

## Thursday Night Cooking Parties

### February

- 8 Romantic Dinners
- 22 Paris Bistro

### March

- 1 French Country Cooking
- 15 Moroccan Nights
- 29 Tuscan Feast

### April

- 12 Grazing on Tapas
- 26 More Paris Bistro

### May

- 10 Another Tuscan Feast
- 24 More French Country Cooking

### June

- 7 Summer Salads

Special programs always  
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Happy Valentines Day! Today we celebrate love with flowers, chocolates, sentimental cards and intimate dinners. While New Hampshire is blasted by frigid temperatures, February marks the start of spring in many warmer climates. Early spring sunshine encouraged the ancient Romans to celebrate love and fertility. Valentines Day finds its early origins with the Romans and their gods and goddesses. Juno, the goddess of women and marriage, was honored on February 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Juno's feast was immediately followed by Lupercalia, the pagan festival honoring Lupercus, the god of fertility.

However, Valentine's Day is not named for Juno or Lupercus but an ancient christen priest, martyr and saint. A saint seems an unusual choice to lead a romantic love fest. History has given us many romantic icons, Aphrodite, Cleopatra and Casanova; so why is this romantic holiday named for an ancient saint? Little if anything is known about Saint Valentine. Or Valentines; it seems that there were a couple of martyred saints of the same name. Their stories are vague and time has mingled and muddled what little is known. However, these shadowy figures are tied together in their support of love and marriage.

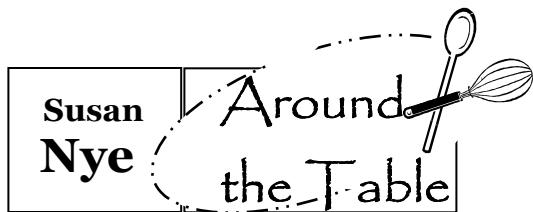
In an effort to boost army enlistment and expand the empire, the Roman Emperor Claudius II banned all marriages. Legend has it that one of the Valentines defied the order and was arrested for secretly performing wedding ceremonies. His tender hearted support for young love ended when he was beheaded on February 14<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of his execution the tradition of Valentine cards began when he sent a note to the daughter of one of his guards and signed it, "Love from your Valentine." Today Americans will celebrate Valentines Day by sending more than 200 million cards.

Food has long been linked with love, romance and seduction. Scientists explain it away as chemistry. Romantics know that atmosphere is at least as important and probably more than chemistry when it comes to aphrodisiacs. Made famous by Casanova, oysters are perhaps the best known aphrodisiacs. History's most notorious womanizer, Casanova started each day with a breakfast of 50 oysters. My favorite romantic foods include lobster, shrimp and caviar, especially when served with champagne. Many spices can warm the heart and help fuel the fires of passion. The Queen of Sheba used cinnamon to seduce King Solomon. Cinnamon, ginger, chilies and garlic will warm you up; and add spice and romance as well as flavor to your favorite foods. Adding a bit of spicy heat to your menu is especially welcome now when arctic winds are blowing.

Chocolate has been part of romantic legend for thousands of years. The Mayans drank chocolate from golden cups at engagement and wedding ceremonies. And thousands of years later, Richard Cadbury introduced the first Valentine's Day box of chocolates in the late 1860's. This year millions of heart-shaped boxes of chocolates will be presented to sweethearts across the country. Dipped in chocolate or not, strawberries are the archetypical aphrodisiac. The beautiful red, heart-shape fruit with its wonderful taste, aroma and texture is the perfect love food. And after Richard Gere fed Julia Roberts strawberries and champagne in *Pretty Woman*, who could argue?

Whether you choose to relax by a fire in a cozy country inn, enjoy a spectacular view from the 50<sup>th</sup> floor of a city skyscraper or spend an intimate evening at home, February 14<sup>th</sup> is the perfect night for a romantic dinner. Enjoy beautiful dishes, include at least a few aphrodisiacs, a glass of champagne and watch the sparks fly.

Bon appétit! - Susan



## On Valentines, Aphrodisiacs and Romance

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Thursday Night Cooking  
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### Pot de Crème

*Three well known aphrodisiacs come together in this Valentine treat. Use only the finest chocolate for a creamy, luscious dessert.*

Serves 2-4

1/2 cup heavy cream  
4 ounces milk or bitter sweet chocolate, cut into small pieces  
1/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract  
Pinch cinnamon  
1 tablespoon Grand Marnier

### Garnish

1/4 cup heavy cream, whipped with 1/4 teaspoon vanilla  
Fresh, whole strawberries

1. Put the cream and chocolate in a small microwave safe bowl. Cook on high for 10 seconds, stir – repeat until chocolate is melted. Let cool slightly.
2. Whisk in the vanilla and Grand Marnier. Pour into tiny cups or glasses. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours. About 30-45 minutes before you are ready to serve, remove from the refrigerator.
3. Serve with a dollop of whipped cream and fresh strawberries.