



Valentine's
Day

Plan a Virtual Date Night

It may be Valentine's Day, but during a global pandemic, Cupid's arrow can be tinged with COVID-19. To avoid the crowds and keep you and your loved ones safe, consider setting up a virtual date night.

Keep reading for more ideas to jazz up a virtual date night.

TAKE A TOUR

Museums and concerts around the world have gone online, and these are great venues for a virtual date night. Where else can you see famous artworks from around the world and hear a world-famous artist? Google Arts and Culture serves up virtual tours from famous museums around the world, including online exhibits. You can also view a variety of concerts online through YouTube or NPR's Tiny Desk Concerts. Set up a screen share you can experience the event together.

PAINT SOMETHING TOGETHER

You can find a lot of art lessons online, from painting to free coloring pages for adults. Chat with your significant other while you get the creative juices flowing, then show off your art to one another. Sign and date it for a special memory you can share.



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MOVIE NIGHT

Discord and Netflix Party both offer services that sync up your streaming accounts so you can watch the latest documentaries or movies together. For bonus points, send each other movie snacks via a grocery delivery service to enjoy during the show.

PLAY ONLINE GAMES TOGETHER

CNET has a great list of online games that are fun and quarantine friendly. These include the Jackbox Party Pack, including the trivia game You Don't Know Jack. Among Us, an online game available on iOS and Android devices,

has exploded in popularity lately. There are also virtual escape rooms like TEG Unlocked: The Heist and a Harry Potter-themed room from the Peters Township Public Library in Pennsylvania. Houseparty is another app that will allow you to video chat in a room

and play games together.

READ TOGETHER

Send each other books to read together or listen to and talk about. This also works with albums and podcasts. If you don't want to hit a long book together, try a reading list of articles or short stories.

Get Your Glamp On

Glamping isn't just camping. It's camping in the lap of luxury.

More and more campgrounds across the country are offering glamping accommodations that can be cheaper than or comparable to the cost of a hotel room. But with more nature — and more romance.

It can even help with your health. According to KOA, 45 percent of American campers says it helps reduce stress and 39 percent say they feel an improvement in their health when they go camping.

TYPES OF GLAMPING

You can glamp in a variety of structures, none of them ordinary. Cabins are the most home-like and often come with conveniences like included cookware and linens. Yurts are tent-like structures with fabric walls that originated in Mongolia. Teepees are similar but were used by Native Americans. You can also glamp in travel trailers like Airstream campers, but without having to drive it yourself. Cabins and campers are more likely to have private bathrooms while yurts, tents and teepees are more likely to share a bathroom facility.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A great glamping site should have clean, accessible bathrooms or private restrooms for your use. It should also include linens and electrical hookups and plenty of recreational activities. Also ask your glamping site about their social distancing and cleaning procedures during COVID-19.

WHAT TO BRING

Depending on where you choose to glamp, different amenities may be included. But here are some general tips on things to bring with you and keep in mind from KOA. You should bring your own toiletries; consider upping the ante with special luxury items to use. Also bring lanterns, candles and flashlights to give

your camping space a cozy glow.

If you're in a cooler climate, bring a heated blanket and, of course, everything you'll need for special meals.

MAKE SOME PLANS

Here are some great ideas for making your glamping trip special:

- Visit local farms, wineries,

dairies and breweries and pick up fresh ingredients to make a great meal.

- Build a fire and do some stargazing. If you see a shooting star, make a wish.

- Take a long hike and spend some time together in nature.

- Try a new activity together, like ziplining or horseback riding.



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Giving Live Plants

Flowers are a Valentine's staple, but there's another gift that is every bit as enduring as your love: live plants.

There's also a lot of health benefits associated with live plants. Houseplants can improve air quality, relieve allergies and boost moods. Tending to outdoor plants have many of the same benefits but also come with the benefit of exercise.

Sound great? Here are some live plants that are great for gifting.

ORCHIDS

Despite their reputation, orchids aren't hard to grow, the American Orchid Society says. Orchids are a diverse plant family with around 20,000 species that come in all sizes and shapes. Most orchid plants are long-lived; some propagations of orchids discovered in the 19th century are still growing and flowering today. Orchids can be found in a whole spectrum of colors and symbolize elegance and love.

