



## April - May - June 2023

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Yes, Spring **always** comes! It may take its time getting here and it may not stay as long as we would like but sooner or later it comes. The air will turn soft, the grass and trees will green up and all the bulbs you planted last fall will suddenly remember they're supposed to bloom. No matter how busy you suddenly have to be or how many garden chores are waiting Spring is too fleeting to be ignored ... nor should it be. Those garden chores will still be waiting (Acer Gardens has a very long list!), there will be too much to do in too short a time (that extra hour of daylight is a help but an extra pair of hands would probably be more helpful!) and everywhere you look something will be calling for your attention. That's both the fun and the burden of gardening in the Spring. PACE YOURSELF! You won't do your garden much good if you're spending all your time driving back and forth to Physical Therapy! You want to take some of that time to enjoy this lovely Spring garden you have created, to appreciate bulbs as they bloom, listen to the birds in the trees, smell that fresh air, remember back to when Spring meant saying goodbye to mittens, sloshing in the mud and chasing the first frogs. It's all a part of every Spring we enjoy. Never mind the weather reports. This is New England's southern end so take those reports with a grain of salt and be prepared for everything! It's unsettled, it's unpredictable, it's too short. There will be something to complain about and there's always be something waiting to be done. BUT it's still Spring and we need to revel in it!

Sometimes, gardeners tend to forget that weather patterns usually “average out” over a period of years...but this, by anybody's standards, was a most unusual winter! Although the past winter was, on the whole, incredibly mild, wind and ice storms did do some harm. You may be coping with damaged shrubbery or trees and replacement may be the only solution. The nursery is here to help you solve garden problems. Existing photographs are always a plus and will help you integrate new additions into your existing landscape. It is certainly disheartening to lose favorite trees, evergreens and shrubs to the force of nature, but it is also an opportunity to change the “look” of a landscape, expand a vista or try something new. Take a minute to sit and reflect on what you really want your garden to be from now on. This could be the perfect opportunity to head off in a new direction!

Consider setting up a chart to monitor the sequence and length of bloom from your bushes and flowering trees and to make note of what you see from the house. It is possible to have a variety of bushes flowering from April into October, providing a background for your perennial beds, screening for the vegetable garden and privacy for sitting areas, decks and terraces. Using bushes is an easy way to reduce garden maintenance as many take care of themselves with a minimum of tweaking. Some garden designers like to ensure that inside and outside colors used compliment each other and that you always have something attractive to look at from the room in the house where you spend the most time. All gardens change as they mature and careful editing and/or additions will help you enjoy what you have created even more. In fact, the surrounding background landscape also changes over time and may alter the way you look at and use your garden. All these factors affect your over-all garden plan.

## **Web Site**

We will be using the Web Site to post current announcements so please plan on checking it frequently. Read about our services, stay up to date on coming events and future workshops, learn about our plants and products, access our quarterly Newsletter and all the current Information Sheets and join us on Instagram (a great way to see what other gardeners are growing). In response to your suggestions, we will also be posting more “How To” videos! We’re always interested in hearing what our customers would like to see on the web site and what would be most helpful to you. Just remember: we don’t have full-time office coverage because we like to spend the season down in the Nursery with you so you may have to leave us a message! We’ll get back to you as soon as we can!

## **Workshops**

Yippee! Spring and summer workshops are back! Acer Gardens is planning a series of workshops held over the active gardening months ... in fact, our Seed Starting Workshop was filled up before we could blink! After this long, gray winter, everyone is anxious to get started, to get our hands in gardening gloves and our feet in garden boots or shoes! Watch your email and/or the web site for further announcements. As always, we welcome your thoughts and suggestions on future workshops and would love to hear from you!

## **Newport Flower Show**

The 2023 Newport Flower Show (the only major outdoor flower show held in the U.S.) will take place June 23, 24 and 25 at Marble House (Rosecliffe is closed for some restoration projects) in Newport, RI. This year’s theme is “The Grand Tour” which will celebrate how traveling Americans came back from European tours using and adapting what they had seen there into their American gardens. Features include designer display gardens, horticultural exhibits, demonstrations and lectures in Botanical Arts and Floral Design, themed floral designs, boutiques a garden marketplace and unique shopping opportunities with over 100 vendors. The Garden Club of America has elevated the Newport Flower Show to the status of a Major Flower Show, on a par with Philadelphia, Atlanta and Boston. This national and international status allows the show to award the GCA’s highest Flower Show awards. Funds raised by the Show are used for the continued restoration and preservation of the Newport Preservation Society’s 88 acres of historic landscapes. For tickets and further information go to: [www.newportmansions.org/events/newport-flower-show](http://www.newportmansions.org/events/newport-flower-show)

## **Summer Gardens to Visit**

The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of over 4,000 private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year. 2023 Open Days in Connecticut run from April 29 through October 14 with admission at \$10 for an adult (children under 12 are free but pets are not allowed). Knowledgeable and enthusiastic gardeners are present in all the gardens and very often the owners are available. No walk-ins will be allowed; online pre-registration will be required and masks are required at the discretion of the garden owners. Open Days are rain or shine events and a fun way to see how other gardeners create very personal spaces. Visit [www.gardenconservancy.org](http://www.gardenconservancy.org) to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for near-by Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts as well as other states.

## **The Really-Must-Do-Now List**

Spring garden chores (see the information Sheet on the Acer Gardens website) can seem daunting but don’t be overwhelmed by the list. Each garden is different and not all chores are necessary.

Clean up and rake off the garden beds; get rid of dead foliage. Remove dead or dying branches on trees and shrubs which were injured by disease, storms or animals.

Cut down grasses and any perennials you left standing in the fall.

Fertilize your garden beds and don't plant anything new until the soil is completely friable ... grab a handful of soil and squeeze it. If water runs out or the soil compacts into a clump, it's too soon to work it.

### **Weed, weed and weed again!**

Clean-up old foliage on Hellebores as new growth emerges.

Trim down Caryopteris and Spireas to about 18" even if they are showing growth.

Wait to trim down Buddleias until after April 15 or even a few days later.

Prune : Roses, as needed, Azaleas and Mountain Laurel after they bloom.

To ensure late season blooms, cut Montauk Daisies down to about 6" in mid-May; pinch back again by half in late June.

