

Dream of having your own vineyard? Begin planning now. By choosing the right location and varietal, you can enjoy home-grown grapes in Western Washington.

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Rebuild your garden soil with a winter cover crop which is considered a green, plant-based fertilizer that feeds the soil without animal products.

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Enjoy the sweet, aromatic flavor of homegrown figs in the Pacific Northwest with these select varieties.

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Capture the seasonal flavors by preserving fresh herbs. Get started drying, freezing, dehydrating and enhance your meals deep into the winter.

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Before buying and planting a tree, Master Gardener Alison Hitchcock outlines species to avoid due to their vulnerability to current and looming threats.

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Plants purchased off the sale rack are only a bargain if you follow these basic rules for all plant purchases.

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July is the time to plant a fall/winter garden. A little work now will set you up for a fresh, delicious vegetables to brighten your autumn and winter meals.

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The best action today's gardeners and homeowners can take to prevent redcedar dieback is to

keep the soil around their trees weed-free and mulched and to discourage heavy foot traffic.

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Join us for this year's Open House at the Discovery Garden, the Salal Native Plant Garden, and the NW Fruit Garden

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Alpine gardening enthusiasts have found a solution to recreate the beauty they see in the alpine regions by using hypertufa containers

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The very act of envisioning, planning, and creating a memorial garden can help you focus on things beautiful and symbolic that capture the essence of your lost loved one.

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Visit a Master Gardener Plant Clinic and get answers to your questions from WSU Extension-trained experts.

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Plants, education, food, music. Kick off your gardening season at the 30th Annual Skagit Master Gardener Plant Fair - Saturday, May 11 - 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

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Successful container gardening depends on the attributes of your potting soil. Take a deep dive into how it is made and how to make it better.

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During this time of year, tent caterpillar egg casings on the branches of deciduous trees are easy to spot. Remove them now, or leave them as an important part of the ecosystem.

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As you plan for the gardening season ahead, tune-up with these at-home stretches and exercises so you'll be up to the gardening chores ahead.

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Whatever the physical challenge, take heart and continue to enjoy gardening by implementing some of these adaptive methods.

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Explore the benefits of using keystone plants to create a wildlife-friendly ecosystem in your own garden.

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Learn about pollinators and open your eyes to the beauty and intricate connectivity of nature. As gardeners, we can make choices that will enhance or inhibit pollinators.

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Interested in growing vegetables but wondering where to start? Master gardeners walk you through what to consider when starting a vegetable garden for the first time.

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Grow herbs and vegetables in the middle of the winter with an indoor growing stand.

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Winter is a great time to plan for next season and explore the many advantages of building raised gardening beds.

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An early frost quickly brings a close to the gardening season. Here, Master Gardener Hallie

Kintner discusses tools and techniques to extend the season.

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Gardening has long been considered good for the soul. Here Master Gardener Kathy Wolfe writes about the many ways gardening improves mental health.

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Master Gardener Jessamyn Tuttle explores the many wonderful bulbs which, if planted now, will bloom as early as late January.

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Master Gardener Sheri Rylaarsdam shares the fun of getting started saving and sharing seeds from your garden.

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Get started pressing apple juice and making cider. Learn about the excellent resources here in Skagit County and how to get started pressing apple juice and making fermented apple cider.

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Recently certified Master Gardener Joan Stamm writes about how Douglas Tallamay's book, *Nature's Best Hope* changed her gardening perspective.

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Former wildland firefighter and Master Gardener Marlene Finley outlines key elements to making your home defensible in a wildfire.

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Master Gardener Claudia Wells discusses the various USDA Zones in Skagit County and microclimates and how they affect your garden's success.

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Master Gardener Bob Bryan helps homeowners set-up their own drip irrigation, helping them save money and time, and their plants thrive.

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The statewide WSU Extension Master Gardeners celebrate 50 years. The first program in the US was started by WSU extension agents in King and Pierce County.

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Join us for a day of discovery and learning at the Skagit Master Gardener's Discovery Garden in Mount Vernon

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Don't be deceived by the beauty of Italian Arum, though it is sold by many companies, it is an invasive plant in most areas of Western Washington.

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Skagit Master Gardeners spend a day touring and learning about the plants at the UW Botanic Garden.

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Author Kathy Wolfe explores the ambiguity of Pacific Northwest tree squirrels: At times entertaining and at other times very destructive.

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Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardeners are preparing for their 2023 Plant Fair at the Skagit County Fairgrounds in Mount Vernon on May 13. Free Admission

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By composting at home, either in a pile or with a worm bin, we can stop the cycle by feeding worms our food scraps and letting them convert them into high-quality nutrients that can be used by plants and other life forms that live in the soil.

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Master Gardener Diana Wisen discusses slug damage and eradication, one of the most discussed topics among PNW gardeners.

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The marine-influenced weather in the Pacific Northwest is the perfect climate for growing cool-season vegetables.

