

**Good
Practice
Guide**



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Additional copies of this document are available in
electronic and printed format from:

Neighbourhood Services
Dundee City Council
3 City Square, Dundee
DD1 3BA

Tel: 01382 436871
Email: events.activities@dundeecity.gov.uk

Introduction

Allotment gardening provides the opportunity for a year round healthy lifestyle. Allotments help to address issues that directly affect people such as, food provenance and food security, sustainability, healthy living and eating, whilst at the same time allotments contribute positively to the environment and biodiversity by providing high quality agricultural growing spaces, which also provide a habitat for native flora and fauna.

As a newcomer you are participating in a traditional activity with a long history and there is support to help you get the most out of your plot. The purpose of this document is to help you get started and provide guidance on where to get support. You must recognise that, as in all things in life, the more effort you put in, the greater the benefits and with regard to allotment gardening, you should be under no illusion that it will involve some hard work!

If either now, or at any time in the future, you have any queries or problems, please do not hesitate to ask for help from any of the elected members of the committee. They, and any of the long established allotment holders, will be most willing to offer help and advice.

Who Owns and Manages Allotments in Dundee?

There are three main types of organisations involved in the day to day leasing and managing of allotments:

- Directly by the City Council
- Devolved management by Allotment Associations
- Privately Owned

See Appendix 1 for the list of Dundee Allotments



Tenancy Agreements and Rules

Missive of Let

The Missive of Let (tenancy agreement) is a legally binding document, setting out the rights and responsibilities of the plothead, and those of the provider. You will be required to sign the Missive when you rent an allotment. The Missive can be between you and the landowner (public or private), or between you and your allotment association, who may own or rent the land via a separate lease with a provider.

Your Missive can be short, referring to separate rules, or lengthy, with all relevant issues covered detailing what you can and cannot do with your plot. You should receive a signed copy for future reference. The Missive should be in plain English.

Why is a Tenancy Agreement Needed?

When renting an allotment you are taking responsibility for a piece of land which is entrusted to you. The allotment provider needs to ensure that you will manage the land in an appropriate way during your time as a plothead and to ensure that the land will be in a fit state to rent out again when you decide to move on. Everyone renting an allotment plot needs to understand their responsibilities; the Missive of Let clarifies this.

What to Expect to be Included

No two allotment sites are exactly the same so Missives vary. There are however, some issues that are required by law to be included:

- Rent: amount (possibly including water charges; renting sheds or other structures); how it is collected; how it is calculated for a proportion of the year; penalties for rent arrears.
- Prevention of and penalties for nuisance and annoyance.
- Prohibition of sub-letting to other people by the plothead.
- Observance of terms of lease.
- Determination of tenancy and notices to quit, compensation for improvements to plot on service of notice to quit.
- Prohibition of trade or business.
- Erection of sheds, greenhouses and other structures.

Additional items may be mentioned in the Missive, referring to such things as rules and policies, local circumstances and by-laws. Individual allotment plots are normally let for a period of one year, although this can be renewed indefinitely as long as you comply with the terms of the Missive. If the Let is between your association and the landowner the Let may be for several years for the whole allotment site. The Missive will usually include provision for the tenancy to be terminated by either the plothead or the landlord. If the plothead has not complied with the terms of the Missive or the rules referred to, the provider may give one month's notice.

Understanding Your Responsibilities

It is important that you read and understand the responsibilities of the Missive. Remember it is a contract between you and your provider. You need to follow the Missive conditions, not only to protect your own position but also to ensure that the site, as a whole, is not brought into disrepute.

Rules

In addition to the Missive of Let, many allotment sites have additional general or specific site rules. Adherence to these rules could well be in the Missive; they may even be included in detail in the Missive. They are usually to ensure the harmonious day to day operation of the site. They do not take the place of the Missive but act as a supplement. You should receive a copy of the rules with your Missive and they may be displayed on the site notice board or in the community hut.

What to do if you have a Problem

We have to accept that from time to time problems can arise, but they must not be allowed to get out of hand. Do not allow problems to fester, open discussion is the way to solve a problem.

A dispute procedure may be included in your site rules or even the Missive of Let. One of the rules may be that all ploholders act in a manner not to cause offence to other ploholders. Normally you would try to solve the problem by talking to the other party. If this fails you would have recourse to the site association committee who may set up an arbitration panel. As a final resort you would put the problem in the hands of your provider who arranged the Missive of Let.

