

Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLIX, NUMBER 1



SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
JANUARY 2026

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January 2026 Calendar

Jan 10, Sat. 9:00 am – noon

Kolter Garden Workday 9710 Runnymede Dr., Houston, TX 77096

Jan 13, Tues. 11:00 am
STU Members and their guests

Day Meeting Adventure Luncheon at ChòpnBlòk (<https://chopnblok.co/>) West African cuisine located in Montrose at 507 Westheimer Rd. This is a self-pay event. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/wn3AWWhBuC8qgzCH7> The initial reservation is for 12, but need to have a final count by January 8. Please **RSVP** to bccurtis5@comcast.net by January 8.

Jan 17, Sat. 9:00 am

Westbury Garden Workday 12581 Dunlap St., Houston, TX 77035

Jan 17, Sat. 11:00 am - noon
Public invited

Lagniappe: "The Vibrant Flavors of Indian Cuisine - A Shopping and Dining Adventure with Chef Karuna." This is a self-pay event (STU members receive discount).

Jan 21, Wed. 6:15 pm
Free and Open to the Public

Evening Meeting "Food with Benefits - Natural Aphrodisiacs" presented by **Angela and Chris Roth**. Location: Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Houston, TX 77004. Doors open at 6:15 pm, with potluck meal and program at 7:00 pm.

Jan 31, Sat. 9:00 am

Westbury Garden Workday 12581 Dunlap St., Houston, TX 77035

February 2026 Calendar

Feb 10, Tues. 10:00am
Free and Open to the Public

Day Meeting "Making Yogurt, Mozzarella and Ricotta" presented by member **Catherine O'Brien**. Location: Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). Bring your bag lunch to socialize following the program. For those interested, the book group will be a meeting during the lunch social to discuss **Endangered Eating** by Sarah Lohman (https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/123979551-endangered-eating?ref=nav_sb_ss_1_14)

Feb 18, Wed. 6:15 pm
Free and Open to the Public

Evening Meeting "The Culinary Artistry of Frida Kahlo" presented by Chris Smith, Houston restaurateur. Location: Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Houston, TX 77004. Doors open at 6:15 pm, with potluck meal and program at 7:00 pm

Feb 21, Sat. 9:00 am

Westbury Garden Workday 12581 Dunlap St., Houston, TX 77035

Feb 28, Sat. 9:00 am

Westbury Garden Workday 12581 Dunlap St., Houston, TX 77035

Newsletter deadline is the 25th of the month, and is strictly enforced (February co-editor is Janice Freeman)



1/06 Donna Wheeler
1/07 Joyce Wilkenfeld
1/12 Linda Van Heeckeren
1/16 Maha Allaham
1/26 Gwen Frisk



Chairman's Corner



Our HSA mission has been on full support! Urban Harvest asked me to give a breakout session talk on herbs and I had a blast! My program was on making sure you trim your herbs and use them by making herbal wreaths! Anyone who attended Herb Day knows that **Benée** was my inspiration!! Having helped a friend trim her herb garden on Thursday and bringing in an overgrown potted Texas Tarragon of my own, we had fun! The cart overflowing with buckets of herbs was an immediate advertisement. Sharing Rosemary Shortbread was beyond appreciated by over 40 attendees. The HCC West classroom smelled amazing, and people are informed and inspired to use more herbs!!!

The Open Community Days at Kolter Elementary have morphed into more than just a workday. If you want to see some amazing Native Pocket Prairies, many herbs, vegetables, fruit trees and a grape growing (mini vineyard on a trellis) come visit from 9-12. I fully enjoyed planting pollinator supporting plants, ala Green Bridges!!

I hope this beautiful season brings everyone Joy and that you give and receive much kindness!!

