

Valentine's Romance



Valentine's Day Dates

Getting dressed to the nines, having dinner at a dimly lit table for two with a single rose in the vase on the table while a string trio plays in the corner and sharing a single decadent slice of chocolate cake seems like the picture-perfect Valentine's Day — so why not stick with what works?

For people who love the traditions of this mid-winter holiday, there are plenty of ways to celebrate.

DINNER AND DANCING

Go traditional! Make a reservation at the most romantic restaurant around and enjoy fancy food, champagne and ordering appetizers and desserts. If there's room in the dining area, dance. Not enough room at the restaurant? Go to a club or find a dance class and learn square dancing. It's still romantic when it's peppered with the occasional "yeehaw!"

COUPLES MASSAGES

More and more massage therapists are making house calls, so it's possible you and your spouse can relax without having to leave the house. But if you want a more complete getaway, find a local spa and a book a couples massage. If you can take the whole day, get a mani-pedi together before or after the massage. If you want the relaxation to last year round, contact your local therapist, recreation center or massage school and take a massage class.

A NIGHT AWAY

You may both have to work on Feb. 14 and Feb. 15, but even if you can't skip town for the day, book a room at a



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fancy hotel or a cute little inn or bed-and-breakfast for you and your partner. Enjoy the time away from kids, pets, the floor that needs vacuuming and other responsibilities and

just spend time with each other. Eat room service on the balcony and just relax and enjoy each other's company or explore a quaint downtown or city nightlife.

STAYING IN

If you're both working full-time jobs, volunteering or are otherwise always on the go, the most romantic way to spend Valentine's Day may be relaxing

at home. You can order in, dim the lights, turn on music and light candles, or get into your most comfortable sweats and eat pizza on the couch while watching Netflix or old movies.

Tips for a Great Valentine's Day

For a holiday intended to celebrate love, Valentine's Day has a complicated legacy; according to Psychology Today, couples are more likely to break up in the weeks surrounding the day. Why? Experts say unrealized or unreasonable expectations or comparisons to past celebrations can make what on any other day would be just fine a disappointment.