### **Spring Products**

Available Spring products at the nursery will include pelletized lime, pre-emergent fertilizer, lawn and garden fertilizer, Milorganite, organic lawn and garden products, grass seed, straw and control products for deer, insects, rabbits, voles, weeds, bugs and disease. April is the ideal time to apply lime, if needed, to the lawn; fertilize and use pre-emergent weed control. Specialized products include:

**Succulent/Alpine Mix:** An excellent growth medium for alpines and succulents. Use in containers or mix into soil to promote good drainage.

**Soil Moist:** Reduces watering by absorbing and slowly releasing water into the soil. Useful both in containers and garden beds.

**Acer's Super Grow 18-6-18:** The nursery's own water soluble plant food with micro-nutrients.

**BT Thuricide:** An organic bacteria (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) used to control gypsy moth caterpillars and cabbage worms on vegetables.

**Milky Spore:** A bacteria designed for the natural control of lawn grubs.

### **The Plant of the Month**

**The Plant of the Month** will be available the first of each month, starting in April, at the nursery ... just ask a staff member for its location! These plants are carefully chosen to feature current bloom times and to serve as an accent in your garden. Try something new!

April: **Silene (Catchfly)**

Zone: 5-9

Height: 12-18"

Spread: 10-12"

This long blooming, mounding perennial features bubblegum pink flowers from spring into early summer with soft green foliage. Sheer it back after blooming for a second flush of flowers. Happiest in full to partial sun.

May: **Brunnera (Siberian bugloss)**

Zone 3-8      Height: 1-1 1/2'      Spread: 1 1/2 - 2 1/2'

This low maintenance, clumping plant is at home in shade gardens, woodland settings and near ponds or streams. Its large heart-shaped leaves make it an interesting ground cover or path liner. Small, blue forget-me-not flowers bloom on slender stems throughout Spring and make it a nice companion to late daffodils, Iris and Bleeding Heart. Mulching will help maintain the cool, moist soil that Brunnera prefers.

June: **Nepeta (Catmint)**

Zone 3-8      Height: 1-2'      Spread: 1 1/2 - 3'

Not to be confused with catnip, Nepeta attracts a wide variety of pollinators ... and is hated by deer! The predominantly blue flowers will bloom from June to September if you trim them back after the first bloom. A sun-lover, this long-lived perennial forms large clumps, is drought tolerant and can be grown in containers.

**Seasonal Reminders**

Give your Rhododendrons and Azaleas a generous feeding of Holly Tone.

April and May are ideal times for pruning evergreens. Remove dead, diseased or undesirable wood but remember to pay attention to the basic shape of the evergreen.

Photograph your bulbs as they begin to bloom and keep them as a permanent record. The photos will be helpful next fall as you plan where to plant new bulbs.

Cut back Gaura, Lavender and Perovskia when you start to see bud break.

If cutting Tulips for the house, do not use more than a few inches of water in the vase and add 1 tsp. of bleach to the water; change the water regularly. Keep cut Lilacs out of direct sunlight to discourage wilting.

Deer quickly get used to a specific repellent so it's a good idea to rotate the products you use fairly often.

Check the nursery web site to access relevant Information Sheets on attracting hummingbirds and butterflies.

**Aftercare for Bulbs**

Don't forget to deadhead Daffodils and Tulips as they stop blooming. Cut the flowers off but let the stems and leaves turn brown before you cut them down. Bulb experts advise against braiding the leaves. You want all that nutrition from the leaves to go back into the bulbs for next year's blooms.

Adding spreading plants to your bulb areas will cover up the fading bulbs and give your garden a second wind. Many Daffodils will happily naturalize and spread over years but, in this climate, most Tulips have a limited life span of 3-4 years. If you plant your Tulips among perennials slow to break in the Spring, the growing foliage will help to disguise the dying Tulip foliage.

**Acer's Theme of the Year: Tried-and-True**

Life is busy as we gather ourselves together after Covid and we're all pulled in different directions. We need things we can count on to do their best for us ... especially in the garden. There are many perennials, annuals, vines, evergreens and bushes on which we can always rely. They love to grow! They need a minimum of care but will happily accept a little extra attention.

They can handle the nuisances of heat and drought as long as you remember to turn on the hose from time to time. They're happy in a wide variety of soils and don't need excessive fertilizing. And, best of all, they bloom a long time with very little fussing on your part. Welcome them into your garden ... you'll be hearing about them as the season progresses.

You may have your own favorites but here are some Tried-and-True plants you might have forgotten about:

### **Perennials**

Allium	Iris
Aster	Monarda
Astilbe	Nepeta
Coreopsis	Perovskia
Ferns	Phlox
Heuchera	Salvia
Hosta	Veronica
	Yarrow

### **Annuals**

Coleus	Impatiens (New Guinea)
Cosmos	Marigold
Fuschia	Nasturtium
Geranium	Petunia
	Zinnias

### **Vines**

Black-eyed Susan Vine  
Climbing Hydrangea  
Climbing Roses  
Honeysuckle  
Mandevilla  
Morning Glory  
Sweet Autumn Clematis

### **Bushes**

Buddleia  
Clethra  
Deutzia  
Forsythia  
Hydrangea  
Rhododendron  
Spirea

### **Evergreens**

Japanese Andromeda  
Japanese Holly (Ilex crenata)  
Inkberry (Ilex glabra)  
Juniper  
Leucothoe

## **Spring Pruning**

Remember that most Hydrangeas (**not** hydrangea arborescens ‘Annabelle’ or Hydrangea paniculata ‘Tardiva’), flower on old wood. Remove any dead or broken branches in spring but do not prune. Fertilizing with a product containing 18-5-9 will encourage flowering. Spent blooms should be removed after flowering. Any light pruning should be done directly after bloom before the bushes set next year’s flowers.

Lilac bushes should be pruned each year, after blooming. Remove all spent blossoms. Trim and clear out larger stems from the center to increase air space. You can leave some small suckers/shoots at ground level to develop into larger stems. This will encourage a wider bloom area. Lightly shape the bush until you like the way it looks but don’t give it an un-natural “flat top”.

Mature Rhododendrons seldom need pruning but, if you must, prune right after they bloom as they set next year’s flowers very quickly. Look for the little green leaf buds on the stem and cut ½” above them. Let the natural shape of the plant dictate your pruning.