Tackling a New Allotment

Media hype about allotments often glosses over the less glamorous, repetitive and often physically demanding jobs involved in the care of an allotment. All too often the hopes and aspirations of new plot holders end up in the compost bin or despair when rabbits eat the salad crops, cabbages become victims of pigeons and weeds choke the life of any remaining crops. To avoid such disappointment it is vital to take early essential steps which will lead to a rewarding long-term future. Before you start cultivating your new allotment, you will need to plan how much time and money you have to spend and, if necessary, consider what help and other resources you may need. Therefore time can be well spent with a cup of tea and a pen and paper noting the size and any existing features. Try to decide what work you need to do to bring it back to cultivation. Adapt your gardening to your abilities and the amount of time you can spend.

Unfortunately new plot holders may inherit rubbish such as broken glass, rotten timber and assorted metal left by the previous tenant. This should be collected and disposed of at a legally registered site. Any materials which can be recycled like timber may be used for making raised beds or compost bins. This practice is in the best allotment traditions and is economical and preferable to purchasing new.

Digging the soil is one of the most physically demanding activities in gardening, as it involves continual bending and straightening of the back while digging. Do a little at a time to prevent back problems and vary your tasks to prevent boredom. If your plot has been neglected for several years, digging the soil over thoroughly before planting is important.

- If the plot is overgrown with long grass or weeds such as brambles you may need to use a strimmer or hedge clippers to cut them down.
- Remember to inform the allotment group committee members if you are unable to clear your plot immediately for any reason, or you could risk losing your plot.
- On weedy plots, plant large leafed crops such as potatoes, courgettes or runner beans, as this will smother weeds.
- You will still need to remove weeds regularly to prevent your crops being overrun by weeds during the first months of cultivation.
- Some people prefer to use methods of cultivation that do not involve digging. Mulches of compost or thick polythene are perfectly acceptable, as are green manures on fallow ground.
- The best time for digging is autumn or early winter if you want to be ready for seed sowing in spring. If you dig in compost, manure or the remnants of last year's crop, worms and micro organisms will break it down over the winter.
- If you are not an experienced gardener, feel free to ask fellow allotment group members for advice.

Getting to Grips with Weeds

If you do not plan to work straight away on a bit of land then cover it with some weed suppression fabric or black polythene, available from garden centres, or alternatively thick cardboard or newspaper. This will work as a weed retardant and make your life much easier when you do start to work on your land. Some people cut slits in the plastic and grow their seedlings through these holes. Even the most persistent of weeds will die after having sunlight excluded from them for three years.

Wood can also be used as a border on the sides of your plot. This can stop invasive weeds from growing in. Just the size of a normal plank of wood will do. If you are growing organically then you will need to do most of the weeding by hand or with a hoe. Try and catch the annual weeds whilst they are young before they can really take root.

Mulching is also an idea - put a 5cm (2 inch) layer of organic mulch between the seedlings. The mulch smothers the light from the weeds and keeps them from growing.

Perennial weeds such as couch grass, dandelions and docks with their deep and persistent roots must be removed before crops are sown or planted.

Never rotavate the soil at this stage, as every piece of root is chopped into several by the rotavator's blades, so where there was one weed many more will be propagated.

If the ground is needed for cropping in the near future there is no alternative to the laborious and painstaking task of root removal by thorough digging.

Tools and Equipment

If you have no tools, start by buying only the essentials first, spade, fork, hoe, rake and trowel.

- If you cannot afford brand new tools, it may be possible to buy old or reconditioned tools from auctions, market stalls, car boot sales or other gardeners.
- Both fork and spade are in constant use and should be as solid and strong as possible.
- The fork is used for raking and spreading compost, for harvesting vegetables, for digging and the removal of roots of perennial weeds.
- The spade is used for cutting edges, winter digging and making trenches and for emptying the compost heap.
- The rake is used for breaking down and levelling roughly dug earth to make a fine seedbed. It is also useful for gathering together debris such as weeds and hedge clippings.
- A wheelbarrow is essential for moving heavy or bulky material.
- Using water butts that are set-up to collect rainwater from sheds or other structures is a good way of saving on water consumption.