Angela

Kolter Elementary Garden



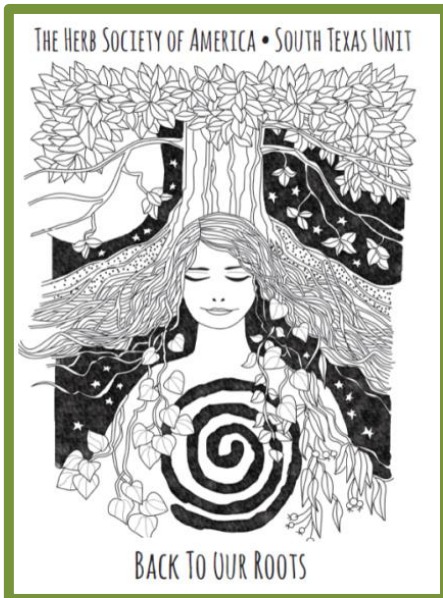
The 2nd Saturday of the month at Kolter Elementary Garden is a great place to enjoy the outdoors and have fun!

Work days are

9 am - Noon

January 10

February 14



Back to Our Roots at the Westbury Garden

Westbury Workdays
Saturday, January 17 and 31
at 9 am

Thank you to all the “herbies” who picked up some calendula to grow at home and harvest for drying. We can use this fabulous plant for a huge variety of herbal goodies for our sale. From tea to salve to soaks and more, calendula is one of the best herbal allies we grow. Not to mention it’s sunny color that always makes me smile. Kudos to Janice Stuff and one other brave soul (whose name I have forgotten) for volunteering to start some chamomile seeds. Chamomile does reseed itself, so we will probably have chamomile sprouting up soon, but it doesn’t hurt to have some backup plants.

Specific jobs in the garden this month include taking down both roselle plants and the butterfly pea vine, dividing and giving away some of the perennials like yarrow and Mexican mint marigold. We have started some parsley, dill, and cilantro seed that are doing well. Since there is not an official workday till the 17th, I encourage you to go down and work on the beds yourself or with a friend. In addition to these jobs, weeding both the beds and the aisles is always needed. I hope you can start the new year right by getting back to your own roots.



See you at the garden!
Julie





January Events



Day Meeting

Luncheon at *ChòpnBlòk* - African cuisine located in Montrose at 507 Westheimer Rd.

Please RSVP to bccurtis5@comcast.net by January 8.

January Lagniappe: "The Vibrant Flavors of Indian Cuisine - A Shopping and Dining Adventure with Chef Karuna"

INDIAN GROCERY STORE TOUR

A delightful experience that will be both educational and fun. One hour tour led by Karuna Diedericks followed by optional lunch at a local vegetarian restaurant. Lunch not included in the tour fee.

