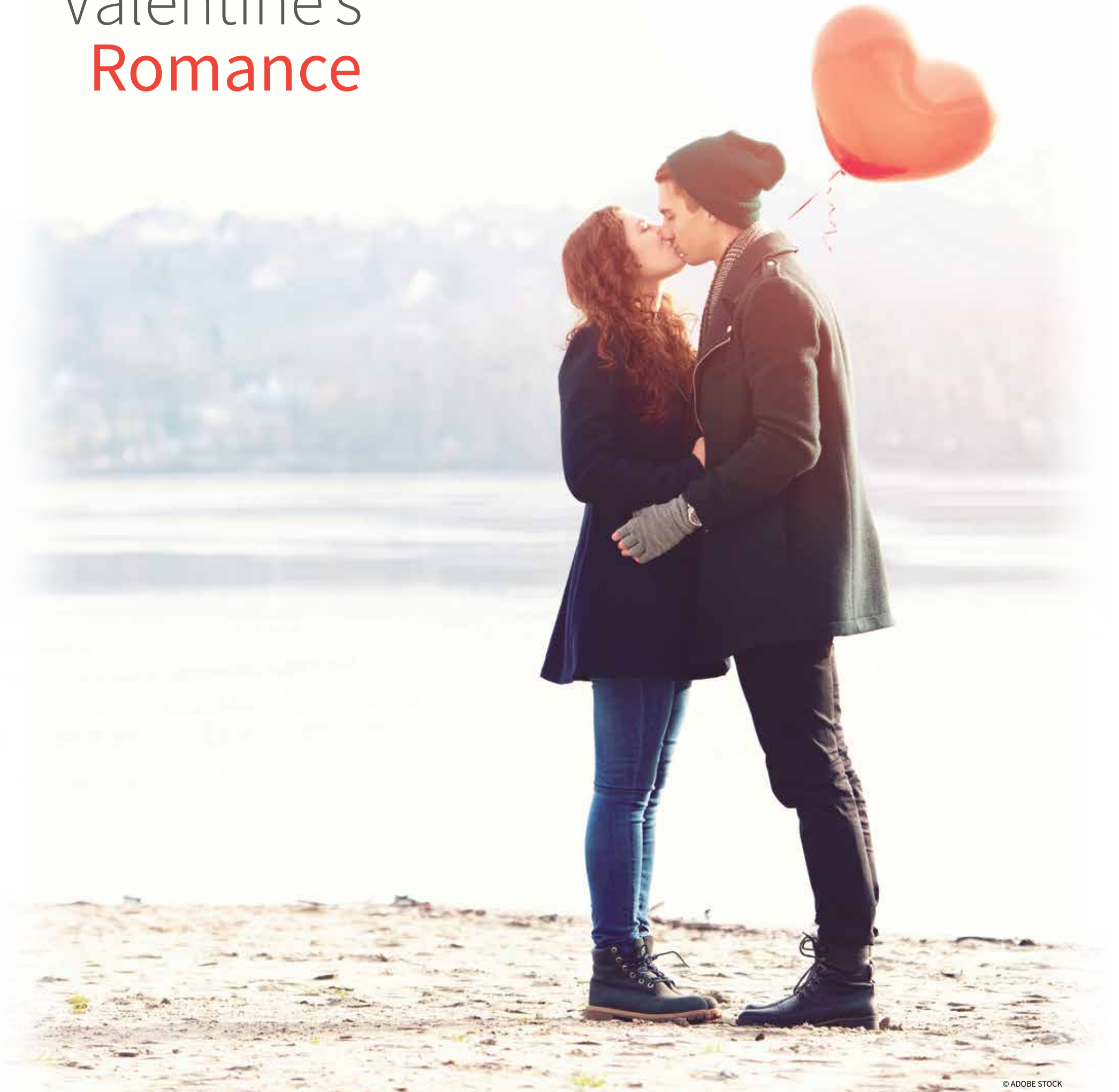


Valentine's Romance



DIY: Making Romantic Gifts

You don't need to spend a fortune to tell your loved one how important they are this Valentine's Day.