Tip: Remember that you should not leave any valuable tools on your allotment between visits even if secured in a shed.



Health and Safety on Allotments

All activities carry an element of risk and allotments are no exception. Everyone needs to take Health and Safety seriously, but it is also very important to approach the issues sensibly and not become paranoid about the possibility of litigation.

New and existing plot holders have a responsibility (duty of care) to anyone on their plot regardless of whether or not they have been given permission to be there. You should act responsibly and comply with any Health and Safety instructions in the Missive of Let, and any subsequent information given by the provider. Health and Safety only becomes unmanageable when responsibilities are neglected.

Cultivating an allotment can be hazardous. Please bear the following hints in mind when you are on site:

- Hard physical work or lifting heavy or awkward loads requires care, practice and an understanding of your own capabilities and physical limitations, particularly if you are not used to it!
- Digging is one of the most physically demanding tasks in gardening. It needs to be approached with care. For your back's sake, do not rush your digging.
- Machinery - if you are using power mowers or strimmers, remember that you are responsible, as an allotment plot holder, for the safety of other plot holders and visitors.
- Broken glass and other materials may be hazardous if left on your allotment.
- Tetanus is an illness caused by bacteria present in soil and manure, which can enter the body through the tiniest scratch, thorn or cut. Make sure that your tetanus vaccination is up to date.
- Garden tools can be a hazard if they are not stored properly or are left lying around the plot when not in use.
- Having a first aid kit available is always a wise addition to the tools. A small selection of adhesive plasters, antiseptic ointment, a pair of tweezers for removing thorns etc and a gauze or lint pad to use as a compress to stop bleeding if badly cut.

Chemicals must be kept securely locked in their own cupboard in your shed, in marked containers. Do not keep them in lemonade bottles or other food containers or leave them lying around your plot. If you must use slug pellets and other chemicals, please keep them to your own plot and do not put them on your neighbours plot.



What You Can And Cannot Do On Your Plot

Gardening within the rules

The Allotments Acts (Scotland) states that your allotment is mainly for growing vegetables and fruit for your own and your family's use. This is the basis on which your plot is rented to you. Modern practice is, often to have some flowers and herbs as well as vegetables and fruit for home use and to attract pollinators.

It is essential that any activities you carry out on your plot are acceptable within the terms and conditions of your Missive of Let. You should not change the nature of the plot in a way that makes it less valuable or could affect the provider's ability to rent it out again when you leave. Occasionally, some activities may actually threaten the future of your allotment site as they change the legal designation of the land-use from that of allotment land, for example using your plot for commercial purposes.

Although restrictions on what you can and cannot do on your plot will differ from area to area, some are generic to all allotment sites. It is always best to check your Missive of Let and check with your site association for any rules pertinent to the site.

Being a good neighbour

A desire to garden means that you will have much in common with your fellow ploholders. There are however some matters of social politeness to consider when you take an allotment or if you are an existing ploholder when a new ploholder arrives. Simple things such as lighting a bonfire or playing a radio may affect your neighbours' enjoyment of their plot. Set ground rules for your visitors and children on your plot. For other ploholders, time spent on their plot may be their only chance to have a quiet time themselves. Show your visitors your boundaries and explain that other plots are strictly off limits. Some sites may have community areas set aside for barbecues; treat the area and equipment with respect and leave it as you would wish to find it. Be sensitive to other people's cultural practices and space.

Sheds and greenhouses

These will provide you with shelter and storage. Some providers do not allow sheds or greenhouses because of the visual impact. Many have rules regarding the size, shape, colour and location on your plot. You may need to apply to the provider to install any shed, greenhouse or structure; details should be in the rules.

Ponds

Ponds can be very attractive and provide a habitat for wildlife, but they can also present a danger to very young children. The information pack, Health and Safety on Allotments: A Management Guide published by ARI, has a detailed section about ponds on allotments.

Sales

You are not allowed to run your allotment plot as a business. Many ploholders donate surplus produce to charities providing meals for the homeless. You cannot sub-let your plot or sell it.

Water

Some providers do not allow hosepipes or sprinklers, other than to fill covered water containers. If hosepipes are allowed, you must comply with any imposed local restrictions, check your local rules.