Azaleas and Weigela bloom on wood at least one year old. After bloom, these bushes should be lightly hand pruned in order to maintain the natural shape of the bush. Carefully remove selected old wood every 3 years, allowing the bush to rejuvenate itself.

## **National Arbor Day: April 28, 2023**

What better way to mark an anniversary, celebrate a special occasion or pay honor to a family member than to plant a tree? Sited carefully (and well away from power lines), your new tree will be a living reminder of a special day and will increase in beauty as time goes by, benefitting this and future generations. Stop in and choose a tree ... we’re here to help and can advise on the most suitable trees for your chosen location and the best way to plant and care for them.

## **Fertilizing and Mulching Basics**

All plants need nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, nutrients essential to helping plants make healthy leaves, develop strong roots and digest their food. Although these elements are usually present in the soil, the wise gardener knows that soil changes over time and the nutrients must be replenished. The home gardener must choose between granular or water soluble fertilizer. Granular fertilizer delivers food slowly but lasts a long time. Water soluble fertilizers are faster acting but must be applied more frequently.

Most bushes and trees like an application of granular fertilizer in early spring. Annuals like additional boosts of water soluble fertilizer throughout the growing season. Wait until the ground has really warmed up before you fertilize perennials, annuals and vegetables. Roses are always hungry and will benefit from the application of light soluble fertilizer every week during their blooming season. Don’t apply fertilizer on wet or windy days ... it will only be wasted.

Decorative mulches are an essential part of low-maintenance landscapes, offering many benefits to your plants and soil. They reduce the amount of water lost through evaporation, keep the soil cooler during the heat of the summer, suppress weed growth and help control erosion. Decomposing over time, mulches add nutrients and organic matter to the soil. There are a few general rules:

Do not place mulch directly against plant stems or tree bases.

Apply mulch layers no more than 1-3” thick.

Thoroughly water newly installed wood or bark mulches.

Don’t automatically renew mulch every year --- assess your needs realistically.

## **Dealing with Over-Crowded Perennials**

In general, most perennials should be divided in the spring which allows enough time for the new divisions to grow and bloom and become established before winter. Here in Connecticut we are able to divide easily until mid-May. Grasses are best divided in early spring because they do their aggressive growing in the hot days of summer. Peonies and Iris should be divided in the fall. A ring of foliage around an empty, flowerless center tells you it's time to divide!

Many plants (Black-eyed Susan and *Leucanthemum* e.g.) benefit from frequent division and almost seem to need it to thrive. Simply dig up the plant and...with your fingers...gently separate the plant into multiple sections. Plant at once, setting the new plant at the same soil level. Tamp the soil down around the plant so that water can pool; protect the new plant from strong sun until it is established.

Some plants should be divided into large segments as early as possible. These include *Lamium*, *Brunnera*, *Dendranthemum*, *Asters*, *Sedum*, *Hosta*, *Monarda*, *Helenium* and *Coneflowers*. Pulling pieces from the outer edges of the clump makes for easy dividing. Place the divisions so that their "best side" is displayed well.

Divide a perennial while it is still healthy and blooming well and replenish the soil with organic matter. Keep the best looking sections to replant and discard any which look weak or diseased. Give the new divisions plenty of spreading room and water as appropriate.

Division of *Hostas*, *Daylilies* and *Grasses* calls for real strength and is often done after a good, soaking rain. The best tool for this is a sturdy garden shovel or fork. Cut the dug-up plant in half or thirds with a sharp knife or the shovel and plant at once.

Some perennials are best not divided. These include: *Alyssums*, *Dianthus*, *Lavender*, *Perovskia* and *Trillium*.

## **The Shady Side**

Few things celebrate the arrival of Spring as beautifully as a woodland garden. If you're lucky enough to have established woods on one side of your property, you could create a woodland walk ... or even just some tucked-in place to sit and enjoy the look of woods in early spring. Shade-loving flowers, especially natives and small bulbs, bloom happily as spring progresses ... their dying foliage is easily covered by established hostas and ferns. Plan your walk so that it replicates the natural gentle curves found in nature. Create layers: the tree canopy to create the shade the plants need and want, shrubs with a succession of bloom through the season, and *Tried-and-True* hostas and ferns for the front. The best news: they'll pretty much take care of themselves!

Foliage is the mainstay of all shade gardens. Shade loving bushes can anchor beds and provide form, height and structure; shady spots are livened up by picking plants with varying textures, shapes and different shades of green. One of the easiest combinations is positioning the fine leaves of ferns against bold *Hostas*. (Some gardeners edge *Hosta* beds with small ferns backed by *Hosta* to make the deer work harder by having to stretch to get to the good stuff! Apparently, deer are lazy about exercise!) The lighter the *Hosta* foliage, the more sun it will accept but all *Hostas* need shade in order to thrive and mature. Ferns can easily handle dappled morning sun but many are even more adaptable in their growing requirements. Growing in shade slows plant growth so plants in shade need less water ... always a help in drought conditions. Mulching will help retain moisture and minimize weeds.

There are many *Tried-and-True* *Hostas* available but, over the years some have really established themselves in gardeners' hearts as they turn to them and depend on them, time after time. Measure for spread before you plant ... these *Hostas* are serious about growing into wide clumps! All are happiest in partial to full shade. Water as needed.

### **Hosta 'Francee'**

Zone: 3-9

Height: 1-2'

Spread: 1-3'

Considered to be one of the all-time best white-margined Hostas, 'Francee' matures to a dense, arching mound with large, heart-shaped leaves. It is easily grown in moist, well-drained soil in part to full shade. For best results, soil should never be allowed to dry out. Pale lavender flowers appear from June to September to set off the dark green leaves.

### **Hosta 'Frances Williams'**

Zone: 3-8

Height: 1 ½-2'

Spread: 4-5'

Best in light shade with some morning sun, this Hosta is tolerant of a wide range of soil but prefers consistent moisture during the growing season. If you can, apply water directly to the soil beneath the leaves. Large blue-green leaves feature irregular greenish-yellow margins with white flowers in June-July.

### **Hosta 'Blue Angel'**

Zone: 3-8

Height: 2-3'

Spread: 3-4'

This plant showcases very large, thick blue-green leaves growing in large mounds. Pale lavender-white flowers blooming in July-August are very attractive to hummingbirds.

