

Last child in the woods

richard louv

Reconnecting with Nature: A Modern-Day Guide Inspired by "Last Child in the Woods"

Problem: Our children are increasingly disconnected from nature. They spend more time indoors, glued to screens, and less time exploring the natural world. This disconnect has profound implications for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, impacting everything from attention spans to overall health. Research consistently links nature exposure with improved cognitive function, reduced stress, and enhanced creativity. **Solution:** Embark on a nature-rich journey, inspired by Richard Louv's seminal work, "Last Child in the Woods," and grounded in modern understanding of the human-nature connection. **** Richard Louv's "Last Child in the Woods" sparked a vital conversation about the detrimental effects of childhood disconnection from nature. Published over a decade ago, its message remains profoundly relevant in today's hyper-connected world. This post explores the core concepts of Louv's work, blending his insights with current research, industry perspectives, and actionable strategies for**

reconnecting your children (and yourself) with the natural world. We'll address the problem of nature deficit disorder and provide practical solutions tailored for modern families. The Nature Deficit Disorder

Conundrum: Louv coined the term "nature-deficit disorder" to describe the growing disconnect between children and the natural world. He argued that this lack of exposure can lead to a host of problems, including: • Attention Deficit:

Children's ability to focus and concentrate can suffer without consistent interaction with nature. Scientific studies now highlight the calming effect of nature on the brain, improving attention and cognitive function. •

Physical Health Issues: **Limited exposure to sunlight, fresh air, and physical activity in natural settings contribute to a decline in physical well-being, increasing the risk of obesity and related health concerns. •**

Mental Health Challenges: **Nature offers a powerful antidote to stress and anxiety. Outdoor experiences encourage mindfulness, reduce cortisol levels, and foster a sense of calm and well-being. •**

Emotional Development Concerns: **Nature provides opportunities for self-discovery, risk assessment, and developing a sense of responsibility and respect for the environment.**

Solutions: Reconnecting with Nature in the 21st Century

Louv's core message emphasizes the importance of "playing outside." However, in the 21st century, we need to adapt this advice to our modern environment. Here are some practical strategies: • Create Intentional Nature Experiences: *Plan outings to parks, forests, beaches, or even local urban green spaces. Encourage exploration, observation, and participation in nature-related activities.* • Embrace "Unstructured Play":

Let children's imaginations run wild in natural settings. Avoid structured activities and allow for spontaneous exploration and discovery. Encourage children to build forts, climb trees, collect rocks, or simply wander. •

Integrate Nature into Daily Routines: **Consider incorporating nature into daily routines, such as walking to school, having outdoor meals, or utilizing neighborhood parks for recreation.**

• **Cultivate a Sense of Wonder: Encourage your children to ask questions, discover connections, and appreciate the beauty and diversity of the natural world. Sharing your own appreciation for nature will inspire them. • Use Technology to**

Enhance, Not Replace, Nature Experiences: Educational apps, nature documentaries, and online resources can complement, not replace, actual time spent in nature.

Utilize these tools to deepen understanding and

generate excitement for future experiences. • Involve the

Community: Connect with local nature centers, parks, and conservation groups. Volunteering together can foster a sense of community and environmental stewardship. • Leading by

Example: Children learn by observing. Model healthy habits, such as spending time in nature, and discussing your own experiences and appreciation for the natural world. • Adapt to

Your Local Environment: Recognize that access to nature varies based on geographical location. Locate accessible green spaces, consider local parks, or utilize community gardens.

Expert Insights and Research: Numerous studies support the link between nature exposure and positive child development. For example, research published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* highlights the restorative effects of nature on cognitive function.

Experts in child psychology often emphasize the

importance of unstructured play and the development of creativity and problem-solving skills that occur in natural settings.