Bonfires

Can be a nuisance to neighbours and fellow ploholders and most providers apply strict conditions. Most common is a ban on bonfires at certain times of the year (usually spring and summer) or limited permission during certain hours and weather conditions. Your provider's insurance or site association insurance may impose additional conditions on bonfires. The burning of painted timber, plastic and other non-vegetation material can cause atmospheric and soil pollution by heavy metals and other contaminants.

Composting and Waste Management

As a general rule of thumb on an allotment, it's good practice to take your waste home with you. Standard rubbish such as crisp packets, sandwich wrappings, etc, should be taken away and disposed of at home or in a public litter bin - after all, if you can carry it on to your allotment it shouldn't be a problem for you to carry it off! Other wastes can be composted or reused in order to become more self-sufficient and even save yourself a little money - for example, using old juice bottles cut in half as cloches or on the top of pea/bean canes or making your own nutrient-rich compost to save you having to buy any.

Items which you may wish to bring from home to make your allotment shed more homely such as kettles or chairs, will inevitably break or outlive their usefulness. In such cases you should again bear in mind that if you managed to bring it in, you should manage to take it away again and dispose of it responsibly. Such items can be taken to your nearest recycling centre and disposed of free of charge:

If on the other hand you find yourself with a large volume of waste such as old greenhouse glass or broken tools, it may be beneficial for you to stockpile these items until other allotment holders also have items for removal and then club together to split the cost of a Special Uplift from the Council's Neighbourhood Services. This service allows up to 6 bulky items to be lifted for a single fee (check website for details) or for larger-scale uplifts to be surveyed and priced accordingly. Contact Special Collections on 01382 436238 between 9.00 am and 4.30 pm, Monday to Friday to pay for this service by credit card (1.5% surcharge) or debit card (no charge). Payment can also be made by cash or cheque at Neighbourhood Services Offices, Dundee House, East or West District Housing Offices and Community Libraries across the city.

If you have taken over an allotment which has a large number of tools/pots etc, which you do not want to keep, why not see if any of your fellow ploholders would have a use for them or try one of the community Reuse organisations like Tayside Recyclers - Tel: 01382 228806. It may even be feasible for your allotment organisation, as a whole, to start their own Reuse point - perhaps in an empty shed or meeting hut - where unwanted, usable tools, pots, etc, could be freely exchanged.

Some allotment sites have, in the past, had skips provided by the Council. These skips were originally provided for the collection of green waste only which was then taken to the Riverside Composting Site. Over the years however these skips have come to be used for all manner of general waste - broken furniture, litter, greenhouse glass, etc, resulting in the contents needing to be disposed of as the compostable fragment of it was so badly contaminated. Because of this, it is anticipated that any skips which remain at allotment sites will in future be removed and it will be the responsibility of each allotment holder to responsibly and legally dispose of their own rubbish. All plot holders are also encouraged to have their own individual or communal composting facilities to deal with green waste. A simple guide to this - and to the different types of composting - can be found in Appendix 2.



Appendix 1

Dundee Allotments

	Organisation and Management of Allotments	Total Number of Plots	
	Association Managed Allotments		
1.	West Law	87	Association Managed Allotments maintain their own waiting list and vacancy list.
2.	Kinnaird	104	
3.	Stirling Park	49	
4.	Murrayfield	40	
5.	Old Craigie Road	79	
6.	City Road	63	
7.	South Road	20	
	Private Allotments		
8.	Clepington Working Mens	82	Private Allotments maintain their own waiting list and vacancy list.
9.	Gardner Street	31	
10.	Magdalen Green	13	
	Dundee City Council Managed Allotments		
11.	Macaulay Street	15	The current waiting list as at 18 March 2016 is 73 people.
12.	Ancrum Road	26	
13.	Arklay Terrace	14	
14.	Magdalen Green	22	
	Total	645	

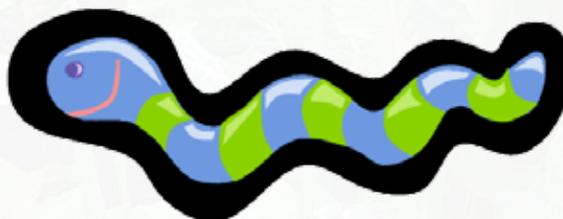
Appendix 2

Composting Guide for Allotment Holders

What is composting and how does it work?