Consider upcycling items around your home or restoring attractive antiques found in the neighborhood. Creating hand-made gifts will show your significant other you care and your desire to build them something from the heart.

Here are some ideas to get you started on looking for the perfect materials to upcycle.

PALLETS

These affordable or mostly free wooden materials are popular for DIY projects. They are accessible, easy to work with and offer numerous possibilities. From creative furniture to attractive signage, pallets provide a great way to show someone you care.

Consider purchasing some quality paint and stencils to display a personalized message for your loved one. Your artwork can be big enough to hang on the wall or feature a small footprint to be featured on a tableside or fireplace mantle. When choosing the dialogue to express your love, think about your sweetheart's favorite quote from a movie, leader or loved one.

When it comes to great Valentine's Day presents, it's all about personalization. You should consider nicknames or sayings you both commonly



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use to communicate. This personal touch on a romantic sign is a wholesome way to show your valentine you care.

SCRAPBOOK

A scrapbook is a thoughtful gift that highlights your favorite

moments with your valentine.

Consider digging into your photo books or digital files to find memories from the beginning of your relationship into where you are today. This exciting display through time can reinvigorate your passion for

one another and inspire stories you may have forgotten. You may also look through history at important dates in your relationship. Find wholesome stories in newspapers associated with significant days you shared.

Handwriting these memories next to the clippings in the scrapbook is another way to show your sweetheart how important they are to you. And the best part about a scrapbook gift? It's a present that will last a lifetime.

Valentine's Day Proposal

Valentine's Day is associated with heartfelt, significant gestures and sincere feelings. If you are considering popping the question on the most romantic day of the year, consider a special presentation to make the moment unforgettable.

Men and women in a long-term relationship may be harder to surprise if a proposal is expected. You can add a level of mystery by scheduling a reservation for the evening but surprising them at an earlier time with your question.

Keep in mind that catching your significant other completely off guard may not be how they envisioned their proposal. Make sure to find out about their plans for the day and look for the perfect window to ask for their hand in marriage.

Here are some wholesome ways to make a Valentine's Day proposal memory one to cherish.

DON'T OVER PLAN

Your proposal doesn't have to feature a mariachi band, or a banner flown through the sky to be memorable. Try to think of something both you and



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your significant other enjoy together and create a new memory during your favorite activity.

Rather than creating a grand spectacle, try to recreate your first date or a memory that was significant in strengthening your relationship. This smaller gesture is a thoughtful way to

show them that you cherish the memories you have and your dedication to creating more.

CHOOSE BETWEEN PUBLIC OR PRIVATE

When deciding when and where to pop the question, you should consider your partner's

feelings. If they tend to be more private, a quiet proposal in an intimate setting can be more comfortable than putting them in the spotlight during a public event. If you're unsure about how grandiose they envision their marriage proposal, you can drop hints before you ask to gauge the way they feel.

PLAN TO DOCUMENT

Of course, you will have this memory in your mind forever but documenting the moment will give you a memento. You may be able to find a professional photographer to capture the proposal in a candid or even ask a trusted friend to freeze the moment in time.



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Valentine's Day Recipes

Is there a better gift for your sweet-tooth sweetie than delicious treats?

Chocolates and sweets are popular options for Valentine's Day gifts. Surprise your sweetheart by creating desserts with their favorite ingredients. Check out a few satisfying recipes that are sure to impress this holiday.

CHOCOLATE-DIPPED STRAWBERRIES

You only need a few ingredients to make this sweet and thoughtful treat. Simply melt semi-sweet and white

chocolate in two separate bowls, then stir until smooth. Next, dip strawberries into the darker candy and allow it to harden while resting on parchment paper.

Use a fork to drizzle white chocolate over the berries and let them rest for about 30 minutes. Don't be afraid to get creative with different colored chocolate to make a personalized gift based on your valentine's favorite hues. The same recipe can be used with a variety of fruits. Try tasty variations with bananas, cherries and pineapple.