Beyond the Child: The Importance of Nature for Adults and Families *This isn't just about children; nature benefits adults too. Family outings to natural environments can strengthen bonds and promote communication. Shared experiences in nature provide opportunities for connection and appreciation. This approach fosters a sense of community and respect for the environment, benefiting everyone.* Conclusion: *Reconnecting with nature is essential for our children's well-being and for our planet's future. By adapting the wisdom of "Last Child in the Woods" to modern life, we can create intentional opportunities for nature exploration and foster a deeper appreciation for the natural world. The benefits extend far beyond just an appreciation for the outdoors. Nature offers a pathway to healthier bodies, minds, and communities.* FAQs: 1. Q: How can I fit nature into a busy schedule? **A: Start small. Even 15-20 minutes of daily time in a park, a nature walk, or a quiet moment in your backyard can make a difference. Look for opportunities to incorporate nature into existing routines.** 2. Q: What if my child isn't interested in nature? *A: Find activities that spark their interest. Visit a farm, a zoo with a nature focus, or explore nature-themed crafts. The key is to expose them to diverse possibilities.* 3. Q: How can I engage my children in nature safely? *A: Teach them about safety in nature, such as recognizing potential dangers, following instructions, and being aware of their surroundings.* 4. Q: How can I create a family-focused nature-immersive experience? **A: Plan family activities. Look for outdoor events, organize nature-themed scavenger**

hunts, or create nature journals together. 5. Q: What resources are available to support us? A: Numerous nature centers, parks, and conservation groups offer programs and resources. Explore your local community for these valuable opportunities. By consciously incorporating nature into our lives, we can foster a profound and lasting connection for generations to come, ensuring a future where both humans and the environment thrive.

Remember those carefree days of your childhood? The ones filled with scraped knees, muddy puddles, and the sheer joy of exploring the world outside your front door? For many of us, those memories are a cherished part of our upbringing. But for a growing number of children today, this connection to nature is becoming increasingly scarce. This growing disconnect is precisely what author and journalist Richard Louv so eloquently addresses in his seminal work, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*.

Louv's book, first published in 2005, struck a chord with parents, educators, and anyone concerned about the well-being of the next generation. It introduced the concept of "nature-deficit disorder," a term that, while not a formal medical diagnosis, resonated deeply because it articulated a widespread and growing problem. It's a phenomenon where children spend less time outdoors, leading to a range of physical, psychological, and cognitive consequences. This article dives deep into Richard Louv's impactful work, exploring its key themes, the research that underpins it, and the ongoing legacy of his message.

The Core Argument: Nature-Deficit Disorder

At the heart of Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* lies the compelling idea of nature-deficit disorder. Louv doesn't present this as a clinical illness but rather as a descriptive term for the negative consequences of the increasingly sedentary and indoor lives children lead. He argues that direct, unstructured experiences in nature are essential for healthy child development. When these experiences are absent, a deficit arises, manifesting in various ways.

What is Nature-Deficit Disorder?

Nature-deficit disorder, as described by Louv, isn't about a specific disease. Instead, it's a way to understand the symptoms that arise from a lack of exposure to the natural world. These symptoms can include:

1. Increased rates of childhood obesity and related health issues.
2. Higher instances of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other behavioral problems.
3. Diminished use of the senses, leading to a less developed understanding of the physical world.
4. A decline in creativity and imagination.
5. Less connection to the environment, potentially leading to a future of environmental apathy.
6. Reduced physical fitness and motor skills development.

Louv meticulously gathers evidence from various fields,

including psychology, medicine, and education, to support his claims. He highlights how natural environments, with their inherent complexities and sensory stimulation, provide a richer learning and developmental landscape than indoor, technology-driven settings. The unstructured play that nature affords is crucial for fostering problem-solving skills, resilience, and a sense of wonder.

The Roots of the Disconnect: Why Are Kids Indoors?

One of the most important aspects of *Last Child in the Woods* is Louv's exploration of the societal shifts that have led to this nature deficit. He identifies a confluence of factors contributing to children spending less time outdoors:

Technological Advancements and Screen Time

The rise of digital entertainment, video games, and social media has undoubtedly played a significant role. These platforms offer constant stimulation and instant gratification, often proving more alluring to children than the slower, more nuanced engagement required by the natural world. The allure of screens often keeps children indoors, limiting opportunities for outdoor exploration.

Parental Fears and Perceived Dangers

Louv also delves into the increasing anxieties of parents. Concerns about safety, stranger danger, and the legal liabilities associated with unsupervised outdoor play have led many parents to restrict their children's freedom to roam. This hyper-vigilance, while often well-intentioned, can inadvertently create an environment where outdoor exploration becomes a rare occurrence. The decline in outdoor play is a growing concern for child development specialists.