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Heathers and heaths, common in our area, have a multitude of characteristics and are well-adapted to the Pacific Northwest landscape. Ericaceae is the family of the heather plants, but it also includes rhododendrons, blueberries, mountain laurels, and more.

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From the comfort of your chair, you may also notice winter birds flitting about. Birds are an integral part in the cycle of nature. Helping them get proper food, water and shelter will assist their winter survival and allow you to enjoy their antics.

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While hard to find in flower nurseries it is possible to start lisianthus from seeds. Mastering the seed-starting techniques was a months-long process, but well worth it.

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Skagit Master Gardeners share their favorite books to curl up with over the holidays.

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The dark days of winter are upon us. As a gardener, this is the time of year we pull out the seed catalogs and start planning for next year.

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As the summer blooms fade and the bright hues of autumn give way to the gray of November, gardeners and crafters alike find themselves looking for ways to brighten their days.

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## Ask a Master Gardener

*Timely insights on relevant topics from our area's home gardening experts*



**Master Gardeners share their overwintering**

# techniques



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By Anne Hays, Skagit County WSU Master Gardener



Anne Hays is a resident of La Conner and a Skagit County Master Gardener

Dahlias, first imported from Mexico and Central America, provide a rich and enthusiastic floral display in Pacific Northwest gardens. Continuous hybridization of Asteraceae has resulted in the development of a plethora of colors, flower forms, and sizes. The blossoms can be as tiny as the minion under 2 inches, or as large as the giant or dinner plate size at over 10 inches. Conventional wisdom incorporated in most PNW and national reference guides for *Dahlia* growers just about universally recommend digging *Dahlia* tubers in the fall and storing them in a cool dry place. The reference materials I consulted noted that while dahlias are considered hardy in our zones - digging and storing is their preferred recommendation for overwintering dahlias in our Zones 8-9.

I then looked out my window. My street garden is abundant with tall, healthy dahlias, and I didn't dig them last winter. So, I decided to do a very unscientific survey of WSU Extension Skagit County Master Gardeners to see what their preferences and protocols for digging dahlias and overwintering them indoors.

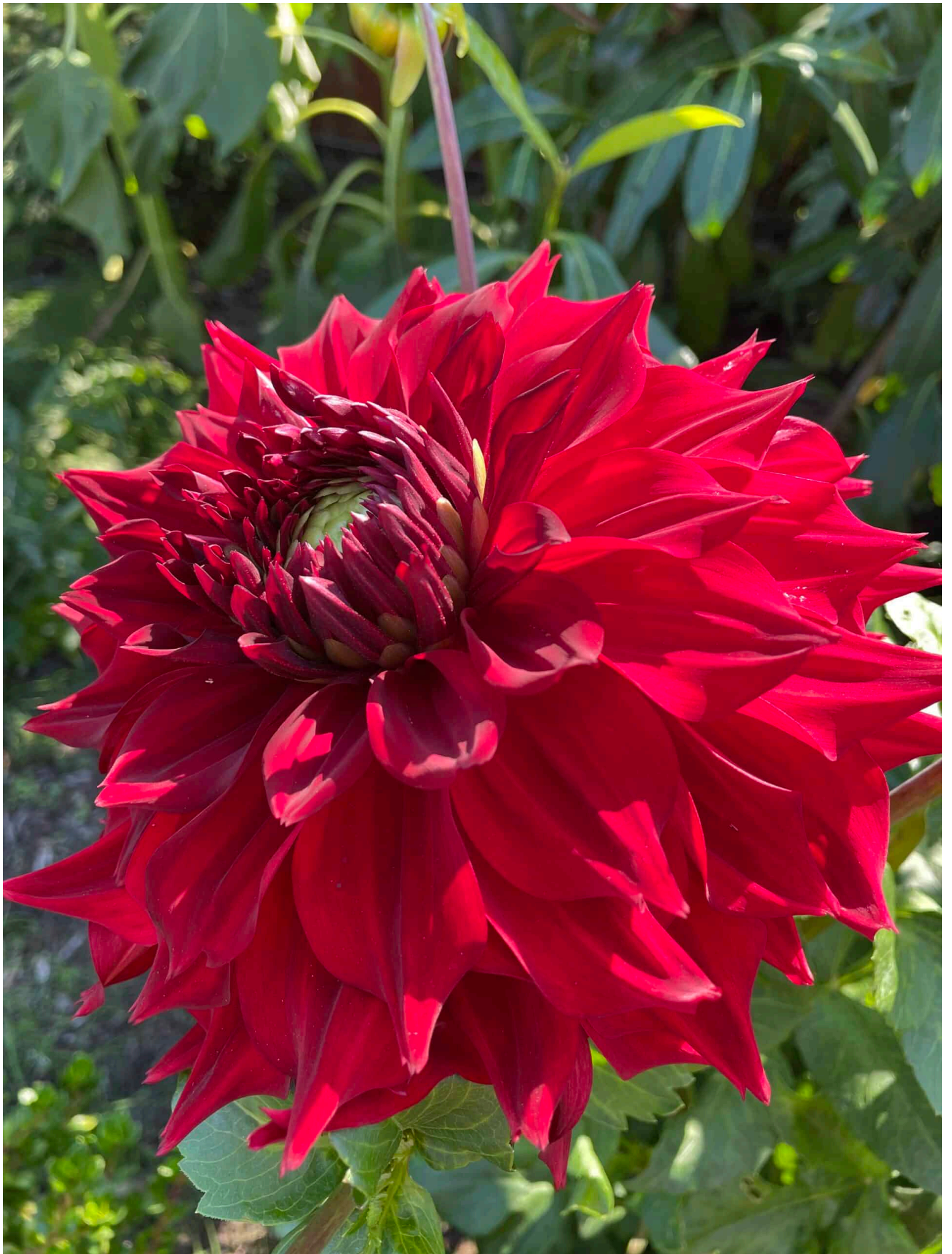
Master Gardeners are a treasure trove of local gardening knowledge, underscoring the depth of their experience and knowledge and differing opinions. Their gardens represent a variety of unique "microclimates" found in our area. The following is a brief synopsis of replies I received with a notation on where their garden is located.



