

Maine's Real Estate and Builders

RESOURCE GUIDE

TIPS TO REDUCE UTILITY COST AROUND THE HOUSE

TIPS TO WINTERIZE A HOME AS COLD WEATHER APPROACHED

A KITCHEN THAT WORKS FOR YOU

YEARLY MARKET OVERVIEW

THE BENEFIT OF HIRING HOLIDAY DECORATORS

Fall / Winter 2026

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RESOURCE GUIDE

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The benefits of hiring holiday decorators



Many holiday celebrants aspire to transform their homes into picture perfect representations of festive wonderlands. Stringing lights and hanging wreaths is a cherished tradition for many people, but others may find decorating too tall an order.

Homeowners with mobility issues or busy schedules that don't allow time to decorate can look to decoration professionals to turn their homes into winter wonderlands. In fact, entrusting seasonal decorating to a pro offers a wide range of benefits.

· Prioritizes safety: Emergency rooms treat thousands of injuries each year tied to holiday decorating accidents, according to Outdoor Lighting. These accidents primarily involve falls from ladders and electrical mishaps. Scaling steep rooflines, navigating icy surfaces and balancing heavy garlands on high ceilings can carry significant risk. Professional installers use industrial-grade safety gear and have extensive experience and training. Their fully insured crews know how to get the job done safely and quickly.

· Creates a high-end design: Professional installers can achieve a high-end design. Rather than do-it-yourself techniques, which may be comprised of mismatched and store-bought ornaments, the company Illuminating Design says professional designers bring commercial-grade LED materials, custom-fit items and balanced color palettes. They can tailor the installation to a home's architecture to accentuate structural features, landscaping and



interior spaces. This polished display might be hard to replicate with off-the-shelf items.

· Saves time: The weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's tend to fly by. Between hosting gatherings, shopping for gifts and managing work deadlines for the end of the year, there may not be a lot of time for outfitting a home with holiday finery. Professional decorators can handle the entire setup efficiently, sometimes in a single morning. Full-service outfits may handle any maintenance, post-season takedown and even off-season storage, further taking the pressure off of busy homeowners.

· Lowers stress: Perhaps the biggest benefit of hiring professional decorators is eliminating the added stress that comes from decorating and maintaining the look. Installation services can handle blown fuses or dead bulbs, and may provide prompt maintenance if a storm knocks something down, according to Decorating Elves. Pros also handle the tedious task of removing displays when it's time to bid adieu to the season.

Delegating holiday decor to a professional can replace a less than enjoyable task with extra enjoyment. Homeowners get to step directly into a festive atmosphere without having to climb a ladder.

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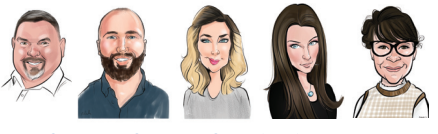
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Tips to reduce utility costs around the house



The cost of goods and services has risen considerably in recent years. Food and fuel costs garner considerable attention, but utilities also are stretching consumers' budgets.

Data from the U.S. Energy Information Adminstration indicates that electricity costs have increased by approximately 37 percent since 2020. That's making it hard for many people to pay their energy bills on time. In fact, the National Energy Assistance Directors Association reports that household energy arrearages, or the amount of money people owe on energy bills past the due date, rose by more than 30 percent between December 2023 and June 2025. That's a troubling development in its own right, but perhaps even more so given NEADA projections indicating the cost to heat a home over the winter of 2026-2027 was expected to increase by nearly 9 percent compared to the year prior.

With utility costs rising and a significant number of consumers falling behind on their energy bills, now is a great time to examine ways to reduce utility costs.

- Reconsider your existing lighting. Millions of consumers have replaced incandescent light bulbs and/or compact fluorescent lamps with LED lights in their homes. According to the energy experts at Reliant®, a single traditional incandescent bulb uses around 60 watts, while an LED bulb requires between eight to 12 watts to produce the same amount of light. By switching to the more effi-



cient LED bulbs, consumers can reduce their energy consumption and thus reduce their monthly utility bills.