Urbanization and Loss of Natural Spaces

As societies become more urbanized, the access to natural spaces dwindles. Parks can be few and far between, and many suburban neighborhoods are designed with less emphasis on natural beauty and more on manicured lawns and sterile environments. The erosion of green spaces directly impacts a child's ability to connect with nature. The impact of reduced green space on childhood is profound.

Academic Pressures and Overscheduling

Children today are often faced with demanding academic schedules and a multitude of extracurricular activities. This over-scheduling leaves little room for spontaneous, unstructured outdoor play, which is vital for developing a

child's imagination and problem-solving abilities. The pressure to excel in academics can overshadow the importance of outdoor learning experiences.

The Benefits of Nature for Children

Richard Louv's work is not just about identifying a problem; it's a passionate advocacy for the profound benefits that nature offers to children. He compiles a wealth of evidence demonstrating how time spent outdoors can positively impact a child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Physical Health Advantages

Perhaps the most evident benefit is the improvement in physical health. Outdoor play encourages movement, contributing to stronger muscles and bones, better cardiovascular health, and a reduced risk of childhood obesity. Children who spend time outdoors are also more likely to be physically fit.

Cognitive and Academic Improvements

Contrary to the idea that outdoor play detracts from academics, research suggests the opposite. Studies cited by Louv show that exposure to nature can improve focus, concentration, and problem-solving skills. The sensory richness of natural environments can stimulate brain development and enhance cognitive function.

Emotional and Mental Well-being

Nature has a remarkable calming effect. Spending time outdoors can reduce stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression in children. It fosters a sense of awe and wonder, promotes emotional regulation, and builds resilience. The mental health benefits of connecting with nature are undeniable.

Social Development and Environmental Stewardship

Unstructured outdoor play often involves collaboration, negotiation, and conflict resolution as children interact with peers in shared natural spaces. Furthermore, a deep connection with nature cultivated in childhood often leads to a lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship. Children who play outdoors develop a greater appreciation for the natural world.

Solutions and the Path Forward: Reconnecting Kids with Nature

Louv's book is ultimately a call to action. He doesn't just lament the current situation but offers practical solutions for parents, educators, and communities to help reverse the trend of nature-deficit disorder. His message empowers us to make conscious choices to reintroduce children to the natural world.

Empowering Parents and Caregivers

Louv encourages parents to be more intentional about creating opportunities for their children to spend time outdoors. This can be as simple as planning family hikes, visiting local parks, or even just allowing children more freedom to explore their own backyards. He advocates for a more relaxed approach to supervision when appropriate, fostering independence and self-reliance.

Integrating Nature into Education

Educators play a crucial role. Louv highlights the growing movement of forest schools and nature-based learning programs. Even without these formal structures, teachers can incorporate outdoor learning experiences into their curriculum, whether it's a nature walk to observe plants or a science lesson conducted in a local park. The importance of outdoor education is increasingly recognized.

Community Initiatives and Urban Planning

Communities can foster a connection to nature through various initiatives. This includes developing and maintaining accessible green spaces, creating nature-based play areas, and organizing community events that encourage outdoor engagement. Urban planners can prioritize the integration of natural elements into city design, ensuring that children have opportunities to interact with nature.

Rethinking Our Relationship with Technology

While technology is a reality of modern life, Louv suggests finding a balance. Encouraging "digital detox" periods and prioritizing outdoor activities can help mitigate the negative effects of excessive screen time. He advocates for conscious choices in how we integrate technology into our lives and our children's lives.

The Enduring Legacy of "Last Child in the Woods"

More than a decade after its initial publication, Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* continues to be a vital and relevant read. The concepts he introduced have permeated discussions about child development, public health, and environmentalism. The term "nature-deficit disorder" has become a widely recognized phrase, spurring research and advocacy efforts worldwide. The book has inspired countless individuals and organizations to champion the cause of reconnecting children with the natural world, fostering a generation that is healthier, happier, and more environmentally conscious.

