beneficial to the crop
Rhubarb	Spring and Autumn, 3ft between rows	-	-
Shallot	February and March, 9-12in between rows	July, when top withers, store until required	Will grow in any soil
Swede	April to July, 15in between rows	October to March	-
Tomato (indoor)	January to March, under glass	May to October	-
Tomato (outdoor)	Plant out in May, 18-24in between rows	August to October	-
Vegetable marrow	March, 4-5ft between rows	July to November	Allow plenty of moisture for manure

Contacts

For general information and inquires please contact

Allotments Officer
allotments@southampton.gov.uk
tel:023 8083 3007

Further information

www.southampton.gov.uk/allotments

BBC: www.bbc.co.uk

NSALG: www.nsalg.org.uk

Garden Organic: www.gardenorganic.org.uk

ARI - Farm Garden: www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

The New Vegetable & Herb Expert
by DG Hessayon
Transworld Publishers Ltd 1997

All written information is available, on request, in **larger** print, Braille ⠃⠗⠇ on audio tape and on disk . It is also available in other languages. Please contact Allotments Officer on 023 8083 3007

www.southampton.gov.uk

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