Composting is the natural degradation of animal and plant matter into a nutrient-rich, dark, soil-like material. Any organic products - i.e. anything that was once part of a living organism - will slowly rot if the conditions are right, but the process can be accelerated and controlled by composting - that is, creating and maintaining the ideal conditions (oxygen, food, water and temperature) for the variety of tiny organisms required to munch on the organic matter and rapidly turn it into gardeners gold.

Naturally-occurring microbes present within the organic material become active under the correct temperature conditions and begin to break down the material around them. As they digest it, they generate heat, carbon dioxide and water vapour - and the more heat they generate, the faster the degradation process is. The end product is a fibre-rich hummus full of nutrients essential for healthy plant growth.



Why compost?

Composting is a sustainable method of green waste management for gardeners and allotment holders and provides a natural fertiliser for plants. The addition of compost to soils increases the nutrient value, provides a more beneficial growing medium and results in stronger, healthier plants, as well as improving the condition and drainage of soils, enlivening it and making it easier to work with.

Managing your allotment is just as much about developing sustainable practices as it is growing healthy plants so it's good to start composting in a way of both reducing the waste you produce and creating a sustainably-sourced, peat-free soil conditioner.



How to begin...

Composting is very simple and requires no specialist equipment or expertise. If you choose to, you can purchase one of the many different types of compost bins or containers, but composting works equally well in an open heap on the ground. Before any decisions are made regarding bins vs. heaps, you should first consider the amount and type of waste you'll be producing - if you have a large plot where you anticipate the production of high volumes of green waste on a regular basis you may need a large space for an open heap or large container, or if you have a particularly weedy plot you will require a compost heap hot enough to kill off weed seeds.

Regardless of how you choose to make your compost, it's important to pick the best possible location for making it. Ideally it should be sited on free-draining soil to allow easy movement of the organisms who will digest the waste - although you can place bins or heaps directly onto concrete as long as you add plenty of light sprinklings of healthy soil to introduce these micro-organisms into the mix. Don't choose a waterlogged site as this will impede the flow of air to the heap which will slow down the composting process. Lastly, it's important to try to choose a site which will get plenty of sunlight as the warmth will help the process along.

Cool or Hot Composting?

Cool composting simply refers to the composting process using a small open heap or average-size plastic compost bin which, due to their small capacity, do not hold heat well, especially as material is added gradually. Hot composting on the other hand involves great quantities of material added either to a very large heap or a very well insulated container which retains heat and thus achieves the high temperatures required to kill weed seeds and pathogens.

Typical cool composting utilises the standard "**Dalek**"- type plastic compost bin or a simple open heap in the corner of the plot or garden, while the hot composting method requires a heap of at least 1 metre square or an insulated bin/box of equal size - commonly used here is the "**New Zealand Box**" type of compost bin.



Examples of hot composting

and cold composting

Whichever type of composting you choose, ensure that you can get easy access to your heap/bin to add new material and turn it regularly - this is really important as it's the distribution of heat and aeration created by the turning process which ensures rapid, even degradation of the waste - so you get better compost, faster.

Hot or cold aren't the only options however, a whole range of technologies are available for those wishing for something a little bit different....

Green Johanna

These are similar in appearance and operation to conventional home compost bins but are designed to allow you to compost raw meat and fish, cooked food as well as garden waste and paper and cardboard.



Green Cone

The Green Cone is a food waste digester which has its base buried in the soil and this is where all the work takes place to 'digest' the food waste using heat and harmless bacteria, breaking it down to its natural components of carbon and water. It's a natural process that relies on the heat from the sun, so the Green Cone needs to be placed in a sunny spot in your garden.

There are also kitchen-based composting devices for food waste only - so not ideal for the allotment, but they do provide very useful plant feed and can be used on a communal allotment for lunch leftovers.



Bokashi

These compact, lidded, containers are designed to remain indoors and can take all types of food waste (no garden waste). A sprinkling of fortified bran is required each time food is added to the unit to speed up the composting process. The resultant "juice" created makes ideal plant food.



Wormeries

Get worms to do all the hard work for you! This method of composting allows you to dispose of raw and cooked vegetable kitchen waste, tea and coffee grounds, egg shells, paper and cardboard, but not meat or fish.