### **Hosta 'Guacamole'**

Zone: 3-8

Height: 1 – 1 ½'

Spread: 3-4'

This Hosta really does have leaves the color of guacamole and can, over time, spread to almost 50" wide! Wide, glossy chartreuse-gold leaves have darker blue-green margins. Large white flowers bloom July into August.

### **Hosta 'Sum and Substance'**

Zone: 3-8

Height: 2-3'

Spread: 3-5'

Heart-shaped yellow leaves turn golden over time with more exposure to sun than most Hostas tolerate. This plant has white, fragrant blooms in August but is grown primarily for its beautiful foliage which provides a strong contrast in a mixed Hosta bed.

### **The First Annual to Welcome You Back**

Many annuals fall into the Tried and True category but only one welcomes us back, year after year: our old friend, the Pansy. Yes, it takes a little rest in the heat of the summer but then it's back in bloom as the days begin to shorten. Fertilize them only at planting time, using a slow-release granular fertilizer.

Try planting Pansies with other cool-season and frost resistant plants. Consider combining them with Alyssum, Dusty Miller, Viola, Lobelia, Primroses and our pre-planted bulbs. Lettuce and Parsley add a light touch to pansy planters and are easily harvested. Many herbs combine well with pansies and will keep going long after the Pansies have finished. Even a small evergreen will serve as a good background to Pansies and provide a strong line to the container. Cold-hardy annuals ... Osteospermum, Super Petunias and Nemesia ... can provide a subtle color echo to Pansies in the violet to purple range. Pansies like cool



temperatures but you can help them last a bit longer as the weather warms up. As the plants start to get leggy, cut them back a few inches so they can catch their breath! Move them out of strong sunlight into shade to help them regroup and bloom again in cooler fall weather.

### **Out of room? Go Vertical**

Many gardeners use vines to draw the eye into the landscape ... or to distract it! Adding height to your garden adds another useful dimension and offers many summer possibilities to your planning. You can disguise a view or create one. You can create a focal point by covering an arch or a pergola. The look of fences and walls can be softened by using vines. You can screen something you don't want to look at. Full sun is not always required but many vines are superb shade creators in their own right. Best of all, vines are quick to produce and flower, especially if the gardener keeps attaching them to something as they climb upward. Many vines are annuals in this climate but perennial vines include Sweet Autumn Clematis, Climbing Hydrangea, Wisteria, Climbing Roses, Trumpet Creeper, Honeysuckle and Dutchman's Pipe. Fertilizing vines once a month will give them the fuel they need for their rapid growth. Some vegetables (cucumber, summer squash, melons) do particularly well when elevated off the ground. They give a bigger harvest in less space, have fewer disease problems because of better air circulation and are easier to see and pick. Best of all, most vines are deer-resistant!

Vines climb by twining (needs a lot of sturdy support), sending out tendrils (which attach to a frame), or producing aerial rootlets which stick to vertical surfaces (ivy). Some, like Climbing Roses, actually "scramble" but need strong support. Matching the right trellis and support system to a particular vine is key to good growth. Vining plants put all their energy into growing foliage and seldom produce sturdy stems. They need your help to grow straight and tall.

Some quick-growing, blaze-of-color bloomers include:

### **Annuals**

#### **Ipomoea**

Morning Glory

8-12'

This tropical native grows best in well-drained soil in full sun. Available in an amazing range of colors including blues, pinks, white and purple. The vibrant flowers open at sunrise and close by lunch although a cloudy day may keep the flower around until late afternoon. Water and fertilize to encourage constant bloom.

#### **Mandevilla**

6-10'

Brilliant trumpet-shaped flowers in tones of pink, white or red will give your garden a tropical look. A water soluble fertilizer applied every 2 weeks will keep this vine blooming from summer to frost. Mandevilla tolerates wet soil and is deer-resistant. Provide support or a trellis.

#### **Thunbergia**

Black-Eyed Susan Vine

6-8'

A quick-growing vine, Thunbergia bears bright orange or cream flowers with black centers. It needs full sun, average, well-drained soil and makes a good container plant. Pinching the vine will encourage branching. The vine climbs by twining so provide a trellis or netting.

#### **Ipomoea alba**

Moonflower

10-15'

A close cousin of the morning glory, the large creamy white Moonflowers open (in slow motion) as the sun sets. Heavily fragrant, the flowers last only one night and should be grown near a terrace or

deck where they can be admired and enjoyed. They start bloom in late July or early August and continue until the first frosts. Disguise the bottom of the vine with low-growing plants to cover bare stems.

## **Perennials**

**Hydrangea petiolaris**                      Climbing hydrangea                      15-25'

Plant in full sun to part shade in well-drained, rich soil amended with compost. Keep the soil moist with regular waters and an application of mulch. Climbing hydrangea require sturdy support (pergolas and arbors are perfect) as the vine is a strong grower and will even grow up trees! Prune after bloom to keep the vine under control.

**Lonicera**                                      Honeysuckle                                      6-10'

Heat-tolerant Honeysuckles are a great addition to any garden. Their fragrance is outstanding and hummingbirds are big fans of the nectar. For best results, grow in well-draining soil, amended with organic matter. They prefer full sun but can tolerate some shade. A light annual pruning in late winter will keep your honeysuckle vine under control.

**Clematis paniculata**                      Sweet Autumn Clematis                      20-30'

Although it is a long-lived perennial, many New England gardeners depend on Sweet Autumn Clematis to give them that last August-to-frost bloom when other vines are lagging. Place them where their fragrance can be enjoyed. This rampant and lush grower blooms on new wood and thrives in partial shade. Its fragrant, white flowers bloom late in the season when other vines have faded. Fertilize lightly and enrich the soil. Perfect for a trellis, it can also be woven through bushes.

## **The Layered Garden**

The concept of “layering” in a garden is not new (remember that old rule: “ tall plants in the back, short ones in the front”) but, increasingly, garden designers are using layering to organize both large sweeps of flowers as well as to create a garden that is attractive to wildlife and, at the same time, emphasizes specimen plants or bushes. The great advantage of “layering” is that it spreads interest across the entire garden year ... plants don't peak all at once! Multiple layers don't necessarily mean a “formal” look ... you can create layers by using drifts of plants and bushes in an informal arrangement and vary the look by pulling the back layer forward in places. Plants can be set underneath each other (especially effective if you don't like the look of plain dirt or mulch or want to cover “bare legs”) and using a middle layer of plants with a vertical accent can call attention to certain bloomers but also disguise plants past their prime. Vines and climbers add vertical interest and often give almost continuous bloom. You can layer a perennial bed or part of a garden and site it near a sitting area or create a private area for rest and relaxation. Using plants in this manner means you don't have to see everything at once but can “discover” the garden as you spend time in it. Most of all, a layered garden is attractive ... either as a sitting area or a larger garden area ... for you and your visitors at all times.