- Identify and address devices consuming energy when not in use. Some electronics may be characterized as "vampires" because they are consuming energy even when they are not being used. Kitchen appliances, DVRs and even computers may be silently increasing your energy consumption even when they're not being used. But consumers need not worry they need to unplug everything each day in order to cut their utility costs. Advanced power strips are smart surge protectors that can reduce vampire energy consumption because they automatically turn off ancillary devices like cable boxes when a primary electronic device like a television is turned off.

- Adjust your water heater temperature. The United States Department of Energy reports that water heating accounts for roughly 18 percent of a home's annual utility costs. That's a sizable percentage, and many people may be over-



spending by setting the temperature on their water heaters too high. Energy experts note manufacturers typically set water heater temperatures at 140 F. However, reducing that temperature to 120 F can help consumers reduce their water heating energy consumption by more than 20 percent in some households.

- Pay attention to HVAC filters. HVAC filters are easy to overlook, but dirty filters can result in considerably higher utility bills. When filters are not regularly replaced, furnaces and air conditioners are forced to work harder to move air throughout a home. That extra work results in greater energy consumption and, ultimately, higher energy bills. The HVAC experts at Carrier recommend changing air filters every 30 to 90 days.

Utility costs have been outpacing inflation for years, but consumers can embrace various strategies to lower their monthly energy consumption.

Tips to winterize a home as cold weather approaches

It's not uncommon to spend a lot of time out of the house when the weather outside is warm. The popularity of outdoor living spaces has made it easier than ever to enjoy nature without leaving home, which can generally be done from late spring to mid-fall each year in many regions. But as fall creeps toward winter and temperatures drop, it's time to head back indoors.

As millions prepare to go back inside with winter approaching, it can be beneficial to winterize a home so interior spaces are more comfortable and exterior spaces are better able to withstand potentially harsh winter weather.

· Check your carbon monoxide detectors. Fall is a great season to open the windows in many regions that feature prototypical autumn air. But the crisp air of fall will eventually give way to much colder air, at which time the windows will be closed and likely remain shut for months to come. The Minnesota Department of Health notes that carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that cannot be detected by the senses. When windows remain closed for long periods of time, such as in winter, the buildup of CO, which can come from sources like water heaters, gas stoves, fireplaces, and clothes dryers, can poison residents over time. CO detectors are a safety net against such a fate, but they must be operating at peak capacity in order to be effective. As fall winds down, check all CO detectors to make sure they're working properly and replace any that are not.

· Check for drafts. Check around windows and doors throughout the home to see if there are any gaps that are allowing air from outside to enter the home. If daytime temperatures are mild well into the fall, then it can be difficult to see if there are any drafts before the sun goes down. Conduct this check in the evenings



when temperatures are a little more chilly and leaks are easier to detect. If drafts are detected, apply weather stripping around doors and windows that do not require replacement. If there's drafts around aging windows and doors, consider replacing them.



· Call a chimney sweeping service. Cozying up beside a fire can make anyone forget the cold weather outside. But fireplaces should be subjected to a thorough cleaning by a skilled professional before each winter. Animals might have nested in the chimney since the fireplace was last used, and you will want any nests cleared prior to lighting your first fire of the season. In addition, the tar-like substance creosote, which forms when wood is burned in a fireplace, can build up and harden over time. That's a dangerous prospect, as creosote is highly flammable, which can lead to chimney fires. Creosote also can block the flow of air through a chimney, and that can trap gasses, including CO, in a home.

· Reverse your fans. It's a simple step but one people may not even realize they can make. In homes with ceiling fans, residents can reverse the fans so the blades spin clockwise. This simple step pushes trapped warm air hovering around the ceiling into the living space below. This can make home interiors warmer without requiring residents to turn up the thermostat and increase their energy bill.

· Replace your HVAC air filter. Replacing the air filter on your HVAC prior to winter can make the unit operate more efficiently, which can help reduce your wintertime energy bill. Replacing the filter prior to winter also improves indoor air quality, which is a notable benefit during a time of year when the windows typically remain closed for months.

Winterizing a home is not a significant undertaking, but it can be very effective at making homes healthier and more comfortable once windows are closed for the season.