Louv's work serves as a powerful reminder that the simple act of stepping outside, breathing in the fresh air, and engaging with the wonders of nature can have a profound and lasting impact on a child's life. It's a call to reclaim the wildness within our children and, in doing so, to nurture a more vibrant

and sustainable future for all. The conversation initiated by Richard Louv about nature and children is more important than ever.

The Last Child in the Woods: A Profound Exploration of Nature's Disappearing Presence

Richard Louv's seminal work, *Last Child in the Woods*, stands as a powerful and timely manifesto that bridges environmental awareness with deep human connection to nature. Published in 2005, the book emerged from Louv's observations that a growing generation was growing detached from the natural world—a detachment with far-reaching consequences not only for the environment but for human well-being itself. Through compelling storytelling, scientific insight, and personal reflection, Louv challenges readers to reconsider the vital role nature plays in shaping childhood development, mental health, and our collective future.

Roots of a Nature-Deficit Disorder

At the heart of *Last Child in the Woods* lies Louv's concept of "nature-deficit disorder"—a term that captures the observable decline in children's direct engagement with the outdoors. Louv argues that as lifestyles grow increasingly screen-dominated and urbanized, children lose essential experiences: climbing trees, exploring forests, observing wildlife, and

simply wandering freely in natural spaces. This absence is not trivial; it undermines curiosity, diminishes attention spans, and weakens emotional resilience. The book draws on research from psychology, medicine, and education to illustrate how prolonged exposure to nature fosters creativity, reduces stress, and strengthens immune function. For many children, the woods become more than a playground—they serve as classrooms, sanctuaries, and arenas for self-discovery.

Interwoven Insights from Science and Storytelling

Louv skillfully blends rigorous science with intimate narratives to make his case both credible and emotionally resonant. He cites studies showing that children who spend regular time in nature exhibit improved academic performance, especially in areas requiring focus and problem-solving. Biologists and ecologists contribute their understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem health, reinforcing the idea that human well-being is deeply intertwined with environmental health. Yet Louv's strength lies in his ability to speak directly to parents, educators, and policymakers—framing nature not as a luxury, but as a necessity. His vivid descriptions of forest ecosystems, seasonal rhythms, and animal behaviors invite readers to re-engage their own senses and memories of growing up outdoors, fostering a sense of urgency and personal responsibility.

Practical Applications and Lasting Benefits

Last Child in the Woods goes beyond diagnosis to offer actionable solutions. Louv champions initiatives such as expanded school outdoor learning, community nature centers, and policies supporting access to green spaces. He highlights innovative programs where children reconnect with nature through gardening, citizen science projects, and wilderness expeditions. For families, the book encourages intentional screen-time limits and daily doses of unstructured outdoor play. In schools, integrating nature-based curricula has been shown to boost student engagement and reduce behavioral issues. The benefits extend beyond childhood: early, meaningful connections with nature cultivate lifelong environmental stewardship, helping nurture a generation committed to sustainability and conservation. Looking ahead, the vision presented in Louv's work remains profoundly relevant. As urbanization accelerates and digital immersion deepens, the call to restore nature's presence in daily life grows ever more critical. Last Child in the Woods continues to inspire a global movement that sees reconnecting with forests, rivers, and wild spaces not as nostalgia, but as essential preparation for a resilient, balanced future. In a world where children's time outdoors shrinks, Louv's voice reminds us that every step outside is a step toward healing—for the planet and for ourselves.

The Last Child in the Woods: Richard Louv's Enduring Call for Nature Connection

In an era dominated by glowing screens and structured schedules, the wild spaces of our childhoods are shrinking. For many, the scent of damp earth, the thrill of climbing a tree, or the quiet observation of an insect are becoming distant memories. This growing disconnect between children and the natural world is the central concern of Richard Louv's seminal work, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Louv, an award-winning journalist and author, has become a leading voice in advocating for the profound and often overlooked benefits of nature exposure for children's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Published in 2005, *Last Child in the Woods* was a groundbreaking exploration that brought the concept of "nature-deficit disorder" into mainstream discourse. It wasn't a medical diagnosis in the traditional sense, but rather a compelling framework for understanding the potential negative consequences of insufficient time spent in nature. Louv meticulously gathered scientific research, anecdotal

evidence, and personal stories to paint a vivid picture of a generation increasingly isolated from the natural environment.

