



In The Mood

Angela Gala's Tips For An Intimate Valentine's Evening

PHOTOS BY AUGUSTO PHOTOGRAPHY TABLE AND FLOWER DESIGNS BY JOHN LUPTON

THERE'S NOTHING MORE ROMANTIC ON VALENTINE'S DAY THAN YOU, YOUR BELOVED AND a quiet meal for two. Don't know where to begin? It's easy. Simply take an ounce of preparation, toss in a smidge of adventure, and add a dash of *que sera, sera* — plus some tantalizing dishes — and you've got a sure-fire formula for a passionate rendezvous. Whether you're a novice or an old hand at entertaining, the following tips and recipes from planning pro Angela Gala will put your special night on track — and keep it there.

Valentine's Menu

Warm Cabecou With Fig Jam

Cream Of Celeriac Soup With Truffle Oil

Pan-Seared Sea Scallops With Vanilla Beurre Blanc And Basil Over Couscous Timbale

Warm Chocolate Cakes With Prune Lekvar

Warm Cabecou With Fig Jam

Napa Style™ mission fig jam with rosemary
2 rounds Cabecou cheese (or sliced Brie)
6 slices of a French baguette

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Use ¼ of a Cabecou round per baguette slice. Place cheese on the bread, and heat until melted. Top with room-temperature fig jam, and serve.



Cream Of Celeriac Soup With Truffle Oil

2 Tb. unsalted butter
1 Tb. olive oil
2 med. Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and diced
1½ lbs. celeriac, peeled and diced
2 leeks, white and tender green parts only, rinsed and diced
32 oz. chicken stock or broth
½ cup milk
½ cup heavy cream
Sea salt and pepper
White truffle oil

Heat the butter and oil over low to moderate heat in a large heavy-bottomed saucepan. Add potatoes, celeriac and leeks. Toss in a pinch of salt and pepper. Sauté for 15 to 20 minutes, until tender, stirring often. (Don't cook the mixture too quickly, or it will brown rather than soften.) When softened, add chicken stock, and bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat. Simmer for 30 minutes.

Working in small batches, one at a time, pour the soup into a blender or food processor, and puree until smooth. When the soup is pureed, pour it back into a clean pot. Add the milk and cream, and heat through. >

Cupid101



To create a romantic mood, proper lighting is essential. Say no to overhead lighting. Instead, opt for table lamps with low-wattage bulbs, and candles, candles, candles.

Move your celebration to an unexpected spot. Dining by the fireplace in the den or living room is sure to ignite a romantic spark.

Valentine's Day doesn't have to be about pink and red. Try using what you have in unusual ways to decorate your table. Unexpected household items can become wonderful vessels for flowers or candles. Silver biscuit tins, antique wooden boxes and colored glass perfume bottles make delightful containers for flowers. Etched juice glasses can serve as distinctive tea-light holders.

Chill out. If you love to cook, but get stressed over special occasions, select recipes for your menu that can be prepared a day ahead. Another way to keep your cool is to pick a main dish that requires roasting for several hours. It will be ready just before you want to eat.

Can't stand the heat? If you're not a whiz in the kitchen, it's okay to order out or have a caterer prepare something for you. The way to a man's heart may be through his stomach, but there's no law that says you have to make your perfect meal from scratch. Food served with love always tastes terrific.

Have fun, and go with the flow. If your dessert soufflé falls, either serve it anyway, and laugh about it, or replace it with a quick *faux-pas* fix. Try this one: Cut a baguette into slices, drizzle with honey, and finish with a piece of chocolate. Toast in the oven until the chocolate melts. *Voilà*, dessert! Remember: There are no real disasters. Even your worst food fiasco will someday become a cherished memory. — *Angela Gala*

To serve, ladle the soup into bowls, and drizzle with truffle oil. Finish with a grinding of fresh black pepper. Optional: If your budget allows, garnish with white truffle shavings. (To prepare this soup a day ahead, complete the recipe up to "puree," then refrigerate. Puree the soup mixture cold, then reheat and follow the remaining steps of the recipe.)