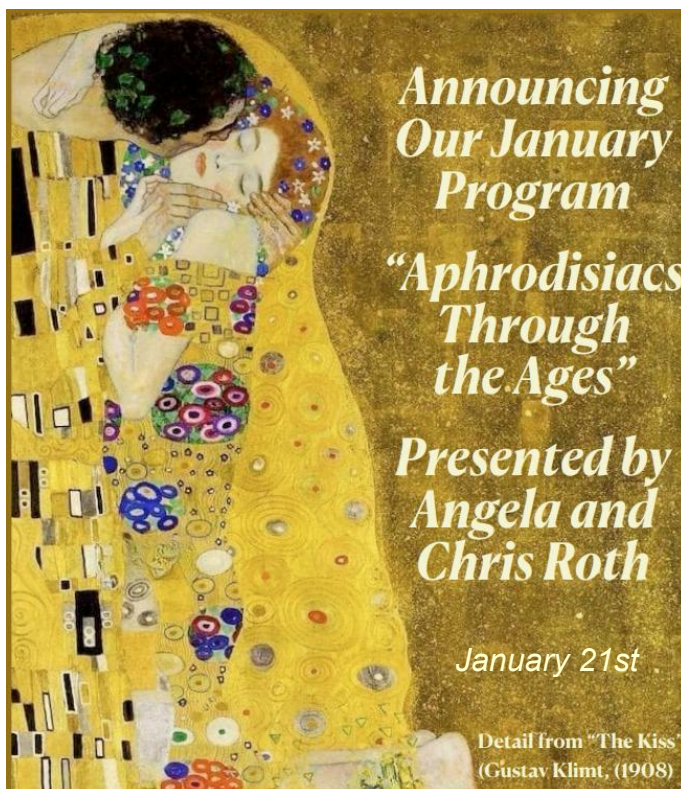
Saturday, January 17, 2026 11am-12pm

Vishala Grocery
5815 Hillcroft St
Houston, TX 77036



TOUR FEE: \$35
QUESTIONS? TEXT/CALL KARUNA 281-546-9698
WWW.CULINARYVEDA.COM

STU Members receive a \$10 Discount
RSVP with Karuna 281-546-9698





The History of Mulled Spices

Donna Wheeler

Herb Society members met for their December day meeting and annual Holiday potluck lunch at the beautiful Folk-Victorian home of Cynthia Card. Before partaking in lunch members listened to a presentation in her sun filled screened porch on the history of Mulling Spices. After conducting my research on this topic, I have a greater appreciation of the spices we often take for granted and I hope the members in attendance also share this appreciation. To enrich the experience, members had the opportunity to prepare their own mulling spice sachet before trying warm mulled cider and wine.

I've prepared a summary of the presentation, the history of mulling spices, a recipe to make your own sachet, and the references and suggestions for further reading. Wishing you all happy holidays!

Mull – Mulling - Spices

- **Mull** – a verb (1618), meaning to heat, sweeten, and flavor with spices. Mulling spices have been a part of human culture for thousands of years, with evidence of their use dating back to ancient civilizations in Egypt, China, and Rome. The practice of mulling, which involves heating spices in liquid to release their flavors and aromas, was initially used for medicinal purposes. Spices were highly valued for their perceived health benefits, and mulling was a way to extract their essence and create remedies for various ailments.
- **Mulling** - The term “mulling” originates from the Old French word “*molir*,” meaning to grind. This process involves grinding or mixing spices to extract their flavors effectively. When preparing drinks, the spices are steeped in hot liquids, which enhances their aromatic qualities and creates a rich and flavorful experience.
- **Spice** - “A spice is bark, seed, root, fruit, or other plant substance primarily used for flavoring or coloring food.”
 - *Generally, **herbs** are primarily the leaves, while spices are derived from other parts of the plant.
 - In the medieval and early modern periods, ‘spice’ was a term liberally applied to all kinds of exotic natural products. Part of the attraction of spices was the flavor they gave dishes, although the long-held view they were primarily used to disguise the taste of bad meat is incorrect.
 - Another attraction was their rarity, making them a fashionable addition to any table and a real status symbol for the wealthy.
 - Spices were used to add flavor not only to sauces but also wines; they were even crystallized and eaten on their own as sweets.
- **Mulling spices** are a blend of various aromatic spices or spices that add flavor and aroma with the purpose to enhance the flavor of beverages, particularly hot drinks like cider, wine, and tea. The most common ingredients in mulling spices include cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, allspice, and orange zest. These spices mixed in a drink are often associated with fall and winter festivities.

Historical background – The Spice Trade – Silk Road

- Mulling spices were originally used for medicinal purposes and to enhance the flavor of beverages. They have been part of human culture for thousands of years. Mulling was a way to extract the essence for medicinal purposes.
- The Trade Routes were critical to the exploration and expansion of spices.
- “The earliest trade networks emerged over 3,500 years ago, with caravans carrying cinnamon from Sri Lanka to Mesopotamia. Pepper from India reached Egyptian pharaohs, while Chinese healers documented ginger’s healing properties. These exchanges didn’t just flavor food – they built economic systems and still influence global markets of today.”



- Items from the east, China, were traded to Europe 130 BC – 1453 CE. The routes the traders traveled is now known as the Silk Routes (formerly the Silk Road).
- The Silk Routes diminished due to high taxes and trade restrictions imposed by the Ottoman Empire around 1453 BC. This empire lasted over 600 years.
- As the spice trade expanded, mulling spices spread throughout the world. The Silk Routes were made up of ancient trade routes that connected Europe and Asia. Merchants and travelers traveling along the Silk Routes carried spices including cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg, introducing them to new regions and cultures. Spices were adapted to local tastes and traditions.
- This exchange influenced the culinary practices of Europe, where mulling spices became integral to social gatherings, especially during the colder months.

History of Mulling Spice

Pre-15th century

- Greeks used honey, cinnamon, and pepper in Hippocras (spiced wine) for medicine. The drink was named after and thought to have been discovered by Hippocrates, often referred to as The Father of Medicine, who was born around 460 BC. Hippocrates created an invention, the “sieve” consisting of several filter bags hanging on top of each other, in which the liquid would filter through.