Understanding Nature-Deficit Disorder

Richard Louv's central thesis revolves around the idea that a lack of direct, unstructured exposure to nature is detrimental to children's development. He argues that this deficiency, which he termed nature-deficit disorder, can manifest in a range of issues:

Physical and Mental Health Impacts

Louv presents a compelling case for how spending time outdoors can combat rising rates of childhood obesity, ADHD, and other attention-related issues. Studies cited in his book suggest that exposure to green spaces can improve concentration, reduce stress, and foster greater physical activity. He highlights the calming effect of nature, contrasting it with the overstimulating environments often found indoors. The sensory richness of the natural world – the feel of bark, the sound of birdsong, the smell of pine – offers a balanced and restorative experience that is increasingly absent in modern childhoods. This is crucial for developing a healthy mind-body connection.

Cognitive and Creative Development

Beyond physical health, Louv emphasizes nature's role in nurturing cognitive and creative abilities. Unstructured play in natural settings encourages problem-solving, critical thinking, and imaginative exploration. When children are left to their own devices in the woods, they invent games, build forts, and engage with their surroundings in ways that foster innovation and resilience. This contrasts sharply with the often-prescribed and screen-based activities that can limit spontaneous discovery. The ability to observe, question, and experiment with the natural world lays a foundation for lifelong learning and intellectual curiosity.

Emotional and Social Well-being

Louv also delves into the emotional and social benefits of nature engagement. He posits that time in nature can cultivate empathy, compassion, and a deeper sense of connection to the world. Witnessing the cycles of life and death, the interdependence of ecosystems, and the sheer beauty of the natural world can foster a sense of awe and wonder. Furthermore, shared experiences in nature can strengthen family bonds and create opportunities for collaboration and social interaction among children. The development of a personal connection to the environment is also seen as a precursor to environmental stewardship in adulthood.

The Shifting Landscape of Childhood

In *Last Child in the Woods*, Louv meticulously documents the societal shifts that have contributed to the growing disconnect from nature. He identifies several key factors:

Increased Urbanization and Suburban Sprawl

As populations become more concentrated in urban and suburban areas, access to wild and natural spaces diminishes. Yards shrink, parks become more manicured, and the opportunities for unsupervised exploration dwindle. This physical proximity to nature is often a prerequisite for regular engagement.

Parental Fears and Over-Supervision

Louv points to a growing trend of parental anxiety, often fueled by media portrayals of perceived dangers. This can lead to increased supervision and a reluctance to allow children the freedom to explore independently. While safety is paramount, excessive fear can inadvertently limit children's opportunities for growth and self-reliance. The desire to protect can, paradoxically, create a more fragile generation.

The Rise of Digital Entertainment

The proliferation of screens – televisions, computers, smartphones, and video games – offers an ever-present and often more immediately gratifying alternative to outdoor play. Louv argues that these digital experiences, while offering entertainment, can displace valuable time that could be spent connecting with the real, tangible world. The allure of virtual worlds can overshadow the wonders of the natural one.

Changes in Education and School Curricula

Budget cuts and a focus on standardized testing have sometimes led to a reduction in outdoor education programs and opportunities for nature-based learning within schools. This can further limit children's exposure to the natural world, especially for those who may not have access to it outside of school hours.

Louv's Vision for Reconnecting Children with Nature

Richard Louv doesn't just diagnose the problem; he offers a hopeful and actionable vision for reconnecting children with the natural world. His work has inspired a global movement of parents, educators, and policymakers dedicated to fostering this connection.

The "Leave No Child Indoors" Movement

Louv is a co-founder of the Children & Nature Network, an organization dedicated to inspiring people and uniting the diverse “green” social change networks and movements to increase access to nature for all children. The organization champions initiatives that bring children back outdoors, encouraging a holistic approach to environmental education and engagement. This grassroots movement seeks to normalize outdoor experiences for children.