STRAWBERRY-FILLED CUPCAKE

Surprise your sweetheart with their

favorite cupcake recipe and add a Valentine's Day twist. Simply follow the directions you're used to, then divide batter evenly among prepared muffin cups.

Once baked, use a paring knife to remove a cone-shaped piece from the top of each cupcake, large enough to hold a strawberry. Prepare a berry by removing the leaves, then slide it into the opening you made before reapplying the removed top.

Once you coat the cupcake with your favorite frosting and toppings, the incision won't be noticeable, creating a sweet surprise when they are eaten. Make them even more attractive by including candy hearts, sprin-

kles and other festive decorations.

CHOCOLATE STOUT EGG CREAM FOR ADULTS

This delicious adult beverage is best enjoyed near a cozy fire or snuggled up in front of a romantic movie. What's even better is that its unique taste is easy to accomplish with just a few minutes of prep time.

Begin with combining one tablespoon of coffee liquor and a half-cup of seltzer. Then, mix in a quarter bottle of stout or chocolate stout. Once it's blended together, add one or two scoops of your favorite ice cream to each glass. For best results, indulge immediately.

Take a Romantic Getaway

The United States is packed with gorgeous destinations to create a memorable Valentine's Day getaway.

Talk to your partner about finding time to leave behind the stress of everyday life and set sail on an out-of-town excursion where you can celebrate with each other.

Fortunately, you can usually travel to an exciting location without breaking your budget.

A great way to plan an affordable vacation is by working through a travel agent. Find an expert who can help get you bundled deals on flights, affordable hotels and car rental. A lavish vacation is waiting for you and your sweetheart. Here are a few popular places that are incredibly popular romantic getaways for couples.

CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK CITY

Central Park is loaded with couple-friendly activities. If the northeastern temperatures cooperate, consider an intimate evening of ice skating at Wollman Rink. The location was made famous in the romantic comedy "Serendipity" and has been the backdrop for many intimate experiences for couples ever since.

While you're there, check out the amazing architecture of the Belvedere Castle and



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the majestic beauty offered by the Bethesda Fountain.

HOCKING HILLS, OHIO

If an extended stay is an appealing option, consider booking a getaway in the romantic atmosphere near Hocking Hills. An amazing experience is found deep in the woods atop a treehouse

cabin or take refuge in spacious resorts throughout the area.

These secluded areas are the perfect way to take a break from your busy schedule and reconnect with your significant other. Be prepared by bringing along warm clothing in case you decide to experience the wilderness

during an amazing hike.

SNOWMASS, COLORADO

Hit the slopes or enjoy each other's companies bundled up near a fireplace in a luxurious resort. The area is known for hosting romantic dinners among snow-capped mountain tops, beautiful wildlife and elegant cuisine.

A fun way to travel the area is in the saddle of a snowmobile. They offer a unique mode of transportation that allows you to experience a side of the outdoors you may not be familiar with. If you have never driven one before, it's a good idea to sign up for a training session or take a guided tour.

Breakfast in Bed

Start your Valentine's Day off on the right foot by surprising your sweetie with a delicious breakfast in bed.

If you can, wake up before your significant other to get started in the kitchen without disturbing them. Cooking a quality meal is a thoughtful way to show your valentine how much you care.

For many, breakfast is a luxury that is often forgotten due to a busy work or personal life schedule. Your sweetheart will appreciate the opportunity to lay around for a few extra moments while you pamper with food, gifts and some relaxation.

Before your Valentine's Day meal, ensure you and your significant other have the free time to enjoy each other's company without life getting in the way. Clear a few hours from each of your schedules. If you intend to surprise them, make sure an extended meal works into their plans without giving too many details away.



HEALTHY BREAKFAST OPTIONS

According to Rush University Medical Center, breakfast is the most important meal of the day because it jump-starts our body's metabolism, making it easier to burn calories. When deciding on the breakfast in bed menu,

make sure to use high-quality foods that are loaded with nutrients.