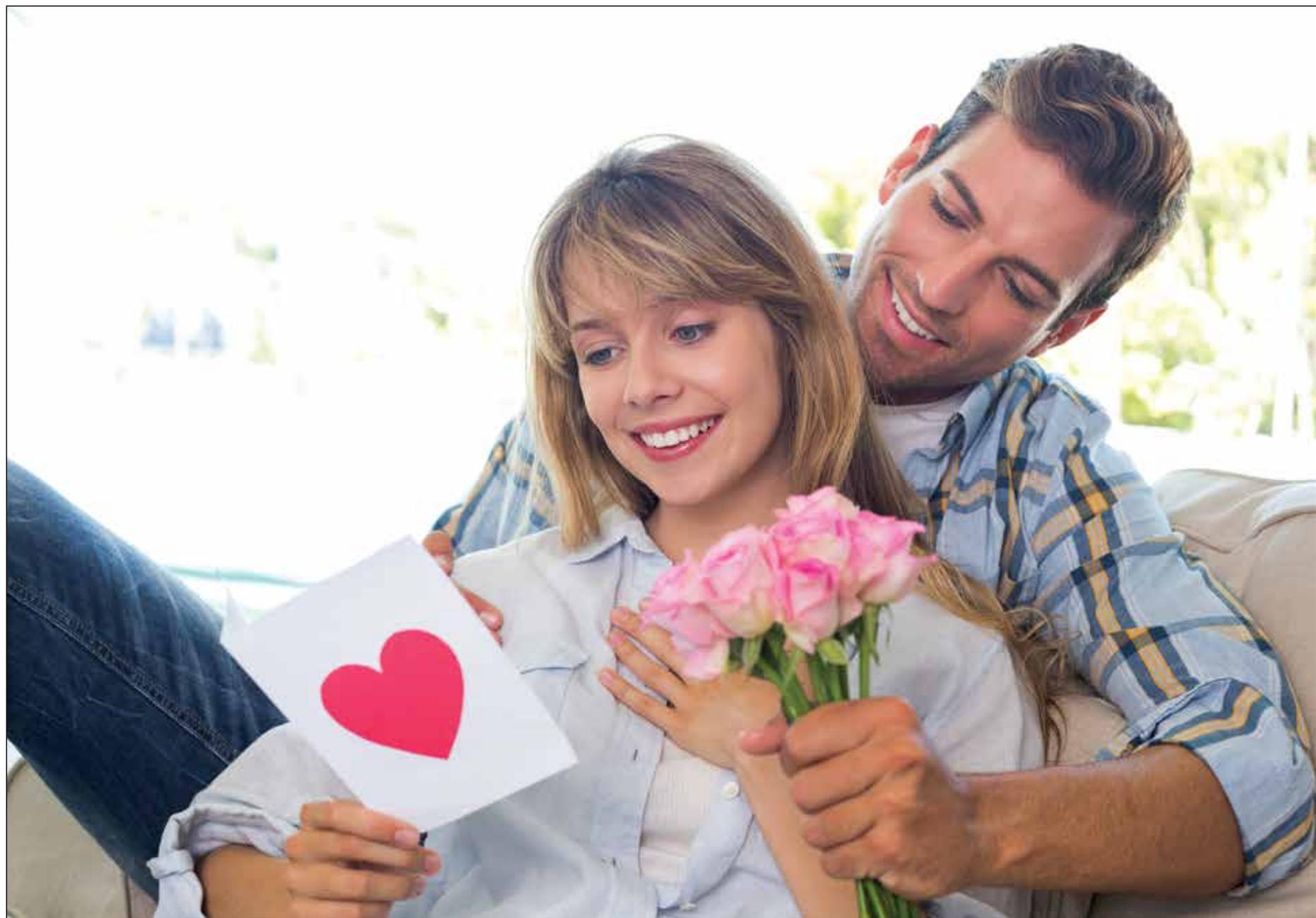
Another reason, psychologists say, is because Valentine's Day tends to add even more pressure on couples who are already struggling. They want to make it a perfect night to prove to themselves they're not having problems, or they find their negative feelings intensified by the day's events.

To make Valentine's Day a great opportunity for a big, romantic gesture of love or a quiet reminder of why you've been together as long as you have, plan ahead, know what you both want and give yourself a chance to have a fun day with your partner.

Make reservations as far in advance as possible. This isn't just for restaurants and hotels either; line up a babysitter as soon as you can. If you wait until the last minute, your options will be limited.

Talk to each other. Make sure you know each other's expectations and you know what your partner wants. You'll have a much better holiday if you plan your festivities together. Do either of you want flowers delivered to your office or breakfast in bed? Tell each other beforehand.

Don't go overboard on spending. It's easy to max out your credit card on flowers,



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chocolate, dinner out, a limousine or whatever grand plans you have. Figure out your budget and find creative, fun and romantic ways to maximize your resources.

Turn off your phones. It's hard to disconnect completely (especially if you have kids at home with a babysitter), but do the best you can to silence your phone. Ignore

calls from work, don't check texts, and even if you're just hanging out on the couch, stay off Twitter and Facebook and talk to each other.

Add a little personal touch.

A handmade card or handwritten note, a random text in the middle of the day, small gifts that will mean a lot to each other all can make your day a little more special.

Inexpensive Date Ideas

A small budget for Valentine's Day doesn't mean you need to go small in your planning for fun and romance. It might require a little more creativity or flexibility, but there are many ways to dress up, have dinner by candlelight and exchange thoughtful gifts with your boo on Valentine's Day. Redbook Magazine offered a number of helpful hints.

STAY HOME

Cook dinner (or get take-out and serve it in your nicest dishes), dim the lights, light a couple of candles, turn the music on low and enjoy a quiet night in. You could even cook together or, if it's a small kitchen, dip strawberries in chocolate or decorate cookies or cupcakes together after dinner. Even if you and your spouse aren't much for baking, you can get un-iced treats at your local bakery.

When dinner's over, have a movie night in front of the fireplace or find a show to binge-watch together. You can also play games at home, do a puzzle together or channel singer Josh Turner and "just dance" in your living room.