Large shrubs, or even small trees, will form the back layer and attract birds at the same time so they can find hiding places. Be careful not to create too much shade as that could limit your plant choices. Then add smaller bushes and tall perennials to form a middle layer and bring in the butterflies.

Finally, put in a variety of small perennials, bulbs, and annuals for your eye to focus on against the backdrop. This layer is the easiest to change as the season advances and you need to refresh the garden. This is often the perfect spot to add ever-blooming annuals. Contrasting foliage will provide a backdrop and, chosen carefully, will serve to showcase the blooming flowers.

## **Houseplants and the Great Outdoors**

As the weather begins to warm, many gardeners itch to get their houseplants outside for the summer. A good rule of thumb is to wait until nighttime temperatures are consistently above 60 degrees. If you have any nagging little doubts, wait! Many houseplants are native to tropical or sub-tropical climates and will need time to adapt to a new environment.

Before your plant goes outside, check to see if it needs re-potting into the next larger pot size. This is also a good time to see if your plants need light pruning or reshaping. Add a little fresh potting mix to each plant as some of its soil will have decomposed over the winter. When the plants go outside, place them in a partially shaded spot for a week or so. Once they have adjusted to more light, the plants can be moved to a sunny location in the garden or on the patio. You may need to water the plants daily and change your fertilizing schedule. It's a good idea to inspect the houseplants periodically in case bugs or insects are causing problems.

## **The One Flower You Can Count On All Summer Long**

Is there really one flower we can all count on? There is now and it's Tried-and-True as well: The **Supercal Petunia!** No matter how or where you use it, this Petunia will give and give and give all summer long. An endless array of blossoms, in deep, melting shades, will stand up to heat, cold, rainstorms and wind. They will bloom early and stay long into fall, brightening flower beds and anchoring containers and hanging baskets. Part Petunia and part Calibrachoa, some of the cultivars have a natural tendency to mound and feature large flowers that don't need deadheading while others have a semi-trailing habit. Combine them for a season-long statement!

Petunias do well in a sunny spot with a minimum of 4-5 hours of bright light every day. Porous soil will give the best drainage. Supercal Petunias rebound quickly from wilt when watered but systematic watering early or late in the day is always the best option. Light mulch is helpful but keep it away from the stems. Apply a liquid fertilizer every 2-3 weeks, depending on the weather.

## **Preparing Ahead for Heat and Drought**

The long-range forecast for this area is for drier and hotter summers and rainfall is always a question mark in that scenario. Growing reliable, heat-tolerant plants in your garden will help you cope with longer dry spells and cut back on your watering needs... but everything starts with good soil. Well-drained, loose soil allows roots to grow deep to where the moisture is held. It's not a good idea to put plants that prefer wet conditions in the middle of a mixed bed! Try grouping plants into "water usage" areas so that watering needs will be consistent. Improving the soil with compost and other organic matter and using regionally suitable plants (both native and adapted) will help your garden thrive. Light mulch will help capture rain water, suppress weeds and encourage deep root growth. In fact, keeping up with the weeding actually reduces the number of root systems competing for water! Use native plants where you can; they've already adapted to the climate.

Drought-tolerant doesn't mean you never have to water... in fact, you must water until plants are established ... but those plants tend to have deep roots that seek moisture well below the surface of the soil. A complete list of Drought Tolerant Plants, ranging from perennials, annuals, grasses, vines and shrubs, is available on the web site. And remember, when the heat wave hits, do only what is absolutely necessary in the garden ... don't push yourself. Many gardeners keep an eye on weather reports and water deeply just before the temperatures soar so that they themselves can take it easy.

In general, established perennial flowers require less water than annuals. Good choices include: Achillea, Agastache, Artemisia, Columbine, Corydalis lutea, Echinacea, Gaillardia, Lychnis, Nepeta, Oenothera, Penstemon, Perovskia, Salvia, Sedum and Stachys.

Water deeply once a week to encourage better root systems ... deeper roots are more drought resistant. Use soaker and drip hoses to minimize water loss through evaporation. (Overhead sprinklers lose too much water to evaporation, especially on hot days.) If possible, capture water from downspouts with rain barrels. Water in the early morning when there is less heat to cause evaporation. Use a rain gauge to give you some idea of how much water has fallen naturally but remember that different areas of your garden may have different absorption rates due to soil content and planted material.

Many native plants do well in drought conditions as they have long since habituated themselves to local conditions. Any tendency to invasiveness can be easily controlled by pulling up self-seedlings. The New England Wildflower Society has some recommendations for natives guaranteed to thrive. Choose from:

Aquilegia Canadensis	Eastern Wild Columbine	Sun/partial shade
Aruncus dioicus	Goatsbeard	Sun/partial shade
Aster novae-angliae	New England Aster	Sun
Boltonia asteroides	Boltonia	Sun
Echinacea purpurea	Purple Coneflower	Sun
Monarda didyma	Bee Balm	Sun/partial shade
Oenothera fruticosa	Sundrops	Sun
Phlox maculata	Wild Sweet William	Sun/partial shade
Tradescantia subaspera	Spiderwort	Sun
Vernonia noveboracensis	Tall Ironweed	Sun
Veronicastrum virginicum	Culver's Root	Sun

### **Planning Ahead for that End-of-Season Splash**

Looking ahead is part of gardening. The garden is so full and lush in June that it seems odd to be thinking about late summer and fall but now is exactly the right time to think about filling the late summer garden with dependable, care-free color. Growing and combining these end of season flowers will give you a wide range of colors, shapes, sizes, and heights ... and they'll keep blooming until the killing frosts come!

#### **Dahlias**

The wide range of Dahlias and the huge variety of colors they come in make them an ideal choice for perennial beds and containers. In this climate, Dahlias should be planted late-April through May when the ground temperature has really warmed. They need a sunny location and well-drained soil in order to thrive and are happy with 6 hours of sunlight a day. If you are planting tubers, do not cover the soil with mulch as it will keep the warmth of the sun from reaching the tuber and helping it to sprout. A low nitrogen fertilizer within 30 days of planting can be repeated 4 weeks later but avoid over-feeding. Dahlias tend to have shallow roots so hand cultivation/weeding is a must. Be on the lookout for slugs and aphids early in the growing season.