Some items include egg whites, granola, lean meats and fruits. While bacon and eggs are a traditional breakfast staple, you can replace pork with turkey for a healthier alternative. Another delicious

yet healthy idea is avocado and poached egg toast.

This dish is easy to make and provides essential vitamins to get your adventure-filled Valentine's Day off to the right start.

PRESENTATION

Your meal may be the main

attraction but don't underestimate the importance of how it is presented. You can use attractive herbs for garnish and to slightly alter the taste profile. A light coating of powdered sugar is another tasty ingredient to add when spicing up breakfast. It is delicious on foods like French toast,

strawberries and pancakes.

GIFTS

After a filling meal is the perfect time to debut a small gift you purchased your valentine. Whether it's a piece of jewelry or a handmade token, their appreciation will be heightened after a homemade breakfast.



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Date Night at Home

If your idea of a romantic evening is spent in an intimate setting at home, there are numerous ways to make Valentine's Day special.

Planning a relaxing date night creates a way for couples to reconnect without breaking the bank.

Since you will be spending the evening at home, take steps before date night to limit distractions. Finish up your business emails and phone calls early so you won't be disturbed

during a movie. You can also hire a local cleaning service so your romantic setting will be spotless and care-free.

Remember to keep all distractions out of your date space and even your head. That means trying to forget about today's work stress or tomorrow's plans while you're spending time together.

Make sure you can focus on your significant other before you attempt to share one of these intimate ideas.

DINNER

Cooking with your significant other can promote teamwork, wholesome memories and hopefully, a tasty meal.

Together, choose your favorite recipe or search for a new one that appeals to your taste buds. Experimenting with your skills in the kitchen can lead to a new passionate hobby and a commitment to spend more time together.

MOVIE NIGHT

If you have young children at home, you already know how rare it is to find the time to sit down to watch a movie without interruption. When planning a Valentine's Day date night, choose a time when you can find a babysitter for the day or a few hours. With the house empty, you can indulge in personal time and catch a flick you have

been excited to see.

EARLY BEDTIME

If you can find a babysitter for the entire night, spoil yourselves by hitting the hay early. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reminds us that sleep plays a vital role in good health and well-being throughout our lives. Sometimes, it can be difficult to incorporate a suitable sleeping schedule, due to a busy routine. Take advantage of a romantic Valentine's Day date night to recharge your batteries. Purchasing a new bedspread or rearranging the room can create an illusion that you are off on an exciting getaway.

Send Gifts

For most of us, the majority of Valentine's Day is spent in the office before we can be home with our sweetheart. Let your someone know you are thinking of them by sending flowers or gifts to work.

Don't forget to accompany your gift with a heartfelt note or card. If you have an exciting surprise planned for the evening, prelude to it with your words. This will make your sweetheart's workday fly by in anticipation for what's to come later in the day.

FLOWER SHOPS

Keep in mind, the romantic day will keep your local flower shops busy, so it's a good idea to call in advance to schedule a delivery time and choose a bouquet.

Of course, a traditional dozen roses accented with baby's breath is a staple for Valentine's Day but ask your florist for their advice on attractive blooms if you want to get creative. They can show you their most impressive offerings based on what is in-season in your area.

EDIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Flowers are always a good idea for a Valentine's Day gift, but edible bouquets are grow-



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ing in popularity and for good reason.

Many companies offer a beautiful display of delicious fruits and chocolate. Your loved one will be excited to receive it and share the tasty treat with their coworkers.

If the man in your life would

be less than impressed with a fruit bouquet, find a vendor who can create a display with snacks like beef jerky, nuts and cheeses. Customizing an arrangement based on their favorite foods is a thoughtful way to let your significant other know they are on your mind.

LUNCH

Modern technology gives us the convenience of ordering deliveries from nearly anywhere from an app. Ensure your significant other doesn't have lunch plans and surprise them with their favorite meal, delivered fresh.

If your area doesn't offer food-sharing services, ask a friend or loved one to pick up the meal and bring it to their office.

An even better idea is to surprise them with a quick picnic if you can sneak away from your busy daily schedule.