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A Kitchen That Works For You



There is a difference between a kitchen that looks beautiful and one that makes cooking feel effortless. The dream kitchen might have a sprawling island, a walk-in pantry, a double oven, and every counter top appliance imaginable. But when it comes to preparing everyday meals, some of the most useful tools are considerably less glamorous.

So what separates a standard kitchen from a dream kitchen? Often, it's not simply the price of the appliances or the finish on the counter tops. It's the thoughtful extras: more room to prepare food, specialized storage, appliances suited to particular cooking habits, and space for multiple people to cook together. Industry kitchen-design research similarly emphasizes functionality, personalized features, and adaptable spaces alongside aesthetics.

For Maine homeowners, where fall brings harvest cooking and winter invites long afternoons of baking, simmering soups, and gathering around the table, a well-equipped kitchen can make home life that much more enjoyable. The trick is knowing what genuinely deserves your investment, what would simply be nice to have, and what you might never use. Before dreaming about a complete kitchen makeover, it helps to start with a simpler question: What do you actually need to cook well in the home you have?



A well-equipped kitchen doesn't require a cupboard full of gadgets or a professional chef's collection of cookware. It needs a handful of dependable tools that make everyday cooking easier, more consistent, and less frustrating. Across kitchen-equipment guides, the same essentials appear again and again: a good knife, versatile pans, accurate measuring tools, and a few hardworking utensils.

Start with two pans: stainless steel and nonstick. A stainless-steel skillet is ideal for searing meat, browning vegetables, and developing the flavorful browned bits that form the base of a pan sauce. A nonstick skillet, meanwhile, makes eggs, pancakes, and other delicate foods easier to cook and clean up afterward. The two serve different purposes, making them a more useful starting point than buying an extensive cookware set. Some brands I like to use are Figment and Made In.

Next comes the chef's knife. An eight-inch knife handles most chopping, slicing, and mincing, making it one of the most frequently used tools in a home kitchen. Make sure to avoid prepackaged knife sets. Point blank, you only ever use one or two knives from the whole set, So instead of spending $200 on a Henckels set of 15 pieces of drawer filler and sink space, spend that money on one high quality chef's knife and/or paring knife.



Two less glamorous tools deserve a place near the top of the list: a digital kitchen scale and an instant-read thermometer. A scale measures ingredients by weight, improving consistency when baking bread, pies, and other seasonal favorites. Also, if you plan on cooking any French or Italian recipes, having the ability to measure in Metric is an absolute must. A thermometer removes much of the guesswork from cooking meat and poultry, helping ensure food reaches a safe internal temperature.

Beyond these basics, a whisk, heat-resistant spatula, tongs, measuring spoons, mixing bowls, and food-storage containers will handle much of the remaining work. A Dutch oven is another particularly useful addition for soups, chowders, stews, and slow-cooked meals.

The goal isn't to own everything. It's to have tools that earn their space, perform reliably, and suit the way you cook. For Maine homeowners preparing for months of baking, roasting, and simmering, a small collection of versatile essentials is often more valuable than a kitchen full of specialty gadgets.

Once the essentials are covered, the fun begins. The best kitchen upgrades aren't necessarily the most expensive; they're



the ones that make a particular kind of cooking easier, faster, or more enjoyable. For some homeowners, that means a professional-style range. For others, it's a small collection of specialized tools that transform the way they prepare food in terms of speed and consistency.

A stand mixer is a dream purchase for anyone who regularly bakes bread, cakes, or holiday cookies. It handles heavy doughs, whips egg whites, and frees up your hands, but occasional bakers can manage perfectly well with a hand mixer. Similarly, an immersion blender is a worthwhile addition for anyone making autumn squash soups, chowders, or sauces. A food processor earns its counter space for cooks who frequently chop large quantities of vegetables, prepare pastry dough, or make pesto and hummus.

Then there are the convenience upgrades. An air fryer can be useful for crisping vegetables, preparing quick meals, and reheating leftovers without heating a full-size oven. A fine-mesh chinois strainer is a more specialized investment, useful for straining stocks, sauces, and purées into a particularly smooth finish. Neither is essential, but both can be valuable for the right cook.

For those bougie cookware enthusiasts, copper pans offer responsive heat control and a distinctive appearance. However, they come at a premium and require more consideration when it comes to maintenance; stainless steel, cast iron, and other materials can serve most home cooks exceptionally well.