Dwarf Dahlias can easily be grown in containers. Bedding Dahlias make a spectacular display all summer long; topping or pinching them will promote shorter, bushier plants with better stems for cutting. The large "dinner plate" dahlias may require some support or staking before they produce their fall blooms but they will bloom steadily until a killing frost. Dahlias are a wonderful cut flower for the house.

#### **Asters**

Asters bring a steady presence to the fall garden. Available in a wide-range of size, shape and color, their long period of bloom (late summer through fall) and wide height range make them invaluable in mixed beds. Mingling well with other fall perennials, Asters establish themselves easily, thrive in average soil and will take sun to partial shade. Some bloom in clouds of pale colors; others flaunt deep shades of purple. All combine well with native plants. Cutting the plants back in early June will prevent "Aster sprawl". Divide the plants every 3-5 years to keep them under control and remove unwanted seedlings as you spot them.

## **Montauk Daisies**

This popular late-bloomer, with its classic daisy look, will flower well into fall if its few simple needs are met by the gardener. Grow this plant in full sun, in average (don't fertilize) well-drained soil. It has a tendency to flop as it matures so cut the plant down to about 6" in mid-May and then again by half in late June. This will control its legginess and give a more compact but still extremely free-blooming plant. Combining well with Asters and perennial Chrysanthemums, Montauk Daisies attract bees and butterflies but are both deer and rabbit resistant. Salt and drought tolerant, it does well at the seashore, makes a nice cut flower, and is very long-lived, even living happily in large rock gardens. This plant earns its keep!

## **Dendranthema (Perennial Mums)**

This is the true perennial Chrysanthemum, not the round flower bump that we see everywhere as fall comes near! These chrysanthemum will grow into large, bushy plants ... just remember to cut them back by half on Memorial Day and again on July 14. They are happiest in full sun but will take some shade; give them rich, well-drained soil with average water. Deadheading will extend bloom time. These hardy mums will need dividing every 3-4 years to keep them under control.

## **Using Variegated-leaved Plants**

Green is the predominant color in northern gardens with brightly colored blooms standing out against the background. Sooner or later, flowers run out of bloom time and the gardener falls back on foliage, texture and shape to make up for the loss of color. Variegation in plants occurs primarily in tones of white, cream or yellow and using variegated plants as accents will provide a strong contrast to the surrounding greens. White flowering plants with white and green foliage provide an elegant look and are especially effective in shady areas. The range of cultivars in both Hosta and Pulmonaria is extensive.

Variegated plants for sunny spots include some cultivars of Lysimachia, Artemisia and even some grasses. Plants with lots of white or yellow in their leaves seem to need more sun but others may lose their variegation if exposed to too much sun.

Choosing which plant to use, and how, calls for careful consideration. A garden full of variegated plants would look chaotic but used as an accent or focal point an individual plant can brighten an entire area.

## **Often-Asked Questions**

### **I can never remember when to apply fertilizer? Is there one best time?**

Unfortunately, there's no one best time for feeding everything but there are some guidelines. Organic fertilizers release a mild and slow feeding so it's safe to apply to any plant, at any time of the year: when you plant in spring or when you clean-up in fall are both good times to use organic fertilizers. Slow or time-release inorganic fertilizers supply a steady feeding for 3 months or more so they are best used in the spring ... either as you plant or when you see new growth on existing plants. Use a light water-soluble fertilizer every other week on your containers, diluting if necessary. Most gardeners stop using fertilizer by the middle or end of August so as not to start too much new growth before the onset of winter.

### **Is there a right way to plant from a pot to the ground? Can't I just plop them in?**

Your plant will do better as it grows if you follow a few simple guidelines when planting. First, and most important, don't ride them around in a hot car! Take them straight home, water gently, and let them sit in the shade for a bit. Best times to plant: early morning, late afternoon, or on a cool, overcast day. Choose your location carefully so that you can meet your plant's special needs. There's an old saying: "Right plant, right place" which really means: location, location, location! Hopefully, you have already amended your soil if necessary. Dig a bigger hole than you think you will need. Ease the plant out of the pot and gently tease out the roots with your fingers or a fork. Carefully position the plant in the hole (add soil to the bottom and sides of the hole as needed) and make sure the plant ends up with the top of the root ball level to the ground

around the hole. Fill in the hole and firm the soil around the plant. Water slowly. Mulch lightly. Check your plant daily for the first week or two to make sure it is getting enough water and thriving.

**We garden on a difficult piece of property so there are garden beds scattered all around. How can we make things look more as though we had a plan?**

Repetition across existing beds will help create unity. Repeat some of the same plants in different beds and add a few vertical accents. Try using naturally clumping plants to establish pattern and flow and create substance. Using just a few colors, in different shades, from bed to bed will help your eye make a visual connection and the garden will seem more peaceful and cohesive. Planting, if possible, in groups of three will also help to give a more solid look. Using white flowers from bed to bed helps your eye focus on continuity; using burgundy stems or foliage helps “anchor” beds and will give a sense of flow as we go through the season.

**I want to attract pollinators like hummingbirds and bees and butterflies with flowers but there’s just so much room! Do any flowers bring all of them in for the whole season?**

You’re going to attract the hardest working pollinators in the garden! Many of their favorite flowers are long bloomers, spanning the entire season and fully hardy in this climate. Here are a few selections which should keep you busy directing pollinator traffic all summer long! Also, access our Web Site Information Sheets on butterflies, hummingbirds and pollinators for even more information.

Achillea	Echinacea	Nepeta
Agastache	Eupatorium	Penstemon
Aster	Helenium	Phlox
Buddleia	Heuchera	Pulmonaria
Coreopsis	Honeysuckle	Rudbeckia
Dahlias	Liatris	Salvia
Dicentra	Monarda	Yarrow

**We’d love to grow vegetables but our only available vegetable garden site has some shade ... do we have any choices at all?**

If you have even 2 hours of direct sunlight a day or dappled sunlight during the day you have more choice than you think. The trick is to stagger your crops, treating your shade like a microclimate. Since plants grow more slowly with less light, sow lettuce in 2 places ... one with sun and one with part shade ... on the same day. Your harvest will be extended. Root vegetables (beets, carrots, radishes) and cool-weather crops (broccoli, peas) will mature slowly and be a little smaller but will adapt well to 3-4 hours of sun a day. If you’re not sure what to grow, try growing patio vegetables in containers and move them around until they seem happy. Try some of these selections:

2 or more hours of sun or dappled sun: Arugula, Kale, Lettuce, Spinach, Swiss Chard, Chives, Dill, Fennel, Mint, Parsley, Thyme.

