

Romantic Dinner for Two

Written by Debbi Covington
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It's the time of year to celebrate romance! Valentine's Day brings romance in so many forms. From cards adorned with hearts and flowers, to boxes of chocolates and dozens of roses, the celebration brings out the romantic in all of us.



In 496 A.D. Pope Gelasius set aside February 14 to honor Saint Valentine, the patron saint of love and lovers. Legend has it that Saint Valentine had defied Emperor Claudius II by secretly marrying countless couples, a practice the emperor had banned believing that marriage weakened his army. Eventually Claudius caught on and the good saint was condemned and martyred in 269 A.D. — on February 14. Over the years February 14 has become a special day for exchanging gifts of love. This year give your true love a romantic dinner for Valentine's Day. Begin the meal with Raspberry Kir Royal. Kir is a white wine that's flavored with a European black currant called cassis and is usually served as an aperitif. When made with champagne, it's referred to as a kir royale. Grapefruit and Mushroom Salad with Lime Vinaigrette is an elegant first course. Salmon with Cream Sauce Dijon served with Twice Baked Potatoes with Goat Cheese and Parsley along side Bundled Green Beans is the perfect entree! Gorgeous fish when whole, king, sockeye, and coho are choice wild fish. Atlantic salmon, only available farm raised, is notable for its consistent quality, but is not as flavorful as the wild varieties. Use tweezers to remove any stray pin bones, which run down the center of the salmon fillets before cooking. End the meal with a classic dessert that's quick and easy – Bananas Foster! When flambeing the bananas, use a long-handled match. Hold the lighted match just above the liquid mixture. You want to light the fumes, not the liquid itself. Most importantly, don't lean over the pan. Stand back to ignite the mixture. Happy Valentine's Day!

Raspberry Kir Royale

1/4 cup frozen raspberries, thawed
2 tablespoons orange flavored liqueur
7 ounces champagne

Strain the raspberries through a sieve to remove the seeds. Add the liqueur and chill. Place 1-1/2 teaspoons of the raspberry mixture in the bottom of each of 2 champagne flutes. Slowly fill with champagne and serve immediately. Serves 2.

Grapefruit and Mushroom Salad with Lime Vinaigrette

1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1/8 cup Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

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1/8 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/3 cup olive oil
3 cups mixed salad greens
1/2 small red onion, thinly sliced
1/2 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
1 cup pink grapefruit sections
1/4 cup sliced almonds, toasted

Combine first 6 ingredients in container of an electric blender. Process until smooth. Add oil in slow, steady stream with blender running. Combine salad greens, onion, mushrooms, and grapefruit sections. Toss with vinaigrette. Sprinkle with toasted almonds. Serve immediately. Serves 2.

Salmon with Cream Sauce Dijon

1/4 cup sour cream
Dash white pepper
Dash dried dill weed
1/8 cup Chardonnay wine
1 teaspoon minced dried onion
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/8 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 (6-ounce) salmon fillets

In a small bowl, combine first 8 ingredients until well blended. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a medium baking dish. Arrange salmon in baking dish. Pour cream sauce evenly over salmon. Bake, uncovered, for 20 minutes or until fish is easily flaked with a fork. Serves 2.

Twice Baked Potatoes with Goat Cheese and Parsley

2 russet potatoes (about 3/4 pound each), scrubbed
3 tablespoons butter
1/3 cup heavy cream, warmed
2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled
1 tablespoon chopped flat-leaf parsley
Salt
Freshly ground pepper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place the potatoes on the center rack and bake until tender, 60 to 70 minutes. About halfway through the baking, prick the skins in a few spots with a fork to allow steam to escape. Remove the potatoes from the oven and place on a cutting board. Holding each potato with a towel or pot holder, slice the top quarter lengthwise off of the potato. Scoop out the flesh with a tablespoon into a

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mixing bowl. Leave enough pulp in the potatoes so that the skins stand up on their own. Remember to scoop the flesh from the lids, too. Mash the potatoes with a fork and add 2 tablespoons of the butter. Work in the cream until fluffy and smooth, then beat in the goat cheese, parsley, salt, and pepper. Spoon the filling into the skins, mounding it nicely on top, and put the filled potatoes on a baking sheet. Pinch off bits of the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter to dot the potatoes before you bake them. You can make the potatoes ahead until this point and refrigerate them for several hours or even overnight. Heat the potatoes in a 350 degree oven and bake them until the filling is hot throughout and the tops are lightly browned, 20 to 25 minutes. (If you've refrigerated the stuffed potatoes, expect them to take 40 to 50 minutes to heat through.) Serve hot. Serves 2.

Bundled Green Beans

16 fresh green beans
1 slice bacon
1 tablespoon light brown sugar
1/2 tablespoon butter, melted
1/4 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Cut bacon slice in half. Wrap each bacon strip around 8 green beans. Place bundles in a lightly greased baking dish. Combine brown sugar with butter and mustard. Dollop brown sugar mixture onto each bundle and cook for 25 minutes in a preheated 350* oven or until bacon is crispy. Serves 2.

Bananas Foster

1/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
2 tablespoons butter, melted
1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 bananas, split and quartered
1/4 cup light rum
Vanilla ice cream

Combine first 3 ingredients in a large skillet; cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until bubbly. Add bananas; cook 2 to 3 minutes or until thoroughly heated, basting constantly with syrup mixture. Heat rum in a small saucepan over medium heat (do not boil). Quickly pour rum over banana mixture; immediately ignite with a long match. Let flames die down; serve immediately over ice cream. Serves 2.

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