

Valentine's Day can be sensual experience — if you know the right foods to eat!

As Valentine's Day approaches, men and women search for the perfect surprise for that special person in their lives. Here are some fun food aphrodisiac trivia and ideas to make a romantic meal.

The experts in this case are local chef Mary Cullom from Arpeggio Restaurant in Spring House and local behavioral therapist and relationship expert Steven Rosenberg, Ph.D., from Elkins Park.

Cullom provides readers with ideas to make a romantic meal using aphrodisiacs with little fuss, or they can stop by the restaurant, located in Spring House Village Center, Bethlehem Pike and Norristown Road, for a Valentine's Day meal.

Dr. Rosenberg explains the myths and truths behind edible aphrodisiacs.

For example:

Asparagus

Many foods thought to be aphrodisiacs were considered so because of their phallic shape. Asparagus, however, has more than suggestive form. It is rich in vitamin E, a vitamin considered to stimulate production of our sex hormones and it may be essential for a healthy sex life.

Chili Peppers

A pepper's heat comes from "capsaicin," a chemical that stimulates our nerve endings, raising our pulse and making us sweat. Some researchers believe that eating hot foods also triggers the release of endorphins, body chemicals that give us a natural high that is conducive to love-making.

Chocolate

In addition to the sensuous texture of melted chocolate, this

Dessert:

Caramelized chocolate banana bread pudding

Chocolate and bananas have long been considered to be aphrodisiacs.

PRE-HEAT OVEN TO 350°

- 6 bananas, sliced into 1/2" thick rounds
- 2 T butter, melted
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 qt. heavy cream
- 12 eggs
- 2 vanilla beans, seeds scooped out or 1/2 cup vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1-1/2 qts. hard crusted bread
- 12 squares of semi-sweet chocolate, or 8 oz semi-sweet chocolate chips

Mix together: cream, eggs, sugar and vanilla beans. Add bread and soak for 1/2 hour. While this is soaking, toss bananas in melted butter.

Pour bread mixture into 8x12 pan. By eye, divide the pan into 12 and place a little bit of chocolate in the center of each serving. Top with bananas and sprinkle with brown sugar. Bake at 350° in the middle of the oven for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until a knife inserted comes out clean.

Guacamole

Avocado, garlic and hot peppers are all considered to be aphrodisiacs. Here is a very simple recipe for spicy guacamole that is sure to stimulate!

1 jalapeño pepper (or habanero if you can take it very spicy!)

- 4 avocados, scooped and mashed
- 1 plum tomato, chopped finely
- 4 cloves garlic, finely minced
- juice of 1 lime

Mix all ingredients and let sit for 1/2 hour in the refrigerator. Serve with raw vegetables or tortilla chips!

quintessential lovers' gift contains a stimulant called phenylethylamine, considered by some researchers as the "love chemical," as it gives you a feeling of well-being and excitement that is very similar to the endorphins giving us a natural high.

Oysters

Oysters are a favorite among erotic foods and research now shows this shellfish to be a rich source of zinc, a mineral required for the production of testosterone. Not only the hormone behind the male

sex drive, testosterone is believed to stimulate the female libido as well.

ABOUT THE EXPERTS:

Arpeggio Restaurant is located in Spring House Village Center, at the intersection of Bethlehem Pike and Norristown Road in Spring House.

Dr. Rosenberg was the team psychotherapist of the Philadelphia Flyers hockey team and a consultant for the "Perspective" television series. He was the recipient of the Selah Award and was inducted into the Hypnosis Hall of Fame. He was also voted Cambridge's Man of the Year 1994 and was listed in Who's Who in the East in 1993-1994. Since 1997 Dr. Rosenberg has published "I Hope the Hell I Win! Turning Hope into Reality ... How Winners Win!" plus a number of self-help audiotapes ranging

from weight loss to building self-esteem.

Arpeggio Restaurant (215-646-5055 or www.arpeggiobyob.com) specializes in eclectic Mediterranean cuisine, including gourmet pizza baked in a wood-burning oven. Owner and chef Mary Cullom, from Montgomery County, is known for her warm and welcoming hospitality and delicious home-cooked meals.



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