4 or more hours of sun: Beet, Broccoli, Carrot, Peas, Potato, Radish, Turnip. Herbs include Basil, Marjoram, Oregano, Sage, Stevia.

**There are robins all over my property in early Spring but I’d like to attract more of our native birds. How?**

If you want native birds flying around your garden, plant native flowers, bushes and trees! Birds would rather stick with their tried-and-true favorites: plants that feature seeds, berries and insects. Planting Daisies (and their relatives) is an easy way to start a bird garden as their seeds are irresistible to many of our local birds. This plant family includes Sunflowers, Asters, Black-Eyed Susans, Liatris and Coneflowers. Adding bushes with berries to the general mix in your garden will attract a wide range of birds but they will strip ripe berries fast. Mature Viburnums fruit heavily and will keep the birds busy for weeks in late summer. Cardinals will devour the large red berries found on a Kousa Dogwood tree.

Oaks and maples offer insects for the birds as well as welcome shade.

**I have a shady area near one of my best sitting spots that needs a quick fix. What flower will add some bright color?**

The wide range of types and colors available makes **Begonias** the answer! They start blooming in early summer and will continue until hard frosts. They are happy with filtered light under trees but need to be shaded from afternoon sun. Give them rich, well-drained soil and good air circulation, especially if you place them in containers. Some Begonias have mounding shapes; some have trailing, bell-like flowers which are well displayed in hanging baskets. The foliage choice is enormous! Also, many shade-loving perennials will do just fine spending the summer in a container and you always have the option of then planting them in the garden during the fall planting season.

**I always wish some of my perennials bloomed longer! Anything I can do?**

Some perennials just have naturally longer bloom periods than others. You can extend bloom time and stretch the season by looking for and planting both early and late cultivars of your favorites. In some cases, you can add 3-4 weeks of bloom by selecting a range across cultivars of the same plant ... this is where reading those little white labels in the pots will be a big help! Many gardeners also plant later blooming “look-alikes” next to their favorites to achieve a “look” they particularly like.

**I love the way a hanging basket becomes a natural focal point. How do I give it the best care?**

A hanging basket, full of bloom, will bring instant color anywhere: front porch, back porch, patio, terrace, perched on or hanging from a post or even hanging from a low tree branch! They are great time savers: you don't have to weed them all the time! The critters won't dig them up or scratch them to pieces. The trick is how to keep them blooming all season. Many plants are ready to help you maintain bloom. Think about using or combining Bacopa, Begonia, Calibrachoa, Fuschia, Geraniums and Petunia.

Do not over or under water your hanging basket ... be aware of the fact that its needs will change as the season advances. Keep your watering consistent. Try to water at the same time every day, and avoid high noon as the water will only evaporate and be wasted. Early morning is always the best watering time. Use a good quality all-purpose granular fertilizer, lightly mixed with the soil. Water with a liquid fertilizer every 2 weeks as well. Deadhead faithfully if your plants require it but many plants now deadhead themselves.

**Growing Great Plants That Take Care Of Themselves**

To the average gardener, Tried-and-True really means “I can count on it to grow and bloom the way it's supposed to do without making a big deal about it!” What that really means is “But I want it to pretty much take care of itself!” And here are three perennials that will do just that, all season long:

**Geranium (Cranesbill)**

These colorful, hardy Geraniums bloom from mid-spring to fall and are the perfect “tuck-in” plant. Perennial Geraniums prefer well-drained soil and do best in morning sun with afternoon shade; they make excellent companions to a wide variety of plants because of their mounding habit. Some cultivars become flowering groundcovers or tuck-ins in rock gardens. Some of the looser-branched cultivars are wonderful fillers in perennial beds with their airy branches interweaving with other plants and they will help hide the “bare knees” of other plants. A slow release fertilizer used at the start of the summer will see these plants through the growing season but because they were once wildflowers they don't expect much coddling. The taller cultivars may need light staking as the season advances.

**Agastache ( Hyssop)**

Also known as Hummingbird Mint, this perennial has everything going for it! Its long flower spikes offer color to the garden from mid-summer through fall. Ranging in height from 12-48”, the plants form thick clumps, prefer full sun and good air circulation and will thrive in lean, dry soil. In fact, they do not want to

be over-watered or over-fertilized and are generally considered totally carefree once established. The aromatic foliage and flowers are particularly appealing to hummingbirds, bees and butterflies but are deer and rabbit resistant. Agastache combines well with Lavender, Salvias, herbs (Sage and Rosemary) and summer-blooming grasses and should be sited where you can brush against the fragrant foliage.

### **Phlox paniculate (Summer Phlox)**

Summer-blooming Phlox has been a favorite in American gardens for well over 100 years! Long-blooming (mid-summer to fall), large, well-established clumps can range from 3-4' and will provide an exclamation point to the summer garden. Drought-tolerant, Phlox combines well with Coneflowers, Daylilies, Monardas, Rudbeckia and some of the smaller grasses. It will help create a "cottage" look to a flower bed especially if shorter plants are used to cover its "knees". Highly attractive to birds, Phlox prefers a humus-rich soil and a little shade as they were originally woodland flowers. Their light, sweet fragrance is a hallmark of summer. Deadhead to encourage continuous bloom and divide large clumps every three years.

### **Garden Containers and Window Boxes**

It's time to think about containers again! The nursery stocks several lines of unusual containers. Acer Gardens will have many pre-planted containers for you to choose from but, of course, you can bring your own empty container to the nursery and staff will be happy to help you design something just right for your garden and advise you on how best to plant it. Maybe it's time to try a container featuring just one color but using varying shades of that color. Looking at a color wheel will give you some idea of complimentary as well as dramatic colors which might fit into your over-all garden plan. Containers can be used to lead the eye along a path, to frame a view or to cover-up a temporary "hole". They can cover that one spot all gardens have where nothing seems to thrive or they allow you to experiment with a new color or texture. The possibilities are almost endless! You can change the look of your containers at will by changing the plantings. Troughs and containers have the advantage of portability and can be moved around the garden as the season advances or as "holes" develop.