Practical Strategies for Families and Communities

Louv's book is replete with practical suggestions for families looking to incorporate more nature into their lives. These include:

1. **Family Hikes and Nature Walks:** Even short, regular excursions can make a difference.
2. **Creating Natural Play Spaces:** Encouraging natural elements in backyards and schoolyards.
3. **Visiting Local Parks and Nature Reserves:** Making use of accessible green spaces.
4. **Encouraging Unstructured Outdoor Play:** Allowing children freedom to explore and imagine.
5. **Gardening Together:** Engaging children in the process of growing plants and food.

He also advocates for systemic changes, urging schools to

integrate nature-based learning, urban planners to prioritize green spaces, and communities to create environments that foster outdoor activity. This involves a multi-pronged approach, recognizing that individual efforts are amplified by broader societal support.

The Importance of "Wildness"

A key aspect of Louv's message is the value of "wildness" – the untamed, unpredictable aspects of nature. He argues that children need opportunities to encounter environments that are not overly managed or controlled, allowing them to develop a sense of adventure and self-reliance. This doesn't mean encouraging dangerous behavior, but rather allowing for experiences that foster adaptability and risk assessment.

The Lasting Impact of "Last Child in the Woods"

Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* has had a profound and lasting impact on how we perceive the relationship between children and nature. It has spurred countless research studies, informed policy decisions, and inspired a generation of educators and parents to prioritize outdoor experiences. The book's enduring relevance lies in its prescient warning and its hopeful call to action. In a world that often pulls us indoors, Louv reminds us of the essential, innate human need for connection with the natural world, a connection that is vital for the health and well-being of our children and the planet.

The concept of nature-deficit disorder, while not a formal medical diagnosis, serves as a powerful metaphor and a vital call to awareness. It highlights a growing problem that requires collective action. By understanding the detrimental effects of this deficit and embracing Louv's strategies for reconnection, we can ensure that future generations are not the "last children in the woods," but rather a generation that thrives in harmony with the natural world.

The ongoing work of Richard Louv and the organizations he inspires continues to champion this crucial cause. The conversation he started in 2005 is more relevant today than ever, as we face the dual challenges of a digital-saturated society and an environmental crisis. Reconnecting children with nature is not just about their personal development; it is about cultivating a generation that understands, values, and ultimately protects the planet we all call home.

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Questions & Answers About last child in the woods richard louv

No	Question	Answer
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1	What's the main idea behind Richard Louv's 'Last Child in the Woods' and why is it still so relevant?	The core idea of 'Last Child in the Woods' is 'nature-deficit disorder,' the hypothesis that children are spending less time outdoors and that this lack of nature is detrimental to their physical, mental, and cognitive development. It remains relevant because concerns about childhood obesity, ADHD, and screen time continue to grow, prompting a renewed interest in the benefits of nature for well-being.
2	How does Louv define 'nature-deficit disorder' and what are its supposed symptoms?	Louv describes 'nature-deficit disorder' not as a medical diagnosis, but as a set of problems arising from a disconnect between children and the natural world. Symptoms he associates with it include decreased attention spans, obesity, higher rates of physical and mental illnesses, and a diminished sense of wonder and environmental stewardship.
3	What evidence or arguments does Richard Louv present to support the existence of nature-deficit disorder?	Louv draws on a wide range of research, including studies on the therapeutic effects of nature on children with ADHD, the cognitive benefits of unstructured outdoor play, and the psychological impact of green spaces. He also incorporates anecdotal evidence from parents, educators, and children themselves, illustrating firsthand experiences of the disconnect from nature.

4	What are some practical solutions or recommendations Richard Louv offers for parents and educators to combat nature-deficit disorder?	Louv advocates for 'getting outside' in any way possible, encouraging activities like backyard exploration, park visits, and nature walks. He also suggests incorporating nature into school curricula, creating nature-based play spaces, and reducing screen time to allow for more imaginative and experiential learning in outdoor environments.
5	Beyond 'nature-deficit disorder,' what other significant impacts of spending time in nature does Louv highlight for children's development?	Louv emphasizes how nature fosters creativity, problem-solving skills, risk assessment, sensory development, and a sense of connection to the environment. He argues that these experiences build resilience, empathy, and a lifelong appreciation for the natural world, which are crucial for both individual well-being and responsible environmental citizenship.

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