

We're pretty sure that when people say "love is in the air" around Valentine's Day, what they're actually referring to is chocolate dessert! Because who can resist the aroma of a cake, cupcakes or brownies? There's nothing we adore more than a sweet treat, lovingly made by our special someone.

RECIPES FOR VALENTINE'S DAY



A sweet holiday

CHOCOLATE STRAWBERRY VALENTINES

Not only are these chocolate strawberry cakes yummy, but they also look beautiful. No one would guess they start with a box of devil's food cake mix. The moist, rich chocolate cake has a sweet strawberry compote on top. They both pair nicely with the tangy, creamy cheese frosting. This easy dessert is topped with a whipped topping and fresh sliced strawberries, but fresh whipped cream could be used, too. We also topped ours with festive sprinkles. It's a wonderful treat for your sweetheart on Valentine's Day.

INGREDIENTS:		DIRECTIONS:
1 box Pillsbury Moist Supreme Devil's Food cake mix	5-8 tablespoons granulated sugar	1. Make your cupcakes according to package directions using water, oil and eggs. Let cool completely before decorating. Measure out 1/3 cup of batter per cupcake so they are uniform.
1 ¼ cups water	½ to 1 teaspoon Kirsch liqueur (more or less to your taste), optional	2. While cupcakes bake, thaw strawberries, cutting them up smaller. Reserve 2/3 cup juice.
½ cup oil	16 ounces strawberry cream cheese spread	3. In saucepan, add strawberry juice, sugar and corn starch, stirring to smooth. Bring to boil and cook until thickened. Add strawberries and cook one minute more.
3 large eggs	14 medium fresh whole strawberries, made into fans	4. Remove from heat and stir in Kirsch liqueur (if desired). Cover and chill filling.
20 ounces frozen sweetened strawberries, thawed, juice reserved	4 ounces whipped topping, thawed	5. Use sharp knife to remove and level rounded cupcake tops. Save those to snack on.
2/3 cup reserved strawberry juice		6. Put strawberry cream cheese in resealable plastic bag. Cut off corner to make piping bag. Pipe all around outside of cupcake.
2 tablespoons corn starch		7. Put strawberry filling in middle of piped cream cheese.
		8. Top with dollop of Cool Whip and fanned strawberry.

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE
THREE-LAYER BROWNIES

Whoa! this is a chocolate lover's dream dessert recipe. The base is a tender, gooey brownie full of extra chocolate. The center layer has a creamy, almost mousse-like texture. Then, they're topped with a fudgy chocolate ganache that sends these over the top. Have a glass of milk handy to wash 'em down. They're rich and fantastic!



INGREDIENTS:		DIRECTIONS:
1 (18 to 20 ounce) box dark chocolate brownie mix		1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Butter 9-by-13-inch or 10-by-10-inch pan.
1 cup semi-sweet mini chocolate chips		2. Mix brownies according to package directions. Then fold in mini chocolate chips.
MIDDLE LAYER		3. Bake according to package directions. Once baked, let cool completely.
12 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature		4. For middle layer: In mixing bowl combine butter, powdered sugar, heavy cream, pudding mix and cocoa powder. Stir with whip beater until light and creamy.
3 cups powdered sugar		5. Spread evenly on cooled brownie and place in fridge while you make top layer.
½ tablespoon heavy whipping cream		6. For top ganache layer: Place chocolate chips in glass bowl and set aside.
3 tablespoons dark chocolate instant pudding mix		7. In small saucepan, bring heavy cream to boil. Pour cream over chocolate chips.
2 tablespoons cocoa powder		8. Cover bowl and let sit 10 minutes.
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract		9. Using wire whisk, whip together chocolate and cream till smooth and creamy. It will have satiny-looking finish. Whisk in vanilla extract.
GANACHE TOP LAYER		10. Pour over top of brownies and spread to smooth. Return brownies to fridge and chill at least 2 hours before cutting and serving.
1 cup heavy whipping cream		11. Cut brownies into 1 ½-by-1 ½-inch square pieces and serve. They are quite rich, so smaller pieces are better. Store in airtight container in fridge. Remove from fridge at least half-hour before serving.
12-ounce bag (2 cups) of chocolate chips		
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract		