HEART-SHAPED PLANTS

Anthuriums are bold, tropical plants have flowers in red, white and pink surrounded by a shiny modified leaf that's shaped like a heart. You can get anthuriums in a variety of presentations, including a striking kokedama (or moss ball). Also look for string of hearts, cycla-



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men, hoyo kerrii and heart-leaf philodendron. Choose a houseplant that will thrive in the light and humidity conditions in the home. Experts at your local nursery can help.

ROSEBUSHES

This isn't too far from the traditional dozen roses, but

comes as a bush that you can keep in house (the miniature varieties) or outdoors. Roses come in many shapes and sizes and types that can thrive in many different environments. Choose one that will thrive wherever your loved one wants to put it, such as climbing a fence or as a shrub. Roses tra-

ditionally symbolize love and passion.

TREES

There's something special about planning a tree – something amazing permanent. Pick a tree that will thrive in your locality and growing zone. You can find your growing zone at

on the USDA hardiness zone map. If you can't plant a tree in your own space, consider planting a tree through the National Forest Foundation or the Arbor Day Foundation.

No matter what you choose to give, make it plant you can care for and nurture together. Just like your relationship.

A Guide to Buying Chocolates

Sweets for your sweet is a great Valentine's treat. Make sure that you're buying the very best for your love with these tips for getting the best chocolate that you can. Real Simple magazine lays out these tips for checking the quality of your chocolate.

- Cocoa should be the first ingredient. If cocoa or cocoa butter isn't first on the list, the chocolate is likely high in sugar and lower in quality.

- More than 60% cocoa. The higher the percentage of cocoa, the darker and less sweet the chocolate would be. Snacking chocolates should be around 60 percent. Higher cocoa percentages, such as 80% cocoa chocolate, are better for baking and cooking.

- Look for a dark, well-sealed wrapper. Chocolate should be protected from light and moisture. Store your chocolates in their original wrapper for as long as possible.

- The chocolate should be matte with a slight shine and a uniform color and sheen. Any splotchiness, discoloration or grittiness could be a sign of spoilage. Also give it a



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sniff; a sour smell could indicate bad chocolate.

- Good dark chocolate should make a snapping sound when broken and not crumble. Milk chocolate and white chocolate have a higher milk and sugar content, so they bend rather than snap.

- Check the best by date.

Don't put much store in the origin of your chocolate, unless you have a sentimental reason to be attached to that locale. Maybe it's where you honeymooned or a brand that's made in the city where you went on your first date. Otherwise, where a chocolate is grown doesn't affect the

taste very much to the average customer.

Also don't think that more expensive chocolate is better chocolate. Look for a price point around \$6-\$7 per pound, though some chocolates can be upward of \$15-\$18. High-quality chocolates can be found at local super-

markets, but for a special treat, look for a local candy maker or chocolatier to make custom treats for your sweet. They can make custom treats that will delight both the eyes and the tastebuds. But order early; these shops are often swamped on holidays like Valentine's Day.

What to Get Your Kids

Valentine's Day is a great time to show love for everyone in your life, including the little ones. But with all the romantic gifts running around, it can be tough to choose presents especially for children. Here are some ideas that can get you started.

ACTIVITY KITS

It's cooler weather and there's a pandemic. That means that kiddos are more likely to be hanging out indoors and need something to do. Put together activity kits to keep little hands busy and out of your hair for Valentine's Day. Some ideas are:

- Coloring and activity books with markers, crayons and colored pencils.
- For the young cook, a kid's recipe book with their own whisks, spoons, apron and pot holders. Art kits with canvases, paints and smocks.
- A gardening pail with kid-sized utensils, seeds and pots for them to grow their own herbs and veggies.

KICKSTART THEIR IMAGINATIONS

If your kids are readers, get them started on a series of



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books. They'll meet characters they'll be friends with for life and it will foster a love of learning and reading. Some suggested series for them to start are:

- The Magic Tree House series by Mary Pop Osborne.
- Diary of a Wimpy Kid books by Jeff Kinney.
- The Adventures of Captain

Underpants series by Dave Pilkey.

- Junie B. Jones books by Barbara Park.