At the higher end, double ovens, oversized ranges, warming drawers, and built-in espresso machines can make a kitchen feel luxurious. They are most worthwhile when they support regular habits, whether that's hosting holiday dinners or making elaborate meals from scratch.

The important distinction is that you can cook remarkably well with a good knife, a reliable pan, and a few basic tools. Dream-worthy extras should reflect what you love to cook, not what you feel your kitchen is supposed to contain.

If I were building my ideal kitchen, I would spend less time looking at counter top appliances and more time choosing the right knife, pan, pot, and cutting board. My

Confit de Canard

Cook time: 5hrs • Difficulty: Easy

If you tell a French chef this is the way you make Duck Confit, they might throw you into the Seine. Confit actually has a pretty cool tie to French history. Confit comes from the French word "confire" meaning, to preserve. Before refrigeration, tough meats like duck or goose were first cured in salt and spices, then slow-cooked in fat, to be stored completely submerged under a hardened layer of fat in a cool cellar to block oxygen and bacteria. Now, we use this technique to break down collagen into silky rich gelatin, improving flavor and tenderness.



Ingredients:

- Medium Dutch Oven
- 2 Duck Legs (I get mine at Whole Foods in Portland)
- Garlic (one head)
- Thyme

Instructions:

1. With the tip of a knife, poke small holes in the skin of the duck legs, making sure only to pierce the skin and not the meat. Make sure to turn the leg over and poke at the fat pockets
2. In a sheet pan, cover abundantly with Kosher salt on both sides, feel free to add fresh spices of your choosing at this point.
3. Let the duck salt brine for at least 30 minutes in the fridge, overnight for best results
4. Preheat oven to 200f
5. Brush of the excess salt, laying the legs skin-side-down in the Dutch Oven
6. Cut one whole head of garlic in half, place both halves into the Dutch Oven
7. Add a few springs of thyme to the put
8. Add about one cup of water, just enough to help steam the pot
9. Cover Dutch oven and roast for 2 hours at 200f
10. After 2 hours, flip the legs over carefully, and roast for another 2 hours at 200f
11. Next, remove the duck legs and strain off the fat to use for you next dish

Note: The garlic cloves have been slow roasting in duck fat for 4 hours, eat them whole or spread them over a toasted slice of baguette

12. Finally, in a stainless steel pan, add a tablespoon of duck fat to the pan. Carefully place the duck legs skin-side-down, sear for 2-4 minutes. This step is just to crisp the skin. The duck is already cooked, but this gives the fatty duck skin an unbelievable crisp and texture
13. Plate and finish with a small pinch of flaky salt
14. Garnish with something acidic, like caramelized orange peel or red cabbage. In the photo is butternut squash puree and diced caramelized apple
15. Enjoy your new favorite dish!



passion is classic French cooking, where technique does much of the heavy lifting. A well-browned piece of meat, a properly reduced sauce, or a finely diced onion depends far more on the cook's skill and the tools in their hands than on how many appliances line the counter.

First, invest in the tools you touch every day. A well-balanced chef's knife, a sturdy cutting board, and quality stainless-steel pans and saucepans would be high on my list. A fine-mesh chinois or strainer is another worthwhile upgrade for anyone who enjoys making stocks, velouté, or silky sauces. These tools don't do the work for you; they give you more control as your technique improves. Stainless steel is particularly versatile for browning and deglazing. Personally, I haven't found the need for cast iron, as others swear by them. A Dutch oven is another excellent investment for braises, stews, and slow-cooked dishes, especially during a Maine winter. These are the kinds of purchases that can last for years when properly cared for (And make great Holiday gifts *wink* *wink*).

Where would I save? I'd buy individual pans rather than a large matching set, choosing each piece for a purpose. I'd also resist buying expensive cookware simply because it looks beautiful. Of course, a passionate baker might have a very different list. A stand mixer could be indispensable for someone making bread and pastry every week, just as a food processor might be invaluable to someone preparing large quantities of vegetables. Neither would be a priority for me.

The best kitchen investments reflect the cook, not the trend. Buy the tools that help you do what you love, learn new techniques, and produce better food. Everything else can wait.