12-15th century

- Spiced wines like Potus ypocras (recipe from 1400) was the medieval version of Hippocras, with a different spelling and from a specific recipe consisting of ginger, long pepper cloves, nutmeg caraway.
- 1300 German Gluhwein tradition - “At its simplest, **Glühwein** is mulled red wine gently heated with spices like cinnamon, cloves, orange, star anise, and sometimes a splash of brandy. The name literally means ‘**glow wine**’, referencing both the warm metal pokers once used to heat it—and the happy glow it gives those who sip it.” In our more modern times, the German Christmas-market offers mugs which enhance the experience.

Age of Exploration: 15-17th Century

- 1497-1498 Vasco de Gama finds a direct route to India. He was a Portuguese mariner, explorer and nobleman. His discovery was the first direct maritime route between Europe and India via the Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean. This opened up European exploration of, and commerce with, India, and is considered a landmark event and a turning point in World history.
- 1500’s – Portugal, the Dutch East India Company and English East India Company dominated the spice trade, bringing nutmeg, mace and cloves to Europe.
- 1596 – *The Good Huswives Jewell*, an English cookery book by the cookery and housekeeping writer [Thomas Dawson](#), was first published in 1585. In 1596 the second edition included recipes for medicines as well as food and a recipe for mulled wine that included cinnamon, ginger, cloves and mace.

Modern Era and Commercialization 18th Century to the Present

- 1800’s – With the expansion of global trade, citrus elements were added to blends; British solidify India/Ceylon control; Dutch control the West Indies.
- 1950’s – Prepackaged mulling spice kits emerge in the US with standardized
- 19th – 20th Century, Spices become more affordable and common, moving from medicinal purpose to festive drinks.
- 2010 – Focus shifts to artisanal beverages, creating modern variations.



The Spices most commonly used in Mulled Cider and Mulled Wine

- **Black pepper**, scientifically known as *Piper nigrum*, is a climbing vine that originated on the Malabar Coast of India. It is considered the most common spice in the world. Today, Vietnam has made huge efforts to become the largest producer of pepper and is responsible for almost one third of the total pepper production worldwide. India, Brazil, and Indonesia produce the remaining two thirds.
 - The peppercorn is actually the fruit of the plant and depending on when it is harvested and how it is processed, and dried, it can produce black, green, or white peppercorns.
 - Some people mistakenly group pink peppercorns in here, but pink peppercorns, originating in Peru, have no relation to *Piper nigrum* and only bear a spherical and culinary resemblance.
 - White pepper, like black pepper, is made from the berries of the pepper plant, also known as the *Piper nigrum*. Unlike black pepper, however, white pepper comes from berries that are picked at full ripeness. These berries are then soaked in water to ferment. Finally, the outer layer is removed leaving only the inner seed. Because the skin is removed, some of the flavor is taken, including the piperine. As a result, white pepper tends to be milder than black pepper.
 - Pepper is the only spice quoted on the stock market.
- **Green Cardamom** - The Queen of Spices
 - The seed requires 3 years to grow and mature, a single plant produces 10 pods
 - Needs favorable weather, just the right amount of rain; climate change is altering the farming required. 6 months of training for workers that work in humid weather.
 - Harvest July – February; must be dried for 18 hours following harvest.
 - After drying, the pods are separated, their size and color determine the market value of cardamom. Lower grade pods are ground into dry cardamom.
 - It is said to be the third most expensive spice in the world, following saffron and vanilla.
- **Cloves started** in the Indonesian Island of Timor. First explorers were the Portuguese who came for the cloves.
 - They are named for the French word “Clou”, meaning nails, due to their shape.
 - They are harvested before flowering.
 - The stem is separated by hand from the bud; the stems are mixed with tobacco and smoked by local Indonesians.
 - Cloves have a long history in traditional medicine for their antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory (eugenol) properties and their ability to promote digestion. Traditional use was dental care and tooth pain.
- **Nutmeg (Mace)**
 - English and the Dutch fought a war over the Banda Islands in Indonesia all in the name of nutmeg. The Banda Islands are the original source of nutmeg. Nutmeg dates back to the 1st century, when it was considered high currency for trade.
 - Nutmeg and mace are from the same tree/fruit. When the fruit of the nutmeg tree is fully mature, it splits in two, exposing a crimson-colored aril, the mace, surrounding a single shiny brown seed, the nutmeg.
 - The trees require 50-60 inches of rain.
 - Nutmeg trees take eight years after sowing to yield fruit. They reach their prime in 25 years and bear fruit for 60.
 - **Nutmeg:** Warm, sweet, nutty flavor with subtle pepper notes. It has a warm, slightly nutty flavor and is often used in desserts and curries, as well as drinks like mulled wine and chai tea.
 - **Mace:** More delicate, slightly citrusy with higher potency.
- **Allspice**, also known as Jamaican pepper
 - Native to the Caribbean and Central America.
 - It is the dried, unripe fruit of the *Pimenta dioica* tree native to the Caribbean and Central America.
 - The spice is dark brown, contains aromatic oil and has a warm slightly sweet flavor.