Karen from Camano has ten years' experience raising dahlias. At first, she was a *Dahlia* digger, but now she leaves them in the ground after struggling with mold issues trying to store them. She cuts her 150 *Dahlia* stalks after the first frost, covers them with a layer of mulch and then with sword ferns and rocks to keep water from rotting the dahlias.



Among gardeners, selecting a favorite *Dahlia* is unique to each individual. Dahlias range in size from under 2" to over 10" and are classified into 18 categories by form. *Photo by Anne Hayes*



The Thomas Edison dahlia is a beautiful example of the deep vivid hues found among the fifteen different colors and color combinations recognized by the American Dahlia Society. *Photo by Anne Hayes*



Though the dahlia's origins can be traced back to the high mountains of Central America, the plants thrive in the moist, moderate climate of the Pacific Northwest, blooming from midsummer until the first frost.

Jan from La Conner is a recent convert to the in-ground overwintering school of thought. Until last year she routinely dug her dahlias, wrapped them in newspaper and stored them in plastic. She left them in the ground last season and intends to again, though she plans to cover the planting area with cardboard and heavy mulch.

Rin from Anacortes describes her soil as sandy and has determined her tubers do best when left in the ground — mostly because she hasn't found an overwintering strategy that doesn't result in mold issues.

Linda from Orcas Island digs her tubers, being careful not to damage or pierce the tubers. She then rinses the soil and lays them flat to dry for a day or two. She brushes the tubers — inspecting them for any signs of rot and places them in cardboard boxes using vermiculite. She places the top of the box on the tubers after barely moistening the vermiculite. She does not allow the tubers to touch and stores the box in her basement.

Allison on Samish Island digs her dahlias and stores them in cardboard with peat moss on top in a cool dry place in her garage.

Among all the WSU Extension Skagit County Master Gardeners I contacted, dividing dahlias is typically undertaken every three years in the spring. Many of the local Master Gardener's caution that new *Dahlia* starts are "slug candy" and recommend careful slug containment and control at the start of a new *Dahlia* season. Dahlias need good soil, enriched with organic matter and some recommend bone meal. Planting depths vary from 6 inches to one foot, and many recommend placing stakes for larger varieties as you plant the tubers to avoid damaging the tubers.

I also asked each of the responders for their recommendations on their methods for placing cut dahlias in display vases. The consensus was to place them in water as soon as possible using a fresh cut and change the water frequently. Many mentioned using a floral preservative.

What was abundantly clear from the replies I received is the passionate enthusiasm among those in *Dahlia* growing communities! Color, abundance, ease of growing, all were mentioned as reasons to add dahlias to your garden. If you decide to include dahlias in your garden next spring, the WSU Extension Skagit County Master Gardeners are available at Plant Clinics throughout the county to offer guidance and answer questions. Please don't hesitate to give us a call at 360-428-4270 to be directed to a Plant Clinic near you.

### **Resources:**

Gardening in the Pacific Northwest, Carol Hall & Norman Hall, Timber Press, 2008 Ornamental Bulbs, Corms & Tubers, A. R. Rees, C A B International, 1992

Sunset Western Garden Book, Sunset Publishing, Edited by Kathleen Norris Brenzel Gardening in the Pacific Northwest, Paul Bonine and Amy Campion, Timber Press

Questions about home gardening or becoming a master gardener, may be directed to: WSU Skagit County Extension Office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A, Burlington, WA 98233; by phone: 360-428-4270; or via the website: [www.skagit.wsu.edu/mg](http://www.skagit.wsu.edu/mg)

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