Before investing in the latest gadget or planning a complete renovation, take stock of what you already have and how you use it. Identify what's missing, invest in quality where it matters, and let your cooking habits guide the rest. You don't need every tool or upgrade to make something wonderful. At the end of the day, the best kitchen isn't necessarily the biggest, newest, or most expensive. It's the one that makes you want to cook.





Yearly Market Overview

In 2026, out-of-state buyers continue to play a significant role in the Maine housing market. The latest complete buyer-origin data from Maine Listings shows that approximately 29% of Maine home purchases in 2025 were made by buyers from outside the state, with Maine residents accounting for roughly 71%. The latest buyer map recorded 15,144 closed single-family sales, including 10,747 purchases by Maine buyers.

While a complete 2026 buyer-origin breakdown has not yet been released, current market data indicates that interest from buyers outside Maine remains an important factor, particularly in Southern Maine and coastal communities.

Key Statistics for 2026

Out-of-State Buyer Share: The latest full-year Maine Listings data shows approximately 29% of buyers came from outside Maine, based on 2025 closed sales.

In-State Buyer Share: Maine residents accounted for approximately 71% of purchases in the latest complete buyer-origin data.

Top Origin States: Massachusetts remained by far the largest source of out-of-state buyers, accounting for 1,156 purchases in the 2025 buyer map. Florida followed with 340 purchases, while New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire also contributed significant numbers of buyers.

2026 Market Activity: Through August, Maine's market continued to show strong prices despite slower sales in some months. In August 2026, 1,542 single-family homes changed hands, down 10.09% from August 2025, while the median sales price reached $424,550, an increase of 4.31%.

Inventory: More homes are becoming available, giving buyers more choices and creating a more balanced negotiating environment than the extremely competitive market of the early post-pandemic years. Maine REALTORS® reported that additional inventory was giving buyers greater leverage in appropriately priced markets.

Regional Trends

While the statewide market is becoming more balanced, certain areas continue to experience substantially higher prices and strong demand.

Southern Maine, particularly Cumberland and York counties, remains among the state's most competitive and expensive markets. During the June-August 2026 rolling quarter, Cumberland County recorded 1,085 sales with a median price of $621,500, while York County recorded 770 sales with a median of $589,500.

The Midcoast also continues to attract substantial demand. Lincoln County recorded a median sales price of approximately $500,000 during the same period, while Hancock County reached $527,500, reflecting the continued premium attached to desirable coastal communities

Yes, 2026 has been a year of transition for Maine real estate. Rather than the dramatic price increases and limited inventory seen in previous years, buyers are seeing

more options while prices continue to rise moderately. Through the first half of 2026, Maine recorded approximately 6,122 closed sales, with a year-to-date median sales price of about $410,000, up approximately 2.5% from the same period in 2025.

Top Performing Counties

(Sales Activity & Price Trends)

Cumberland County: Remains Maine's most active high-value market. During the June-August rolling quarter, sales increased approximately 3%, while the median sales price reached $621,500.

York County: Continued to show strong demand, with 770 sales during the latest rolling quarter and a median sales price of $589,500, up more than 7% from the same period in 2025.

Lincoln County: Remained one of the stronger Midcoast markets, with sales increasing approximately 7% during the June-August period and a median price of $500,000.

Hancock County: Experienced one of the strongest price increases in the state, with its rolling-quarter median sales price reaching $527,500, an increase of more than 18% year over year.

Counties Showing More Moderate Activity

Not every part of Maine experienced the same growth.

Androscoggin County: Sales declined approximately 7% during the June-August rolling quarter, although the median sales price remained at $360,000.

Knox County: Sales declined approximately 4%, with the median sales price falling to $424,550.

Sagadahoc County: Sales were down approximately 5%, although the median price increased to $471,000.

Franklin County: Sales declined approximately 3%, but the median sales price increased more than 8% to $337,700.

Price Trends by County

Highest Median Price: Cumberland County remained the most expensive major county, with a median sales price of $621,500 during the June-August 2026 rolling quarter.

York County: Followed closely at $589,500.

Hancock County: Reached $527,500, reflecting especially strong appreciation in many coastal communities.