- The name “allspice” was coined by the English, who thought the spice combined the flavors of cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. This unique blend of flavors has made allspice a baking and cooking staple in many cuisines. It has also been used in traditional medicine for its anti-inflammatory and digestive benefits.

- **Cinnamon (Ceylon and Cassia)**

- Both are grown in humid climates and require regular rainfall.
- Both are harvested twice a year.
- Both are harvested from the bark of the Cinnamomum tree.
- The bark is scraped off and curls into quills as it dries.

Ceylon Cinnamon originated in Sri Lanka

- Ceylon is considered the highest quality of cinnamon the “true cinnamon”.
- It has a mild flavor.
- Ceylon cinnamon sticks consist of numerous paper-thin bark layers rolled together.
- Authentic sticks display a light tan to golden-brown color.
- **Soft texture:** The bark should be soft enough to break easily by hand.
- Has multiple quills nested inside each other.
- Crumbles easily when pressed, unlike the hard cassia bark.

Cassia Cinnamon – typically grown in China, Viet Nam, and Indonesia

- Dark reddish-brown hue.
- Thick hard bark, usually one thick layer.
- Bark is harder to break than that of Ceylon.
- Has a strong, sharp, spicy and slightly bitter taste.

- **Star Anise – S.E. China and Viet Nam**

- Top quality is a rust color and has 6-8 points
- It has a licorice and fennel flavor.
- It is cooling and sweet.
- Cultivated by local farmers and picked before ripened.
- Once picked it is dried in the sun.
- Offers digestive benefits.

Resources and suggestions for further reading

[A Glimpse into History: The Timeless Tradition of Mulling Spices](#)

[FlavoryCooking - Where Taste Meets Tradition](#)

<https://www.naturekitchenshop.com/blogs/recipes/a-glimpse-into-history-the-timeless-tradition-of-mulling-spices>

Ford, Eleanor. (2022) [The Nutmeg Trail: Recipes and Stories Along the Ancient Spice Routes](#)

[A Toast to Tradition: How Glühwein Became Germany's Wintertime Classic -](#)

Miller, Max and Volkwein, Ann. (2022) [Tasting History: Explore the Past through 4,000 Years of Recipes \(A Cookbook\)](#)

Turner, Jack. (2004) [Spice: The History of a Temptation](#)

Frankopan, Peter. (2015) [The Silk Roads: A New History of the World](#)

Mulling Spice Sachet Ingredients:

2 cinnamon sticks (broken in half)

1 tsp whole cloves

1 star anise pod

1 tsp dried orange peel (or a few strips)

½ cracked nutmeg

Optional: 1 tsp allspice berries, small piece dried ginger



Herbs Make Sense

January 2026

Supplies: 3"x4" muslin or paper bags (cooking safe), Nutcracker Cooking twine (if no drawstring) Large pot
Instructions: Fill Bags: Add all ingredients to a muslin bag. Crack nutmeg with a nutcracker and snap (or crack) cinnamon in half to release flavor. Tie Bags: Secure ingredients inside each sachet with drawstrings attached to muslin bags; alternatively, use cooking twine to close bags. Ingredients: 2 cinnamon sticks (broken in half) 1 tsp whole cloves 1 star anise pod 1 tsp dried orange peel (or a few strips) ½ cracked nutmeg Optional: 1 tsp allspice berries, small piece dried ginger *some recipes suggest gently crushing the spices with a rolling pin before inserting in the bag, this one did not.