Wormeries can be kept indoors in an area with a fairly constant temperature, for example in a utility room, porch or garage.

Dundee City Council has joined a national framework which supplies discount compost bins and water butts to gardeners in the local area. For more details please go to: <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/environment/homecomposting/>



How to make good compost

First and foremost it's important to get the correct mix - ensuring you get a good mix of both the "green" and "brown" materials detailed opposite will ensure a great end product. If mixed correctly, compost shouldn't need any accelerators, but if you think that the process is slowing down or perhaps the mix is not quite as it should be, it won't hurt to add some natural accelerators such as seaweed, urine or even a few handfuls of soil.

Start with a layer of brown material to provide structure to the mix and gradually add your chosen materials - ensuring that you mix these in. If you add too much "green" material the mix is likely to become too wet so will stagnate and smell, while too much "brown" material will leave the mixture too dry to do anything. Air spaces are important too so make sure the structural brown material is well mixed in to provide plenty of air pockets, but that the green material is also evenly distributed to leave everything damp. If you notice that the compost seems a little dry, try adding some water or even some leftover fruit juice (not fizzy juice) to get things going again. Assuming you don't let the mixture get too wet or too dry you shouldn't have any problems and with regular turning and mixing should have good quality compost in around 9-12 months.

To avoid any of the common pitfalls it's a good idea to chop or shred the waste as small as possible to enable a faster breakdown within the bin and to avoid dumping large quantities of wet, "green" material inside - especially grass - as this can restrict the amount of circulating air and slow (or even halt) the whole process. If the bin or heap seems smelly and slimy then it's likely to be too wet - add some fibrous "brown" material and mix it in well to give the compost structure and to soak up some of the excess liquid.

Fruit flies are common around compost heaps and bins and shouldn't be a cause for concern, but they can be controlled by leaving the lid off or partially off for a while to encourage predatory beetles which will eat the flies. In the winter, things will slow drastically if the heap gets too cold so its a good idea to insulate the bin with a piece of old carpet or sturdy cardboard to help it retain heat.

Choosing the right ingredients

GREEN

Grass cuttings (small amounts)
Vegetables and peelings
Young weeds and fresh plants
Poultry manures
Tea leaves and coffee grounds
Fruit and peelings (only limited amounts of citrus fruit peelings should be used)
Animal manure from herbivores (sheep, cattle, horses, rabbits)

BROWN

Autumn leaves
Paper/cardboard (torn/shredded)
Straw or hay
Old dead plants
Hedge clippings (shredded or small twigs only)
Egg shells
Wood ash
Wood chippings/sawdust

DO NOT ADD TO YOUR COMPOST

Meat, chicken and fish
Plate scrapings and leftovers
Manure from meat eating animals (e.g. dogs, cats)
Coal and peat ashes
Glossy paper
Large woody material
Chemically treated garden waste
Diseased plants
Animal carcasses
Disposable nappies
Pernicious weeds - see advice below

REMEMBER - good compost relies on the correct mix of "green" (nitrogen-rich) and "brown" (carbon-rich) material. Ensure you start with a layer of "brown" material and aim for a 50/50 split of each. If the correct mix is achieved the compost process will take care of itself and the only difficulty you'll face is the wait to get your hands on some premium soil fertiliser!

Using your compost

Once ready, your home-made compost can be used in a variety of ways - you can work it into the soil to improve drainage and enrich it, you could spread it as mulch or you could mix it (to your own preferred recipe) with sharp sand, soil or leafmould to create the perfect potting combination.



Dealing with weeds

Unless you're using the "hot" composting method, you should take care to exclude pernicious weeds from your compost bin or heap. Certain pernicious weeds - such as the notorious Giant Hogweed - are extremely difficult to rid yourself of and so should NEVER be composted but should be disposed of in the appropriate method - it's worth contacting your local branch of SEPA to find out if special disposal rules apply to any pernicious weeds you may have on your plot.

For the more common weeds we find in gardens and allotments, it's worth noting that these have valuable nutrients which can be very beneficial in the compost heap, but care needs to be taken that they don't go to seed. To prevent this, you could try "drowning" them in a barrel or bucket of water for a few weeks - the water can then be used on plants and the weed remains safely composted.





...you can do so much more **ONLINE** at...
dundeecity.gov.uk

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