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Columnists

6 Steps to Spice Up Your Marriage

by Alisa Ruby, M.A.

Valentine's Day 2007: This celebration of hearts, expensive dinners, Hallmark cards, candy and romance has its origins all the way back to ancient Rome. In fact, the pagan fertility festival honoring Lupercus, god of shepherds, and Juno, goddess of women and marriage, was the time to meet and court a prospective lover. As Christianity replaced Ancient Roman culture, the festival was transformed into one that downplayed overt sexuality in favor of religious devotion and familial love, qualities that Saint Valentine advocated. This year, you can create a unique evening to honor and celebrate all that you love in your life. The following 6 Valentine's Day tips will indulge and please all your senses.

1) Taste: The ancient Romans believed, as many do today, that certain foods had aphrodisiac properties. Be sure to indulge in any of the following foods on February 14th at a romantic dinner, or make your own special feast at home.

Chocolate Most women know that chocolate is a mood stimulant and booster. Chocolate contains phenethylamine - a safe natural ingredient that is released in the brain

when positive emotions such as falling in love are experienced and is a chemical similar to the substance that is automatically released by the body while making love.

Honey Honey has been called the nectar of the gods. The Romans put it at the top of their passion food list. In fact, the delicately fragranced sweetener is rich in B vitamins, nutrients that help power the sex drive.

Asparagus This vegetable was highly valued in ancient Rome as a delicacy. It was even considered a food fit for gods. The Ancient Romans, as well as many other cultures, considered asparagus an aphrodisiac.

Oysters Oysters have been accepted as an aphrodisiac food as early as the second century. Some Romans believed women were wanton after drinking wine and eating oysters. In Ancient Rome, thousands of slaves were sent to the English Channel to gather oysters for their feasts.

Nuts Almonds and walnuts are considered symbols of fertility. In ancient Roman culture, these nuts were used in fertility ceremonies. It is written that the Romans tossed walnuts rather than rice at newlyweds. These nuts are high in zinc, which has been known to aid male sexuality.

Herbs Pungent rosemary and basil are thought to stimulate the central nervous systems. Medieval woman bathed in rosemary water to allure men. Ancient Roman folklore advised women with unfaithful husbands to powder their breasts with basil to keep their men from wandering. An Italian man would give a woman a sprig of basil in an attempt to win her heart. Basil works well with most Italian sauces or with some fresh mozzarella and balsamic vinegar in a classic Caprese salad.

2) Touch: Today, you deserve to feel like royalty. Treat yourself to a long massage or spa treatment. Most day spas offer a hot stone massage or a couple's massage if you are so inclined. Allow yourself to be lovingly touched by someone today. Touch is healing to the mind, body, and soul. Wear soft, cuddly fabrics, such as silk, satin or cashmere. Purchase something soft to touch for yourself or your lover.

3) Smell: Many studies have proven that scent is perhaps the most powerful sexual stimulant for human beings. Animals smell pheromones to determine their ideal mate. Burn scented candles, incense, and spray your home with fragrances that you love. However, you may be surprised at what will most attract your lover to you. In research at the Chicago-based Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation, it was discovered that certain food scents trigger arousal in men and women. Cinnamon rolls turned out to be a lot sexier than most traditional perfumes. The founder of the study created fragrances designed for men and women that elicited the greatest levels of arousal. SA For Men, which is designed to attract women, includes a mixture of citrus, baby powder and Good & Plenty scents. SA For Women, which is designed to attract men, includes a mixture of cucumber, lavender and pumpkin pie scents. Experiment with these smells, or opt for a perfume you know and love. The point is to find what you love and to enjoy.

4) Sight: As you awake on Valentine's Day morning, decide to surround yourself with beauty. Go somewhere that you consider beautiful, such as the beach, the mountains, a stream, an art gallery, or a drive through a lovely neighborhood. Allow yourself to stop and truly soak in the beauty that is in front of you. Take time before you go out to make

yourself look and feel beautiful. Wear clothes you love, take time to get ready for the evening, and see your own unique beauty as you look in the mirror.

5) Sounds: Music is so powerful and healing. Play something soothing that touches your soul. Relax with sounds that you love such as the crashing ocean waves, jazz, Spanish flamenco music, romantic love songs, or an evening of live opera. Let your ears take you on a journey. Close your eyes and feel the music as deeply as you can. Let it heal you and stir your passion.

6) Emotions: Decide today to feel love for yourself, your family, your partner, the Earth, and who or whatever you truly cherish. Make a list of all of the qualities about your partner that you love and give it to them. Cover your bed with rose petals. Smile at a stranger on the street. Give a box of candy to someone that you know is alone today. Kiss your loved ones and tell them how much you care. This is a holiday in which we can all find depth and meaning and symbolically create rituals to honor all that we love.

Alisa Ruby is a California board registered private practice Marriage and Family Therapist intern in Westwood. Alisa has her Master's Degree in clinical psychology and works with individuals, couples, and children in her office. She also runs a support group for young, single, professionals.

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