

Love is in the air

Crafting a love story through food.

ARTICLE BY ROBIN SELDEN

Love shows up in many forms, but my favorite has always been the delicious kind. In our kitchens at Marcia Selden Catering, food is truly our love language, and every delicious bite that we craft is made with love and lots of passion! It's how we celebrate, flirt, comfort, surprise, delight, and create unforgettable memories. So, when *Westport Lifestyle* asked me to share ideas for their "Love Local" issue, my mind instantly went to all the beautiful, cheeky, intimate, and wildly fun ways food can set the mood this February.

Whether you are hosting a candlelit Valentine's dinner, a spirited Galentine's cocktail party, or a blowout celebration, a little creativity goes a long way. Every plate can become part of the story, every sip can set the mood, and every detail will feel like a kiss.

Let's start with a visual spark, as we all eat with our eyes long before we even pick up a fork. Heart-shaped anything will always work its magic, but the real secret is to think about presentation as part of your decor. One of my favorite moves is serving hors d'oeuvres inside heart-shaped chocolate boxes. Remove the chocolates and tuck in tiny savory bites where bonbons once sat. People absolutely light up when they see them coming, as it's unexpected and fun.

Even the simplest ideas can become special. A skewer of fresh fruit becomes instantly charming when the fruit is cut into little hearts, or when the picks used have a tiny heart topper. A French macaron tree adds height and whimsy to a table and becomes an irresistible treat for dessert lovers. A heart shaped tray or one that literally says "love" creates a joyful serving moment before anyone even takes a bite.

Tabletop design also set the tone. Layer in soft candlelight, a touch of red or blush, a lip-shaped chocolate at each seat, or a miniature amuse bouche perched on a plate. Present a shimmering golden egg filled with truffled mashed potatoes and caviar...can you say *yum*? Beauty invites anticipation. Anticipation creates excitement. And excitement is where the romance begins!

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Edible decor of cheese and charcuterie.
Photo by Brian Dorsey Photo Studios.



Candy tray with short rib truffles.
Photo by Hechler Photography

Shape your menu with intention. Oysters, figs, chocolate, berries, truffles, champagne, and anything with sparkle or gold always makes hearts flutter. For one unforgettable event, we created a golden Adam-and-Eve duo of waiters, complete with grape leaf attire and shimmering wreaths, who passed figs to guests as they arrived. We complemented the moment with warm fig flatbreads that people devoured. Trust me when I tell you that every single guest that attended that soirée will never forget that moment—and the golden duo made sure of it!

Entree plates can feel like love letters all on their own. Panko-herb-crusted salmon with sweet pea risotto. Miso glazed sea bass, a gorgeous green salad with crunchy snap peas and fresh mint. Strawberry pavlovas with clouds of cream. Every color and texture becomes part of the experience. Small service touches also add a bit of theater. Pour a lobster bisque or potato leek soup table-side over a Boursin panna cotta so it blooms as the soup warms it. These special surprises will always heighten your guest's experience.

Cocktails that flirt back are always a must! Craft a signature cocktail that sets the mood the moment it is handed to a guest. A bourbon blackberry smash. A rosy gin spritz. A sparkling pour with a blush hue and a tiny rose petal floating on top. Name it something cheeky like a "Blush Kiss" or "Kiss Me Rose" and pair it with a cute napkin that says "kiss" or "sip." Even better, close the night with towers of espresso martinis so the final moment feels as celebratory as the first. What coffee lover wouldn't want that, rather than a cup of coffee?

Desserts that steal the love-themed show *must* include chocolate, as it is the universal Valentine's love language. In fact, nearly 36 million boxes of chocolate are sold in the U.S. for Valentine's Day, so it's clear that chocolate needs to make its

way onto your menu! We make desserts personal with heart-shaped French macarons, adorable lip-shaped chocolates tied to our MSC branding, tiny hand-rolled chocolate truffles, or even our amazing chocolate ribbon dessert served with a trio of homemade gelato. One of my favorites (although not chocolate) is our honey lemon panna cotta with berry glass and mango gelée, which looks almost too beautiful to eat, especially when finished with edible flowers.

Create a room that tells a story as design can transform an ordinary dinner into something cinematic. Imagine a Garden of Eden-inspired table, set beneath handcrafted trees created by your florist. Tables adorned with charcuterie, cheeses, dips, and warm breads for guests to pass while settling in with a nice glass of wine. These early touches create conversation and awaken the appetite before the first course even arrives. They also create beautiful and edible décor for your tabletop.

Late at night, send guests off with a smile. We love passing egg sandwiches from our hawker trays. We bring guaranteed smiles to their faces when they read "Eggs-It Sandwiches" labeled on the fronts of the trays. Just another way to bring joy through deliciousness to our guests with a playful nod to an exit strategy that makes everyone laugh on their way out the door with a delicious bite in hand.

Love is a feeling, but it is also a vibe. It is color, sparkle and aroma, and it should be full of playfulness. It is the thrill that comes from doing something unexpected. It is the joy of creating something beautiful for the people you adore. Every February table has a love story waiting to be written. I hope this inspires you to craft one that feels intimate, playful, gorgeous, and straight from the heart as your guests are guaranteed to feel the love if you go that extra mile.



Rosy gin spritz. Photo by Michael Jurick Photography.



Lobster bisque poured tableside. Photo by Liz Banfield Photo.



Grilled fig flatbreads. Photo by Philip Van Nostrand Photography.



Espresso martini towers. Photo by Brian Marcus Photography.



Heart-shaped French macarons. Photo by Hechler Photography.



Garden crudite tartlets on "Love" tray. Photo by Michael Jurick Photography.