CELEBRATE ANOTHER NIGHT

Restaurants and theaters are crowded, and all the babysitters are spoken for on Valentine's Day. You can avoid the rush by celebrating a couple of days before or after, when it's easier to get a reservation at your favorite restaurant. You could also volunteer to swap babysitting on Valentine's Day with friends.

FIND A NONTRADITIONAL RESTAURANT

If you want to get dressed



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up and go out on Valentine's Day, do it! Check out the hole-in-the-wall or mom-and-pop diners that serve good food and offer a smaller, more intimate atmosphere and make a memory. Or, go very non-tra-

ditional, go through the drive-thru of a local burger joint and go for a drive.

GET OUTSIDE

Go for a hike. It's a great chance to get exercise and

offers a lot of time for the two of you to talk with each other. You can adjust the difficulty of the hike for the ability levels of you and your spouse and how much time you have. If you've got the whole day, put

your good shoes on, pack a picnic lunch and head out for long hike to the most beautiful part of your region. If you only have an evening, find a shorter hike or go somewhere to watch the sunset.

Unique Dates

Looking for something a little nontraditional for your Valentine's Day? Either to avoid crowds or to mix it up, many couples like to use the holiday of love to try something new, act a little silly or give back. Dating website Babble offered date ideas that will definitely be a memorable experience.

RECREATE YOUR FIRST DATE

Whether it was a year ago or 50 years ago, relive that first time the two of you spent time together as a couple. Go to the same restaurant if you can, rent the first movie you watched or go to the same club. If you're far from the city where you met, find a restaurant with a similar feel or cook the same dishes at home. Dance to the same song in your living room.

VOLUNTEER

You can serve meals to the homeless, help your local food bank or secondhand store separate donations or work with a local children's charity. Or, you may have a neighbor who's a little lonely. Spend the evening with them talking or looking at photos or see if they need any help around the house or yard.

SWAP OUT YOUR WHEELS

Do you or your partner have a dream car? Rent it for the night, or take one for a test drive (but don't eat in the car if you're renting a luxury vehicle). If you're feeling extra wild, and have a couple of extra layers, lower the top of the convertible and enjoy the wind in your air. Or rent a limo for the evening.

GO TO A COOKING CLASS

Whether you're a kitchen



novice or comfortable in the kitchen but want to learn something new, check out local restaurants who offer cooking demonstrations. These are typically done in

smaller groups and put you right in front of the chef, who walks you and your date through how to make whatever delicious dish they're cooking up for Valentine's Day. In

addition to the demonstration, you'll get dinner. These sometimes include wine tastings as well.

You can also check with the local community center to see

about cooking classes. You'll have to do more of the work in these classes, but it's still a fun way to spend time with your date and have fun in the kitchen.

Gift Ideas for Her

It's hard to go wrong with the classics: gourmet chocolates or chocolate-covered strawberries, a bouquet of flowers, a diamond tennis bracelet and perfume. Or you can go a different route: cookbooks for the food lover; scents for the woman who loves her house smelling like a tropical island in the middle of the winter; or a shoulder bag.

Whatever your partner likes, and whatever budget you're working on, you can find a great, personalized gift for her.

JEWELRY

Earrings, necklaces and bracelets, either simple or ornate, make great gifts. If you're unsure of your partner's style or you want something a little different, talk to your local jeweler about different gemstones, styles or settings. Your jeweler can help you find something that plays to her tastes.

FLOWERS

Whether it's 12 long-stemmed red roses, a bowl of brightly colored tropical blooms or a vase of her favorite flowers, brighten your Valentine's Day with a little greenery delivered to her office or home or by you. If flowers aren't her thing, look into living plants like a cactus for those who don't have a green thumb, herbs for a woman who wants a little fragrance or a plant for her desk or windowsill. Not much of a gardener yourself? Talk to your florist about beautiful, fresh ways to say, "I love you."

A SPA DAY OR OTHER SERVICE

Get a certificate for a massage, facial and mani-pedi at your local spa; an appoint-



ment with a personal shopper (check with her first, though); a gift certificate for framing or for a class in which she's interested; or a night at a bed and breakfast. Unless your partner has actually asked for it, though, a gym membership,

meal delivery services or housecleaning is territory you want to avoid.