GIFT AN EXPERIENCE

The pandemic heightened some families' sense of togetherness and, with that, came a love of experiences over things. Consider gifting

your children a special trip to a park or other destination to do things they love. If you have a sports fan, maybe go watch a socially distanced game. Outdoorsy? Go camping, fishing or hiking. See a movie, go out to eat and make a whole day of it.

But how do you gift an experience? You have to get

creative. For a hike, consider gifting a pair of fun hiking socks along with an itinerary or map of where you plan to go. For a destination or experience, bundle a bunch of pictures of where you're going and make a scavenger hunt for the kids to figure out. Or just jump in the car and make it a surprise.

Picking the Perfect Scent

Perfumes and cologne counters are, at the very least, overwhelming places. There's a lot of visuals and entire clouds of scent that can make it tough to pick just the right one.

There's a science to fragrance, however, and, with these tips and a little help from the fragrance staff, you can pick the right one for your Valentine.

START SMALL

Only sample a few scents at a time. Try three or so fragrances, then take a break from the counter to let your nose rest. Start with lighter scents, like musky and citrus odors, before going for the heavy hitters. If you get overwhelmed, skip the coffee beans and bury your nose in your elbow and take several deep breaths.

IT'S ABOUT THE CHEMISTRY

Remember that we each have our own unique ecosystem on our skins. Our unique body chemistries mean that perfumes may not smell the same on us as they do in the shops. If you're buying for a picky wearer, ask for a testing sample you can take with you for them to try. Put the perfume in the crook of their



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elbow or somewhere else not being washed often and have them wear it for a few hours and see how it works with their chemistry.

WHAT IS THAT SMELL?

If one sample keeps drawing you back, think about why. Does it draw out a certain feel-

ing? A memory? If a fragrance gives you a headache, skip that one for scents that intrigue you or put you in a good mood.

You should also understand the parts of the scent that you do like. Here are some words you might hear to describe different scents. Once you narrow

down what you like, you can use this vocabulary to ask the fragrance counter staff to help you find the scents you're looking for.

- **Musk:** It has nothing to do with sweaty feet and everything to do with a clean-laundry smell.

- **Smoky:** It can smell like a

blown-out match or a campfire.

- **Citrus:** Just what it sounds like – lime, lemon and orange scents.

- **Woody:** Smells like cut wood and has a huge range. Think sandalwood, patchouli and cedar.

- **Aquatic:** Fresh or ocean water.

Buying the Right Bubbly

Valentine's is the right time to celebrate with your sweetheart, and that can mean a bottle of Champagne. The first thing to remember is that it can only be Champagne if it comes from that region of France; everything else is sparkling wine.

TYPES OF SPARKLING WINE

- Cava is a Spanish sparkling wine that's made from Macabeo grapes. It's most similar to French Champagne in terms of production, but the end product is more floral and fruity than Champagne. Cava is a great choice for buyers on a budget.

- Prosecco is an Italian wine made from the grapes of the same name. It's usually more floral and fruity than Champagne, tending to be more sweet and light. It also may not be as bubbly as true Champagne, but again, it's a great value and a great addition to cocktails.

- Rosé comes in either still or bubbly forms. It's known for its pink hue and fruity taste with tones of strawberry, citrus, honeydew, roses or rhubarb. It comes from all over the world, but is most commonly pro-



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duced in France.

- Champagne is a white wine produced, as we said, in that region of France. It's typically made from pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay grapes, but pinot blanc, pinot gris, arbane and petit meslier can also be used.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

First, know how much you

want to spend. You can get a decent bottle of bubbly anywhere from under \$10 into the hundreds of dollars. Consider both the winemaker and the vintage; lean on the experts at your local liquor store or quality grocery to help you pick a bottle that you and your sweetie will love.

Sparkling wines also have their own vocabulary. Here's

some words you should know before you hit the store.

- Brut is the most common type of sparkling wine and has a dry flavor.

- Extra dry or extra sec is slightly sweeter than brut.

- Sec is a medium sweet sparkling wine.

- Demi-sec is usually considered a dessert wine, as is doux, with are, respectively, sweet

and very sweet.

SERVING CHAMPAGNE

Sparkling wines are traditionally served chilled in coupes or flutes, but vintage pours can go in a regular wine glass. It should be cold but not too cold, especially for vintage sparkling wines, which need to warm up a little to reveal their full flavor.