

These aphrodisiacs make for great gifts this Valentine's Day

With Valentine's Day upon us once again, here are some purported aphrodisiacs that can be incorporated into special dinners with a sweetheart.

ALMONDS: This nut has been regarded as a fertility symbol. While it has been said almond aroma can incite passion, there is no concrete proof. Still, almonds are a good source of essential fatty acids and important B vitamins that can help prevent coronary artery disease.

ASPARAGUS: This vegetable may inspire lust in men and women, but it also is a good source of various vitamins. Asparagus is a member of the lily family that is nutrient-dense, containing folic acid, potassium, fiber, vitamin B6, and thiamin.

AVOCADOS: This fruit has a shape that could put people in the mood. In fact, centuries ago Catholic priests from Spain who visited Mexico found commonly grown avocados to be obscene and prohibited their consumption.

BANANAS: Potassium is a key nutrient for muscle strength. Muscle contractions will be more intense and the body will have greater endurance after consuming bananas.

CHOCOLATE: Chocolate and romance have often gone hand-in-hand. Chocolate contains the chemical phenylethylamine, a stimulant that releases dopamine and produces feelings of well-being and excitement.

FIGS: This sweet fruit has been revered as an aphrodisiac for thousands of years. In many cultures, figs are considered to be a symbol of fertility. Figs are very high in fiber and have a higher mineral profile than any other fruit or vegetable.

HOT PEPPERS: Chili peppers and others that contain capsaicin help to increase circulation and stimulate nerve endings. A spicy meal may lead to a spicy ending to the night.

OYSTERS: This shellfish is one of the better-known aphrodisiacs. However, not every person finds seafood palatable. Oysters are high in zinc, the mineral known to increase libido. Therefore, it stands to reason that other foods high in zinc might be just as effective at inspiring romantic notions.

POMEGRANATES: This fruit owes its power to the antioxidants within. Antioxidants help protect the lining of blood vessels, allowing more blood to flow through and increasing sensitivity around the body.

SALMON: This pink fish is packed with omega-3 fatty acids that aid in the production of key hormones in the body, including estrogen and testosterone.



Chocolate has been considered a special gift for centuries. It became linked to Valentine's Day in the 1800s.

How chocolate became tied to Valentine's Day

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. 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 des-

sert 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 a method to make drinking chocolate more palatable and created "eating chocolates." These chocolates were packaged in decorative boxes. Eventually, Cadbury saw the benefit of putting images of cupids and roses on the boxes. Cadbury even designed chocolate boxes in the shape of hearts that could be saved as mementos. These chocolates soon became intertwined with Valentine's Day celebrations.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Milton Her-

shey dabbled in commercializing chocolate as well. Hershey began as a caramel maker, but experimented with covering the caramels in chocolate in 1894. Hershey would go on to develop one of the most successful brands of chocolate in the United States, which included the famous Hershey bar. In 1907, Hershey launched production of tear-drop shaped "kisses." (The chocolates were given their unusual name because of the "smooching" noise made by the chocolate when being manufactured.) The kisses became wildly popular and made for affordable chocolate gifts.

Many other chocolate manufacturers soon began packaging their chocolates in special

boxes for Valentine's Day. Russell Stover and Whitmans are two manufacturers who have long specialized in heart-shaped boxes or other decorative Valentine's gifts.

Traditionally, men have gifted women with boxes of chocolate for Valentine's Day. However, that role is reversed in other areas of the world. For example, in Japan, women give gifts — namely chocolates — to the men in their lives to express love, courtesy or social obligation. This tradition first began in 1936 when confectioner Morozoff Ltd. ran the first ever Valentine's Day ad in Japan through a local English newspaper. By the 1950s, other Japanese confectioners were following suit.

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