

Decadent chocolate makes the perfect Valentine’s gift

Valentine’s Day would not be the same without chocolate. Men and women who want to go the extra mile for their significant others on Valentine’s Day this year but still incorporate chocolate into the festivities can try their hand at concocting a homemade confection such as the following recipe for “Chocolate, Port and Pear Upside-Down Sponge” from Maxine Clark’s “Chocolate: Deliciously Indulgent Recipes for Chocolate Lovers” (Ryland, Peters & Small).

Chocolate, Port and Pear Upside-Down Sponge
Serves 6

Crème Anglaise, to serve (see below)
6 to 8 medium, underripe pears, peeled
1 cinnamon stick
6 Tablespoons sugar
2/3 cup Ruby Port
2 cups full-bodied red wine

Cake Batter
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
3 Tablespoons unsweetened cocoa
1 teaspoon baking powder
Pinch of salt
1/2 cup fine cornmeal
6 1/2 Tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
3 large eggs, separated
1 teaspoon pure vanilla essence
6 Tablespoons milk

1 9 x 2-inch heavy round cake pan, greased

Halve the pears lengthwise and carefully scoop out the core with a teaspoon or melon baller. Put the pears in a wide, shallow sauté pan with the cinnamon and the sugar. Pour over the port and red wine and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer gently for 20 minutes (after which they will be a little less firm). Lift the pears out of the pan with a slotted spoon. Let cool. Boil the reserved wine juices hard until well reduced and syrupy.

Arrange the pears cut-side down around the base of the prepared cake pan (wide ends outward, points toward the middle). Pour over half the wine syrup, reserving the rest. Let cool.

Preheat the oven to 375 F.

To make the cake batter, sift the flour, cocoa, baking powder and salt in a small bowl and stir in the cornmeal. Using an electric beater, cream the butter and sugar in a large bowl until pale and fluffy, then beat in the egg yolks and vanilla essence. Fold in the flour mixture, then beat in the milk.

Using the electric mixer with clean beaters, beat the egg whites in a clean, dry bowl until they form soft peaks. Using a metal spoon, quickly stir a large spoonful of whites into the cake mixture to loosen it, then gently fold in the remainder. Spoon the cake batter over the pears and smooth the surface.

Bake for 45 to 60 minutes, or until a metal skewer inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes in the pan. Just before serving, put the pan over low heat for one minute to warm

Romantic films that you’ll enjoy on Valentine’s Day

Many people feel the best way to celebrate Valentine’s Day is to enjoy an evening in with the one they love. A quiet dinner followed by a romantic movie can make for a relaxing, memorable Valentine’s Day.

Romantic films pluck at the heartstrings and leave few dry eyes in the house. This genre has produced many unforgettable moments in film. While many people have their go-to romantic films, it can be fun to rethink preferences and watch something new.

The following are just some of the films dubbed “the most romantic movies” by sources such as AMC, TimeOut magazine, Rotten Tomatoes and Flavorwire.

- **Beauty and the Beast** (1991): This animated classic tells the tale of a prince who is disfigured into a beast to outwardly represent his internal ugliness. Only true love can break the spell, which seems unlikely until the lovely Belle comes into the Beast’s life. Fans of the animated film will have another opportunity to fall in love again with the live-action retelling of the story set for release in March 2017.

- **Once** (2007): A modern-day busker in Dublin has a chance meeting with a Czech immigrant. The two begin to collaborate musically and a romance blossoms. The film features musician Glen Hansard and his Irish band “The Frames.”

- **Say Anything** (1989): In a tale of first love, Lloyd seeks to capture the heart of Diane, who is an unattainable high school beauty. The movie includes a now-famous pivotal scene when Lloyd holds up a boombox playing Peter Gabriel’s “In Your Eyes.”

- **The Notebook** (2004): Based on Nicholas Sparks’ novel of the same name, this modern cult classic is set in the 1940s in South Carolina. The movie is the tale of a poor man who falls in love with a rich young woman, only to be separated by their social differences. However, true love ultimately prevails.

- **When Harry Met Sally** (1989): Close friends Harry and Sally have known each other for years and ponder if engaging in an intimate relationship would ruin the

friendship.

- **Gone With the Wind** (1939): This sweeping epic is set in the antebellum South during the American Civil War. The story of Scarlett O’Hara’s tangled love affairs has been popular with film fans for nearly 80 years.

- **Sense and Sensibility** (1995): This film is a dramatic interpretation of Jane Austen’s novel published in 1811. Sudden financial struggles force the Dashwood sisters to move to a distant cottage. Locals develop romantic feelings for the ladies in this story that is considered an early example of the romantic novels of today.