Many gardeners find that elevating a container by placing it on a pedestal gives the container greater impact in the garden and really shows off trailing flowers. Placing more containers around the elevated one can also create a further dramatic effect and make a real statement. Be sure the pedestal is securely anchored so that it won't blow over and that the container itself is heavy and won't wiggle.

Accurate watering is key to growing good containers as is a good ratio of plant to pot. Think about where your containers will be placed as you choose your plants. Containers for decks and terraces will be in view 24/7 so they can be made to reflect how you choose to entertain or become extensions of the larger garden. A container sited for the "wow" factor can be filled to over-flowing with wild colors and luxurious blossom and you should feel free to depart from your normal style. After all, if it doesn't work it's easy to change! Be sure that all your container plants share the same sun, soil and water requirements and set up a realistic fertilizing schedule. Many gardeners photograph their containers as the season advances and keep them to use as guides for next year.

Window box planters are an easy way to add a splash of color or greenery and are perfect for people who want to enjoy a garden but don't really have the time to take care of it. Some gardeners "theme" their window boxes: fragrant herbs, succulents or strong foliage plants are all options. Choosing annuals with bold, colorful flowers and adding foliage plants makes a dramatic visual impact. Trailing vines are always a welcome addition. Like containers, window boxes need frequent waterings so coordinating soil and water plant requirements is key to a good result.

How you actually plant the window box is also important. Plant each flower one at a time, following your plan and adding more soil as needed to surround the plant roots. Compress the soil gently with your hands to remove air pockets. Finish with the soil 1" below the top of the window box and water thoroughly.



Some flowers that always do well in window boxes include:

Begonias  
Calibrachoa  
Geraniums  
Impatiens

Petunias  
Torenia  
Verbena

There are many more choices for window box flowers. Please feel free to come to the nursery and let staff help you choose plants which will be appropriate for your purposes.

### **The Vegetable Garden**

Acer Gardens is your “go to” place for vegetable seeds and starter plants. Knowledgeable staff will be happy to help you choose what you need to make your vegetable growing a pleasure and to answer questions.

Plotting your garden on graph paper will help you establish boundaries and maximize your available space. Remember to rotate your crop’s positions from year to year to keep the soil fresh. If you are using rows be sure to leave access routes for weeding and fertilizing. More and more vegetable gardeners are going vertical in an effort to maximize available space ... tomatoes and cucumbers in particular benefit from this concept, as do peas and some squashes and melons. Hanging baskets can also be utilized for vegetables. Acer Gardens continues to offer an outstanding selection of seed varieties of popular gourmet vegetables and heirloom annuals.

Many vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. Leaf lettuces, such as Black Seeded Simpson, are harvested young and re-planting every 2 – 3 weeks will keep you harvesting into fall. (The nursery now carries pre-blended lettuce varieties, including both a Gourmet Mix and a Heat Wave blend.) Arugula, cilantro and spinach will also continue producing on a similar schedule but do not re-plant in the heat of the summer. Radishes, a fast and easy grower, can be planted in short rows at 2 – 3 at weekly intervals. Spring is the optimum time to direct sow or plant peas, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, cabbage, leeks (plant Large American Flag now for fall harvest), carrots, parsley, onions, Swiss chard, kale and micro- greens.

Late May is a good time to plant cucumbers, tomatoes, corn, peppers, melons, pumpkins, and squash. Plant basil near the tomatoes to discourage the insects that feed on them. Alyssum, Nasturtiums and Marigolds planted in the vegetable garden will fend off many aphids, thrips and beetles and will protect your squash and pumpkin crops. Fennel bulbs and onions can be planted now ... both hold well in the vegetable garden. Plant in early to mid spring and harvest in summer when the tops fall and begin to brown. Dry in an airy place until ready to use.

The wide-ranging herb selection keeps expanding and now includes Stevia (the sugar substitute), Lemon Grass, a wide range of Thymes and Lemon Verbena (the leaves are wonderful in water or iced tea). Many new basil cultivars are now resistant to downy mildew. Thai Basil will be available again (try it with fish as well as using the leaves in oriental dishes). Most herbs will do well in patio and deck containers but Thai Basil should be grown separately as it actually needs to dry out between waterings .

Herbs can be more than kitchen companions to the vegetables you grow. Think about inter-planting herbs and vegetables in the garden. (Harvesting dinner will be easy!) Try basil and tomatoes, chives and carrots, rosemary and beans. Marjoram, oregano, sage and tarragon enhance many vegetables. Grow dill separately as it can become invasive and needs a lot of spreading room as well as successive plantings.

Acer Gardens’ Information sheet on **Growing Vegetables** is available on the web site and at the nursery.

## **Growing Vegetables in Pots**

Even if you don't have a "real" vegetable garden, you can certainly grow herbs and many vegetables. The nursery has a large selection of herbs and vegetables which will all do well planted together in containers! Dwarf vegetables are always a good choice as are vegetables that take up little space (lettuce, radishes and scallions) or crops that bear over a long time (cherry tomatoes and small peppers). "Bush" and "Compact" sizes will do well grown in containers or tucked into the front of flower beds. Lettuce and containers are born companions but lettuce makes a terrific border plant too! Plant seeds every 3-4 weeks for successive harvests. Some new cucumbers and squash plants are designed to be grown vertically and take up very little room.

Choosing vegetables with the same water and sun requirements will be a plus. Almost all vegetables do best when grown in full sunlight, at least 6 hours per day. Leaf vegetables (lettuce, greens, spinach and parsley) will tolerate a little shade, especially as the season lengthens.

Pick a container larger than you think you will need. Be sure the container has good drainage (holes in the bottom) because containers need more watering than vegetable beds as they dry out quickly from sun and wind. Some plants may require daily watering. Don't let the soil dry out between waterings as this could cause the plants to drop their flowers and fruits. Acer Gardens bagged potting mix is a good soil choice; use a slow release or organic fertilizer at planting time.

## **Garden Help**

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will answer inquiries on lawn problems (860 683-4977), soil testing (203 974-8521) and plant disease issues. (203 974-8601.)

*Acer Gardens*

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