ART OR DECOR

Is there a photograph she likes, a piece of art she's always found attractive, a wall clock

or funky lamp that she's told you would look great in her living room? If you're not sure, pick out the gift together. The element of surprise is nice; knowing you're getting her exactly what she wants is even better.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL

Good Housekeeping offered a number of less typical gifts: wine tasting or a corkscrew, a hanging terrarium, a personalized cheese board or welcome mat, a suitcase, a comfy plush bathrobe or bath beads.

Valentine's Day Gifts For Him

Men may seem hard to shop for, especially if you've exhausted all your good gift ideas at Christmas, and maybe all you've come up with so far is a tie. Before you rule that out — does he wear ties to work? Does he like funny ties? Did you see a nice silk tie that's perfect for an upcoming event? Maybe a tie isn't such a bad idea.

Real Simple and Cosmopolitan offered some other ideas to make the man in your life smile on Valentine's Day.

FOR THE CHEF OR FOODIE

Get a new grill, grill accessories or an apron for him to wear while grilling. If he's more of an inside chef, look at cast-iron skillets, Dutch ovens or a pizza stone. If he's into beer, consider a six-pack from local brewery or a home-brewing set; if you're looking a little smaller, how about a custom bottle opener or coasters? For the foodie, find a box of chocolates or specialty candy or a gift certificate to his favorite restaurant or more adventurous foods you can try together.

FOR THE OFFICE

Between commuting and the office, work takes up a lot of time. Make the work day a little nicer for him with a new laptop bag or briefcase, art for his office, gadgets for his mobile phone or tablet, or a subscription to an audiobook service for him to listen to during the commute.

Get him a set of cuff links — simple and classy, or fun and personalized, whatever he'd like the most — or a watch. If he's open to a bit of



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a closet makeover, a new blazer or two or that nice tie works. And, since goofy socks are becoming more in vogue, get a couple of pairs with cartoon characters, chicken

drumsticks or the solar system.

STILL LOOKING?

Get him a bottle of cologne — either a bottle of his favor-

ite scent or something new that he'll like. If you have trees in your backyard or a couple of posts, get him a hammock, even if he has to wait a couple of months to

hang it up. Find something related to his hobbies, like hiking boots, outdoor gear, tools or musical instruments, or go for a classic like slippers or a robe for cold nights.

All the Single People

Valentine's Day frequently serves as a reminder to those who aren't in relationships that, well, they're not in relationships. For those who want to be dating or married, it can be a difficult day. If you want to keep it simple, treat it like any mid-February day and don't worry about celebrating. If you want to celebrate, make it fun.

The Daily Meal has a few ideas to celebrate solo.

SPEND THE EVENING WITH SNACKS AND TV

Binge-watch your favorite comedy series, go a little dark and watch "Law & Order," or watch movies. You can go all in and watch the cheesiest romance streaming services have to offer or go in a different direction entirely, watching old westerns, horror or action movies. Have a celebrity crush? Look them up and watch movies starring that person.

COOK A FANCY MEAL

Who says you can't cook a three-course meal for yourself? Make the recipes you've been thinking about cooking but never had time or energy to — cook a nice steak or lobster and make a rich chocolate cake. Decorate the table, use your best dishes, drink from a goblet or wine glass. Or, if you're not much into cooking, order food or pick up from your favorite restaurant and treat yourself at home.

BUY YOURSELF A GIFT

Valentine's Day is a great time to buy a new kitchen accessory, a piece of jewelry or clothing, a new book or something else you've had your eye on. Buy yourself a box of choc-



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olates (get it personalized, so you get all your favorites and none of the chocolates you try to avoid) or even a bouquet of flowers to brighten up your

home or office.

HAVE A PARTY

You can all it an anti-Valentine's Day party, decorate with

broken hearts and black decorations, making it as unromantic as possible. Or keep it theme-free and just get together with friends — eat,

drink, play games, and if you have a friend with a dog, have them bring Fido, because nothing makes a party more fun than a dog.