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susannye@tds.net
603/526 7319

Are you planning one of those big romantic gestures for Valentine's Day?

They seem to be quite the rage on YouTube and the morning news programs. You know what I'm talking about. Love declared and marriage proposed with brass bands, enough dancers to rival a Super Bowl half-time show, sky-writing, balloons and really big signs. Then there are the more intimate gestures. The kind that don't make the morning news. Quiet but still grand, a rose petal path leads to a flower-filled, candle-lit bedroom. Romantic music floats in the background, champagne chills in an elegant ice bucket and plump strawberries fill a silver bowl. Or maybe that's just in the movies?!? I hope not.

But what if you are too shy to declare your love before a cast of thousands or worried that all those candles will set the house on fire. Or at the very least trigger the smoke alarm and ruin the mood. Not to worry. Instead of big, lavish declarations of devotion, think about practicing small romantic gestures on February 14th and every day of the year. Here are a few suggestions:

Hug and hold hands. If asked to name a romantic couple, I would wager that few people would mention their grandparents. But well into their seventies and eighties, my mother's parents were like young lovebirds. When I picture them together my grandfather's arm is either gently wrapped around my grandmother's shoulders or waist or they're holding hands. Activities which encourage handholding or snuggling are always a good bet for kindling romance. Try a walk on a windswept beach, ice skating or cuddling in front of the fire.



Give flowers. When I lived in Switzerland I was on airplanes almost every week. From time to time my boyfriend surprised me at the airport. I was delighted to find him waiting in the arrivals hall with a single red rose. He did it once or twice a month and it was always a lovely surprise.

Keep those cards and letters coming. Charlie Brown agonized over sending a Valentine to the little red-haired girl. Don't agonize, don't hesitate; send a card. It can be sweet, funny or sentimental; even sappy. On Valentine's or any day, tuck a card or

note in your sweetheart's briefcase or lunchbox. Heck, when life gets crazy busy, a sweet note on a Post-It will do.

Dance. It doesn't matter if you have two left feet. It's not a competition and there are no judges. Learn to tango or take ballroom dance classes. If it all sounds too complicated, or too public, just sway to your favorite music in your living room or under the stars. After all, dancing is just hugging with music.

Find the time. Is your life too busy to spend an evening alone together? Try lunch in a special restaurant or enjoy a picnic in the park, by the lake or in a sunny meadow. Any time of year is a great time for a picnic, even winter. Hike or cross country ski to a beautiful, sunny spot. Share a loaf of crusty bread, a little cheese and fruit and a bottle of wine in the sunshine. A decadent chocolate truffle is the perfect, crowning touch for your romantic picnic. Not the outdoorsy type, bring it all inside and enjoy your feast in front of a roaring fire.

Have a wonderful celebration with your Valentine and bon appétit!

Susan

White Chocolate Mousse with Raspberry Coulis & Fresh Raspberries

A sweet finish to your romantic dinner for two! Enjoy!

Serves 4-6



7-8 ounces good quality white chocolate, chopped
3 egg yolks
1-2 tablespoons honey
Grated zest and juice of 1 orange
Pinch salt
Pinch nutmeg
Pinch cloves
2 tablespoons Grand Marnier
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
4 ounces mascarpone cheese
1 cup very cold heavy cream
Raspberry Coulis (recipe follows)
Fresh raspberries for garnish

Prepare an ice bath in a large, shallow bowl and set aside.

Put the chocolate in a large, microwave safe bowl and cook on high in the microwave for 30 seconds. Continue to zap the chocolate at 10 second intervals until it starts to melt. Set aside.

Whisk the yolks, honey, orange juice, spices and salt together in a small, heavy saucepan until light and frothy. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the custard registers 170 degrees on a candy thermometer.

Remove the pan from the heat and pour the custard through a mesh sieve into the bowl with the warm chocolate. Let the custard sit for a few minutes to melt the chocolate and whisk until smooth. Add the Grand Marnier, vanilla and orange zest and whisk to combine.

Set the bowl of custard in the ice bath and stir frequently until completely cooled.

Beat the mascarpone in a large bowl with an electric mixer, slowly add the cream and continue beating until stiff peaks form.

Gently fold the whipped cream into the cooled custard, cover and chill for several hours.

To serve: drizzle Raspberry Coulis onto individual plates, add dollops of mousse and garnish with fresh raspberries.



*Another recipe from Susan Nye:
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Raspberry Coulis

Make about 1 cup

12 ounces fresh or frozen raspberries

Juice of 1/2 lemon

Juice of 1 orange

2 tablespoons sugar or to taste

1 tablespoon Grand Marnier

If using frozen raspberries, thaw the berries.

Put the citrus juices, sugar and Grand Marnier in a blender and process to combine. Let sit for several minutes until the sugar dissolves. Add the berries and process until smooth.

Strain the coulis through a fine-mesh sieve and discard the seeds. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.