- **Roman Holiday** (1953): A European princess is disillusioned with her life and needs an escape. She takes off for a night in Rome and meets an American reporter, who first thinks he can get the exclusive scoop on the runaway princess. However, romance soon gets in the way of that plan.

- **The Princess Bride** (1987): Wesley and Buttercup begin with a tumultuous servant-master relationship. But their love blooms, only to have Wesley be called away, leaving Buttercup to believe he has died. The two ultimately reunite in this classic and often hilarious tale of romance.

- **Casablanca** (1943): A nightclub owner in Casablanca is reunited with his old flame, only to discover she is traveling with her husband. During World War II, Ilsa wants her rebel husband to escape to America, but her renewed feelings for Rick leave her struggling with what to do.

the pears and help loosen them from the bottom. Run a knife around the edges to loosen the cake and invert onto a warm serving plate. Brush the pears with the reserved syrup. Serve warm or at room temperature with Crème Anglaise.

Crème Anglaise
Serves 4 to 6

1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
1 1/4 cups milk
1 Tablespoon sugar
2 egg yolks
2 Tablespoons brandy, Armagnac or bourbon (optional)

Put the vanilla bean, milk and sugar in a small pan and heat gently. Bring almost to a boil, then set aside to infuse for 15 minutes. Remove the vanilla bean. (Rinse and dry the vanilla bean and store in a sugar jar to make vanilla sugar.)

Put the egg yolks in a bowl, beat well, and then pour in the infused milk. Mix well and return to the pan. Stir with a wooden spoon over gentle heat until the custard coats the back of the spoon. Pour into a cold bowl and stir in the brandy, if using. Cover the surface with plastic wrap, let cool, then refrigerate until needed.

How chocolate became tied to Valentine’s Day

Heart-shaped boxes filled with decadent treats are coveted gifts on Valentine’s Day. Chocolate lovers typically have a favorite type of chocolate, whether it’s creamy filled truffles or chocolate pieces with fruit or nut fillings.

The tradition of gifting chocolate is anything but new. Chocolate and other sweet treats have been offered for centuries as prized gifts. Even ancient Aztecs and Mayans celebrated chocolate and saw it as a hot commodity. Drinks made of cacao beans would be given as presents to people of high status. Chocolate also would be offered to the

gods as a token of appreciation. Cacao beans were even used as a form of currency at one point.

During the 17th century, chocolate consumption grew considerably across Europe. Chocolate houses cropped up in London, and the French elite often indulged in chocolate. Chocolate’s popularity continued to grow, but the dessert was not linked to Valentine’s Day until nearly 200 years later. In the mid-1800s, an enterprising individual named Richard Cadbury was looking for a way to make chocolate even more popular than it already was. He sought out

Learn how to write a classic love letter

Today’s digital world has given rise to fast, stunted communications.

According to the Pew Research Center, texting is the most widely used smartphone app, with 97 percent of Americans using it at least once a day. Across the globe, 8.3 trillion text messages are sent each year.

That translates to roughly 16 million messages per minute. In addition to text messaging, social media posts are generally concise and short on depth. The written form of communication has changed dramatically in the last decade, as letter-writing and other forms of prose have all but faded away.

But come Valentine’s Day, it can be special to dust off that pen and paper to express oneself via the written word in the name of love. Love letters are cherished keepsakes that can be kept for years. Such couples can illustrate a couple’s present-day love for one another and shed insight on their relationship years later. Here are some steps for writing a romantic love letter or note.

- Jot down ideas and inspiration. Make a list of attributes and qualities in a spouse or romantic interest that you would like to highlight. Write down phrases and terms that come to mind. These words can serve as the foundation for the letter.

- Categorize your thoughts into three areas. Jot down things that you like and love about the person, things that the person may do for you or your family that you appreciate, and various memories from throughout the years.

- Write what you know. Do not feel pressured to make this letter more complicated than it has to be. The words will come when you write from the heart. While you can use other letters to spur ideas, do not lose your voice or try to mimic someone else’s work.

- Make the letter personal and specific. Small details are important and make love letters more meaning-



SWEET, SWEET LOVE — Chocolate has been the gift that spells love for decades. Whether you select a box filled with the delicious treat or make your own from a cherished recipe, the gift says “love” in the sweetest way.

ful. Such details illustrate to a significant other that this letter was specifically written with them in mind.

- Disregard length. The letter does not have to be a certain length. Whether it is a paragraph or several pages, the letter will be a success if it says what you want to express. It doesn’t have to be long if that’s not your style.

Writing a love letter can be a wonderful way to express romantic sentiments this Valentine’s Day.

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