HOMEMADE
CHOCOLATE CAKE

Vintage recipes are always fun to prepare, and this scratch-made chocolate cake recipe is one of them. Coffee enhances the chocolate flavor in this light and fluffy cake. Each bite melts in your mouth. Rich and creamy, the homemade chocolate frosting makes this a cake for chocolate lovers.



INGREDIENTS:		DIRECTIONS:
2 cups all-purpose flour		1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Mix flour, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, cocoa powder and salt for cake in large bowl.
2 cups granulated sugar		2. Add milk, vegetable oil, vanilla extract, coffee and eggs.
¾ cup cocoa powder		3. Beat well. Batter will be thin.
2 teaspoons baking soda		4. Prepare two 8- to 9-inch pans by greasing and flouring. Pour batter evenly into prepared pans.
1 teaspoon baking powder		5. Bake about 45 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean.
1 pinch salt		6. Once toothpick comes clean, remove cakes from oven. Allow to cool 5 minutes. Remove from pans and place on cooling rack.
1 cup milk		7. After cakes cool, use hand mixer to beat ingredients for frosting.
½ cup vegetable oil		8. Place one cake on serving plate. Smear layer of frosting on top of cake.
1 teaspoon vanilla extract		9. Place other cake on top of frosting. Carefully smear frosting over sides and top of cake.
1 cup black coffee		
2 large eggs		
FOR THE FROSTING:		
½ cup butter, softened		
3 ounces unsweetened or semi-sweet chocolate, melted		
3 cups confectioners' sugar		
½ cup sour cream		
2 teaspoons vanilla extract		

VALENTINE'S DAY ORIGINS

Valentine's Day is a bright light in the middle of the winter. Come Feb. 14, sweethearts celebrate their love and affection for each other on this day devoted to happy couples.

The origin of Valentine's Day has generated much speculation over the years. Most early accounts do not point to heart-shaped boxes filled with chocolates. Rather, a few distinctive tales may paint the picture of early Valentine's Day, and they have nothing to do with stuffed animals or romantic dinners.



ROMAN FESTIVAL

One of the earliest records of the term Valentine's Day is traced to the Roman festival of Lupercalia, which was a fertility festival. This annual event on Feb. 15 included animal sacrifices. Priests called Luperci would take pieces of animal hide and touch them to the foreheads of women in the hopes it would make them more fertile. Fortunately for the squeamish (and the sacrificial animals), Pope Gelasius I ended Lupercalia and replaced it with St. Valentine's Day by the end of the fifth century.

TWO OR THREE ST. VALENTINES?

Most people attribute the origins of Valentine's Day to the holiday's namesake, St. Valentine. But it seems that Valentine was the surname of a few different individuals. According to History.com, the Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus. One Valentine was a priest during the reign of Emperor Claudius II, who decided that single men made better soldiers than those with families or wives. Claudius outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine disagreed with the decree and performed marriages in secret.

Others believe it was St. Valentine of Terni, a bishop beheaded by Claudius II outside of Rome, who was the true namesake.

Yet another Valentine may have been jailed and fell in love with a jailer's daughter while in prison. He purportedly wrote to her, beginning the first Valentine card or letter tradition.

Other stories say the imprisoned Valentine actually was writing to a blind woman he purportedly healed, and signed the note "from your Valentine."

It is hard to know who is who in regard to the name Valentine, as the stories and the people behind them are used interchangeably. Some historians believe they actually are the same person rather than several Valentines, while others insist there were multiple martyred individuals.

However you slice it, the defiant actions of one or more people named "Valentine" set the course for centuries of romance to follow.