Lowest Median Price: Aroostook County remained among Maine's most affordable markets, with a median sales price of approximately $175,000.

Highest Price Growth: Hancock County posted the strongest increase among the counties during the latest rolling quarter, with its median sales price rising approximately 18.5% year over year.

2026 Context

Realtors report that 2026 has brought a more balanced environment for Maine buyers. Inventory has increased significantly compared with the tightest years of the post-pandemic market, giving buyers more opportunities to compare properties and negotiate.

At the same time, the increase in inventory has not resulted in widespread price declines. Well-priced homes in desirable locations continue to attract buyers, while properties that are overpriced or need significant work may take longer to sell.

In August 2026, Maine REALTORS® specifically noted that additional inventory was giving buyers more opportunities and leverage, while appropriately priced homes continued to attract attention.

Top Places to Live in Maine

Top places to live in Maine continue to include coastal favorites such as Cape Elizabeth, York and Falmouth, along with vibrant cities like Portland and Bangor and suburban communities such as Scarborough. These communities offer different lifestyles, from high-end coastal living to more affordable inland communities.

Cape Elizabeth: Renowned for excellent schools, ocean views, Fort Williams Park and a quiet, close-knit atmosphere while remaining close to Portland.

Portland: Maine's largest city remains ideal for buyers seeking urban amenities, a thriving restaurant scene, waterfront access and a strong employment base.

York: A historic coastal community with beaches, charming neighborhoods and convenient access to New Hampshire and Boston.

Scarborough: One of Southern Maine's most desirable suburban communities, offering beaches, outdoor recreation, newer housing and easy access to Portland.

Falmouth: Offers an affluent, quiet atmosphere with larger properties, excellent access to Portland and strong demand for homes.

Bangor: Known as the "Queen City," Bangor provides a more affordable urban environment with access to northern and central Maine's outdoor recreation.

Brunswick: A popular Midcoast community offering arts, culture, restaurants, Bowdoin College and a strong sense of community.

Factors to Consider:

Housing Costs: Coastal communities such as Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, York and many parts of Cumberland and York counties tend to command significantly higher prices. Buyers looking for affordability may find more options farther inland or in northern Maine.

Commuting: Communities such as South Portland, Scarborough, Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth and parts of York County provide relatively convenient access to Portland and the I-95 corridor.

Coastal vs. Inland: Coastal towns such as York, Bar Harbor and Cape Elizabeth offer scenery, recreation and strong long-term demand, but typically come with higher purchase prices and heavier seasonal traffic. Inland communities can provide more space and affordability while maintaining access to Maine's outdoor amenities.

What Home Buyers Should Keep to Themselves in 2026

When buying a home, you don't necessarily need to reveal your absolute maximum budget, personal financial details, or how emotionally attached you are to a particular property. However, buyers should never mislead their Realtor or provide false information.

Keeping certain information private can preserve negotiating flexibility and allow your agent to focus on finding the right property rather than simply maximizing the purchase price.

Key Things to Keep Private:

Maximum Budget: If you tell an agent that you can spend $500,000, there is little reason to volunteer that you could actually spend $550,000. Instead, discuss the price range you are comfortable shopping in and work with your lender on your true borrowing capacity.

Urgency/Timeline: If you have a strict deadline because of a job transfer, lease expiration or another personal circumstance, you don't necessarily need to advertise that fact to the seller.

Extreme Enthusiasm: Saying "I love this house" or "I would pay anything for it" can unnecessarily weaken your negotiating position.

Low-Ball Intentions: If you're interested in a property but intend to make an aggressive offer, discuss your strategy with your agent rather than announcing to the seller how low you are willing to go.

Your Absolute Ceiling: There's no advantage to telling a seller that you have reached the absolute maximum you are willing to pay before negotiations require that information.

What to Say Instead:

Budget: Give your Realtor a comfortable target range while keeping your absolute ceiling private.

Timeline: Explain your general timing while emphasizing that you're prepared to move quickly when the right property appears.

Interest: Tell your agent what you like about the property, but also discuss comparable sales and whether the asking price is supported by the market.

Negotiations: Let your Realtor know your priorities—price, closing date, inspection terms, seller concessions, or other factors—so they can build a strategy around what matters most to you.

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