A note from Angela Roth: She used apricot lavender preserves and mulling spices in apple water. Angela said many people asked for the recipe!

<https://natashaskitchen.com/apple-roses-recipe/>

A Thoroughly Delightful Holiday Gathering for "The History of Mulled Spices"



Our thanks to our entertaining and informative speaker, Donna Wheeler (upper right), and host Cynthia Card. Susan and Julie are busy assembling their mulling sachets.



Enjoying the festivities (and the cookies!) are Angela, Benée, Virginia, Jane, and Terry. Special thanks go to Benée, our Day Group Chair, who selected "Mulling Spices" as the perfect theme for the holiday gathering in Cynthia's historic Victorian Folk home.



It was a beautiful day to gather, learn, and celebrate. Catherine, Lois Jean, Janice S., Janice F., Ro (doesn't she remind you of Rosie the Riveter?), Donna, Palma, Joan, and Sara.

Items Needed!

Member **Yvette Darnell** is requesting:

- 1) **Black and white newspaper** (not color print) to use in making SEED TAPE, a new product for Herb Fair
- 2) **Old seed catalogs** to use in crating another herbal craft product.

Reach out to Yvette directly to coordinate pick up.



Sharing Holiday Fun with Friends



Our gracious hosts, Maria and Donald; Arya and Ro; Michael, Harrison, and Dena; & Stephanie and Josh.

Making Spirits Bright...



Linda and Steve, Virginia and Rose, Donna, & Elayne and Albert

Laughing All the Way...



Lucinda and Mary, Tricia, Catherine, & Leo and Sara

Joy and peace to all this Christmas



Lucinda, Janis, Angela & John



Julie speaks for all of us -
The STU wishes you a Merry Christmas
filled with joy and laughter!

EdCon Registration now open!



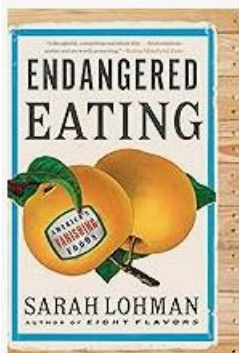
Reserve your spot now for
The Herb Society of America
Educational Conference,
"It's Spicier in Texas",
San Antonio, Texas,
April 15 - 17, 2026.

*HSA Members - Register early
and receive a discount*

[Register Here](#)



*What's on your list for the
new year?*



Be Prepared!! The Day Meeting Book Club will discuss Sarah Lohman's **Endangered Eating** in **February**. Quoted from an Amazon book review:

In **Endangered Eating**, culinary historian Sarah Lohman draws inspiration from the Ark of Taste, a list compiled by Slow Food International that catalogues important regional foods. She travels the country learning about the distinct ingredients at risk of being lost: in Hawaii, she learns the stories behind heirloom sugarcane; in the Navajo Nation, she assists in the traditional butchering of a Navajo Churro ram; in the Upper Midwest, she harvests wild rice; in the Pacific Northwest, she spends a day reefnet fishing; on the Gulf Coast, she devours gumbo made with filé powder; in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, she tastes America's oldest peanut. She learns from those who love these rare ingredients: shepherds, fishers, farmers, scientists, historians, and activists. And she tries her hand at raising these crops and preparing these dishes.

Animated by stories yet grounded in research, **Endangered Eating** gives listeners the tools to support community organizations and producers that work to preserve local culinary traditions and rare, cherished foods.



The Herb Society of America
South Texas Unit
P.O. Box 6515
Houston, TX 77265-6515



Find our Unit on the web at:
www.herbsociety-stu.org

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While authors or speakers may cite how they personally use herbs and may quote scientific, ethnographic, folkloric, or historic literature, the material presented does not represent a recommendation or an endorsement of any particular medical or health treatment.

Whom Do I Contact?

2025-26 STU Officers

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