Pan-Seared Scallops With Vanilla Beurre Blanc, Chiffonade Of Basil And Couscous Timbale

Vanilla Beurre Blanc

1 Tb. shallots, finely minced
¼ cup white wine (If possible, use the wine you will be serving during this course.)
¼ cup champagne vinegar
1 vanilla bean, halved
1 Tb. cream (optional)
¼ lb. butter (one stick) cut into tablespoons

Place the shallots, vinegar and wine in a small saucepan. Scrape the contents of vanilla bean into the liquid, then toss in the pod. Place over moderate heat and reduce the mixture until nearly dry. Add the cream. (Cream helps the sauce hold until you are ready to serve. If you leave it out, serve the sauce immediately, or it will separate.) Add the butter one piece at a time, whisking vigorously. If you don't add the butter slowly, and whisk constantly, the sauce will separate.



Pan-Seared Sea Scallops

3 to 5 large sea scallops (If you can get them, diver scallops are best. They are free of preservatives, and will allow a nice sear. If you are using scallops from your local grocer, rinse and pat thoroughly dry. Damp scallops release moisture, preventing a good sear.)

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1 Tb. light olive oil

Chiffonade of basil

Season the scallops with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a heavy skillet over moderately high heat. When the oil is hot (shiny but not smoking), add the scallops. Sear on one side for three minutes, depending on the size of the scallops and temperature of the burner. Turn the scallops over and cook two minutes more. (You want a nice brown crust on either side without overcooking.)

Chiffonade: Stack a couple of basil leaves. Roll them up length-wise, and slice on the diagonal.

Couscous Timbale With Golden Raisins And Pine Nuts

¼ cup pine nuts

½ cup golden raisins

1 cup whole wheat couscous, uncooked

1 Tb. olive oil

1 ¼ cups chicken stock

Salt and pepper

Toast the pine nuts in a 350-degree oven until fragrant and a pale gold color. Set aside. Heat the chicken stock in a small saucepan with tight-fitting lid over moderately high heat. When the stock boils, stir in the couscous and butter, and cover. Remove from heat, and let stand five minutes. Stir in the pine nuts and raisins.

Tightly pack couscous mixture into a ramekin. Turn the ramekin over onto the center of the plate, and give the bottom a tap. The couscous should come out formed.

To serve: Place the scallops around the timbale, drizzle with *beurre blanc*, and top with the *chiffonade* of basil.



Warm Chocolate Cakes With Prune Lekvar And Armagnac

8 oz. semi-sweet chocolate, melted in a double boiler

½ cup plus 2 Tb. sugar

1 large egg

1 large egg yolk

1 Tb. prune lekvar (recipe follows)

½ cup all-purpose flour

¼ tsp. baking powder

4 large egg whites

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Brush six 3½"-heart-shaped cake molds with softened butter, and set aside.

Combine melted chocolate, ½ cup of sugar, egg and egg yolk, and mix well. Add the lekvar and blend. Combine the flour and baking powder, and sift over the top of chocolate mixture. Stir well, until all ingredients are thoroughly combined.

In a separate bowl, beat egg whites until soft peaks form. Add the remaining 2 Tb. sugar and beat until stiff. Fold egg whites into the chocolate mixture, combining well, but taking care not to deflate them. Spoon

into the prepared molds and bake about 20 minutes, until firm on top and somewhat soft in the middle. Invert the cakes onto a serving tray, and serve warm.

These cakes are wonderful alone, but they are also great with Sarabeth's Blood Orange Marmalade. To serve, gently heat the marmalade in a little water, then puree in a food processor until smooth. Add as much water as needed, until the desired consistency is reached.

Prune Lekvar With Armagnac

1 lb. prunes

¼ cup Armagnac

Water

1 cup sugar

Place the prunes and Armagnac in a heavy-bottomed saucepan with enough water to cover. Cook over moderate heat until soft. Add the sugar, and continue to cook until thick. Place prunes in a food processor and puree. If the mixture is runny, put it back on the stove and simmer until thick. **TCW**

What Goes With What

Beverage Suggestions To Complement Your Romantic Fare

Warm Cabecou With Fig Jam — Hoegaarden White Belgian Ale

Cream Of Celeriac Soup — Bruno Paillard Premier Cuvee Rose NV Champagne, \$59.99; Laurent Perrier Cuvee Rose Brut NV Champagne, \$84.99

Pan-Seared Scallops — '03 Cuvee Henry de Vezelay Bourgogne, \$19.99; '03 Louis Latour Meursault, \$42.99

Warm Chocolate Cake — '02 Aia Vecchia Lagone, Tuscany, \$15.99; '01 Sequoia Grove Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, \$27.99

Source: *Martha Faulkner, The Wine Shop*