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A Fool-Proof Guide to Celebrating Valentine's Day





Matters of the Heart

How to Put Together a Great Valentine's Day

Once you have kids, the hearts and flowers in life tend to get kicked to the curb. Weekend getaways are abandoned in favor of a quick dinner out (and a movie if you're lucky). Lingerie is replaced with "comfortable" sleepwear. And what happened to those dozen roses?

"Most parents are so busy that they don't get to spend a lot of time as a couple, which is so important for nurturing a relationship," says Sharon Fried Buchalter, Ph.D., clinical psychologist, family/marriage therapist, relationship expert and author. "Valentine's Day is a good opportunity to rekindle some romance (although all year round is good, too)."

But once you go by "Mom" and "Dad" instead of "Honey" and "Hottie," the prospect of trying to bring your sexy back for this February holiday can seem daunting. Will you cave under the pressure?

The Perfect Plan

Success on Valentine's Day, as in any worthwhile endeavor, starts with a well-crafted plan. And that starts with some honest communication. "To decrease the stress for both, I recommend having a conversation in early February," says Laura Elliot, a Bay Area mom of twin 4-year-old boys and creator of the blog site romanceandthemommy.com. "Get to know (and accept) what your spouse considers a Valentine's good time. Some men might not care about dinner and theater tickets. Some women don't want diamonds and pricey items when their dishwasher has been out of commission for a month. Talk to your spouse and get specifics. If you want a surprise element in your Valentine's, then ask your spouse for a list of fun dates and/or appropriate gifts. Then pick one and surprise him."

Whatever your plans may be, make reservations or accommodations in advance. You don't want to take a chance on things working out on spur of the moment – especially finding a babysitter, so book that first!

If you are not on a budget, consider a getaway to get you away from the same-old, same-old. A weekend in the Wine Country, a three-day cruise or a trip to San Francisco or New York City might be the ticket. If you want to keep it local, take in a show (L.A. has great theater!) or check into a local hot spot like the Beverly Hills Hotel, L'Ermitage, Hotel Bel Air or Shutters. They often offer wonderful spa packages that will allow you both to relax and be pampered *together*.

Dining In

If you *are* on a budget, don't fret. Soft music, candlelight and dinner at home can yield big romance for a small amount of cash. "Keep it simple – and maybe save the sexy stuff for dessert," advises Chef Jackie Keller, founding director of NutriFit, a healthy meal delivery service. "We humans tend to be less inhibited after we've eaten and had a glass or two. Remember the words of the poet Virginia Woolf, 'One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.'"

Keller explains the link between food and romance. "There are many foods that are linked to romance – from the perspective of their actual chemical properties, or their physically stimulating appearance, or their fragrance," she says. "Food also has sentimental value and is linked to the type of memories that are made in the brain from touch, taste and smell."

Dinner at home can be an especially nice option if you have little ones and can't get a sitter. Just feed the kids early,