



Seven ways to celebrate Valentine's Day as a family



Valentine's Day can be a time to celebrate love of all kinds. This year, instead of making romantic plans with your partner, why not include your kids and celebrate as a family? Here are some Valentine's Day activities you and the kids will love:

1. Profess your love. Each family

member takes a turn telling the others something they love about them, including themselves.

2. Eat a special breakfast. Serve heart-shaped pancakes or oatmeal with strawberries and chocolate chips.

3. Go on a family date night. Eat at

a local restaurant you haven't tried before and catch a movie after.

4. Take a walk down memory lane. Reminiscence and share stories while looking at old family photos. The kids will love looking at themselves and you in your younger days.

5. Bake cookies. Use a heart-shaped cookie cutter to make Valentine's Day cookies. Decorate them with pink icing.

6. Have a movie marathon. Make popcorn, buy candy and snuggle up together under your cosiest blankets.

7. Make cards. Gather red and pink paper, glitter, stickers and markers to make valentines to hand out to friends and family members.

8. Do a random act of kindness together. Visit a nursing home and hand out homemade Valentine's Day cards. Give a drawing of a flower to each of the elderly on your street. Bake cookies to deliver to the police station. Do something for those who may not have someone to share the day with. Valentine's Day is a great day to express love for fellow humans, even those you don't know.

Taking the time to celebrate Valentine's Day as a family will create memories your kids will have for a lifetime.

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How did chocolate become associated with Valentine's Day?



you ever wondered how this sweet treat came to be associated with the most romantic day of the year?

In fact, the connection between chocolate and love dates back to the Mayans, who first started brewing cacao beans sometime around 500 BC. Eventually, they came to ritually use this so-called "gift of the gods" in marriage ceremonies.

However, it would take more than 2,000 years for chocolate to make its way to Europe and another few hundred years after that for the treat to become a Valentine's Day staple. It was only in 1861 that an inspired candy-maker named Richard Cadbury thought to sell chocolates for Valentine's Day. He packaged them in heart-shaped boxes decorated with rosebuds and Cupids, which were already popular symbols of romance among the

Victorians. Thus, a new Valentine's Day tradition was born.

Today, heart-shaped boxes

of chocolates are ubiquitous around Valentine's Day, and in North America, more than 25

million kilograms of chocolate are bought to celebrate the occasion each year.

Did you know?
Cacao beans are full of phytonutrients, which act as antioxidants. They're also a rich source of iron, copper, magnesium, zinc and phosphorus. These attributes are believed to contribute to chocolate's health benefits, including its potential ability to

lower the risk of cardiovascular disease, reduce inflammation, improve cognitive function and boost your mood.

If you want to spoil someone special for Valentine's Day, it's almost impossible to go wrong with a box of chocolates. But have

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Spoil your sweetheart with a tailor-made Valentine's Day



This year, surprise your partner with a DIY Valentine's Day celebration. The effort you'll put into it definitely won't go unnoticed. Just keep in mind that achieving that "wow" factor takes time. Bottom line: don't start the night before. Good luck!

A ROMANTIC ATMOSPHERE

The success of your evening will largely depend on the atmosphere. Contact your florist to order a sizable amount of rose petals and fresh flowers, and use them to make a bouquet, a personalized card or a bundle of pot-pourri.

If you have kids, get them involved in the decoration stage with a fun art project. For inspiration and supplies, head to your neighbourhood craft store or hobby shop.

Build a playlist with your favourite love songs, making sure to include tracks that remind you of your first date, your travels, your wedding and so on. The right tunes are essential to achieving a romantic ambiance.

A HOMEMADE MEAL

Cook up a meal that's fit for royalty by calling on your local grocer, baker, butcher, fishmonger, cheese maker and chocolatier to gather the freshest, tastiest ingredients around.

A CUSTOM-MADE GIFT

Finally, give your better half a thoughtful gift you made yourself. If she's a tea connoisseur, personalize a mug for her to bring to work. If she's been talking about redecorating the living room for months, surprise her with a custom-built bookcase topped with family photos. Be creative!

FOUR THINGS TO AVOID COOKING ON VALENTINE'S DAY.

Have you offered to make somebody you love a romantic Valentine's Day dinner but aren't the best cook? While there are countless recipes out there for people who aren't adept in the kitchen, here are four meals you'll definitely want to avoid serving.

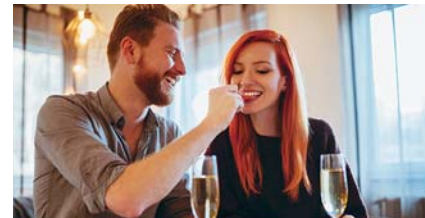
1. Anything too spicy: some people love spicy foods like curries, chilies and anything covered with hot sauce, but for the uninitiated, these foods can cause major stomach issues that could put an early end to your romantic evening.

2. Anything that requires a bib: lots of people love to crack into a lobster or crab, but eating these shellfish can be incredibly messy. If you're going to go the seafood route, serve the meat without the shells.

3. Anything too heavy: you might be tempted to serve a robust dish you know your sweetie will love like steak and potatoes. However, eating a heavy meal is more likely to put your love interest to sleep than it is to put him or her in the mood for romance.

4. Anything too complicated: while you might love the idea of making a cheese soufflé or French macaroons, the truth is that these dishes are extremely finicky, even for an experienced chef. It's best to leave these recipes for a night when there's less at stake.

You don't need to be fancy to impress your date. The important part is spending some time together, even if it means ordering a pizza after you've burned the chicken.



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