

Think Outside of the Heart-shaped Box

If you've read my articles in the past, then you already know that I encourage couples to be loving and romantic 365 days a year—not just on February 14th. That being said, if you are planning to do something special this Valentine's Day, be creative, thoughtful, and loving with your choices. A heart-shaped box of chocolates from the drugstore, a dozen red roses, and a store-bought card have become cliché—and subsequently don't hold as much meaning as they may have in the past. Let's think outside of the heart-shaped box and tap into our wells of sexual and romantic creativity.

Cliché #1 - Heart-shaped Box of Chocolates

Creative alternatives: If your partner loves chocolate, there are numerous alternatives to the drugstore or grocery store boxed varieties. Named one of the 10 Best Chocolatiers in the World in 2012, Vosges Haut-Chocolat is considered the height of luxury when it comes to chocolate. While they do offer a heart-shaped box for Valentine's Day, I can promise you, the precious truffles inside will be like nothing your sweetheart has ever tasted! The Crush Truffle Collection is a 16-piece collection, described as “a dossier of aphrodisiac truffles.” Two of my favorites from the collection include the **Edith:** Piper Heidsieck Brut Rosé Sauvage Champagne + 65% cacao dark chocolate + rose water + crushed rose bud poudre; and the **Kumamoto:** kumamoto oyster-infused fresh cream + champagne + 36% cocoa butter white chocolate + edible pearl dust. As you can see, these are not your run-of-the-mill truffles! Personally, a trip to New York City is not complete for me unless I get to stop into their shop pick up some of these uniquely delicious treats! Shop online at: www.vosgeschocolate.com

Sensual alternatives: If you're looking for something more sensual, I suggest chocolate covered strawberries and/or a chocolate fondue. My favorite chocolate covered strawberries are made by Godiva; however, you can also purchase them online from a variety of other retailers. As for a fondue, be sure that you choose items to dip into it that are sexy and not too messy. For example, strawberries, pineapple, apple slices, sliced bananas and bite-sized pieces of sponge cake work well. Anything that will crumble easily should probably be avoided. For a Fondue Recipe, see the one suggested at the end of this article by Ghiradelli. Both the chocolate covered strawberries and the fondue can be served as a dessert or as part of foreplay...either way, they're sure to love it.

Cliché #2- A Dozen Red Roses

Creative Alternatives: Instead of roses, pick them up a bouquet of their favorite flowers. This kind of thoughtfulness will make the gesture a lot more meaningful to the receiver. Not sure which ones are their favorites? If you're married, chances are you can refer back to a wedding photo and take note of what she chose to carry in her bouquet. If you're not married, that's okay too. Did you know that all flowers have

meanings? Find ones that say just what your heart is thinking. One helpful website is www.theflowerexpert.com. They offer pictures of the flowers along with their meanings. For example, they state that the **Iris** symbolizes *eloquence*. Purple iris is symbolic of *wisdom* and *compliments*. Blue iris symbolizes *faith and hope*. Yellow iris symbolizes *passion* while white iris symbolizes *purity*. Once you find one or two that you think would be perfect for your partner, get some help from your local florist to create a beautiful bouquet. Be sure write down the meanings of your choices, so that when you give them the bouquet, you can tell them the meanings—and melt their heart with all of your creative thoughtfulness.

Sensual alternative: Buy a feather rose (or a dozen feather roses). Feather roses look like a fresh rose from a distance; however, the petals and leaves are made from feathers. When they're done admiring it as a unique, long-lasting flower, you can put it to use as a sensual addition to your repertoire in the bedroom. The same way you would use a peacock feather to tickle their senses in the bedroom, this lovely rose is a prettier and more creative substitute! Just make sure you use it on their body before using any lotions or oils, as that would make the feathers clump up and get icky. After your creative night of bliss, simply put it into a pretty vase on your bedside table for easy access for your next fun-filled evening!

Cliché #3- Store Bought Card

Creative Alternative: Write a love letter. I wrote about this in more depth last year; however, it's worth sharing again. If you're in need of some pointers, there is a website that teaches the art of writing a Love Letter: www.writeexpress.com/How-to-write-a-love-letter.html, by Larry Barkdull. It gives clear, step-by-step instructions for how to write an amazing love letter. Here are a few of the points you want to be sure to include:

- recall when you fell in love with him/her
- explain how your life has changed for the better
- explain that you can't imagine life without him/her
- tell how wonderful and complete he/she makes you feel
- recall some special moments you've shared together
- list qualities that set him/her apart from everyone else

Sensual Alternative: Write an erotic love letter. Simply take the aforementioned suggestion, but tailor it to sexual thoughts and feelings related to your partner. For example, recall the first time you made love to them and how amazing that was for you. You could also include specific things about them that you find particularly attractive. If you're at a complete loss for words, but really want to give this a shot, there is always good old Google! Simply type in "how to write an erotic love letter" and voila! There are dozens of websites out there to help you. For an extra touch, spray a little of your perfume or cologne onto the paper before you start writing.

If you're a good storyteller, try your hand at a little personalized erotica, with you both being the main characters, of course. Be sure to note specific things that they do that really turn you on, as well as things you would like to do to them. Don't be afraid to stretch out of your comfort zone and share some of your sexiest fantasies. Pull them into a world with you that they've never experienced before. They are sure to read it more than once—it just may not make its way onto the mantle. ♥

GHIRADELLI FONDUE RECIPE

“Bittersweet and milk chocolate and a hint of chocolate liqueur make this the ultimate chocolate fondue.”

Makes 4 Servings

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/4 cups whole milk or heavy cream	or chopped into 1-inch pieces
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract	6 ounces Ghirardelli Milk Chocolate baking bar, broken or chopped into 1-inch pieces
2 tablespoons unsalted butter	2 tablespoons chocolate liqueur (optional)
6 ounces Ghirardelli 70% Cacao Extra Bittersweet Chocolate baking bar, broken	

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a medium saucepan, combine the milk, vanilla, and butter. Heat over medium heat until the mixture just simmers. Remove from the heat and stir in the bittersweet and milk chocolates and chocolate liqueur until completely melted and smooth.
2. Serve over a heat source that will keep the fondue warm, but not hot.

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