



# Extension News Column

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Don't look now, but Valentine's Day is fast approaching. But with a little planning, this holiday won't put your budget in the red. I've been amazed over the last few years how the stores have really catered to shoppers with special tables set up to wrap and bag those last minute purchases. So here's the deal, you have a week. Take that week to plan and get your presents ready so that you won't be dashing by the grocery store or florist to pick up a present when you forgot until the last minute! Isn't this a holiday to remind your loved ones that you truly care about them? So plan ahead with these budget friendly presents.

There is nothing to compare with a dozen roses in her favorite color. Roses are also available at the grocery store, but remember that those from the florist are generally of a higher quality and will last longer. But if your loved one is like me, they may enjoy a growing plant rather than cut flowers.

Here's one of my favorite ways to make a spectacular gift at a bargain basement price. Find a basket from the thrift store, or even one you may have stored in the house. Pick up several plants and place in the basket— don't replant, just leave them in their individual small pots. Cover the surface of the pot and fill in between with sphagnum moss that has been soaked in water or just dry Spanish moss. The trick is to use the moss to hide the pots. Tie a bow on the handle or top edge and you've turned inexpensive plants into a luxurious basket. Choose a couple of ivy plants and one small flowering violet, all are easy to grow. Or choose a dracena, an ivy, and a flowering plant. Just drop by the greenhouse or the grocery store and check out the offerings. I fixed two baskets including the baskets (from the thrift store) for about \$28. The going price for one basket in the store was about \$35.

Do you want to treat your sweetheart to sweets? Rather than buying that heart shaped box of candy, take a minute to make your own. One of my favorites is to make peanut butter bonbons and dip them in chocolate. If you don't have a recipe, call the office and I'll share—it is a great treat, both inexpensive and easy to make. Or, make some fudge and rather than cutting them in the traditional squares, use a heart shaped cookie cutter to cut festive shapes.

The same principal works with cookies. Press cookie dough into a cookie sheet and bake. While the cooked dough is still warm, use the cookie cutter to make heart shaped cookies. This process is much easier than rolling out and cutting the cookies. Any kind of cookie dough or brownie will work, and remember that mixes are out there for cookies, brownies, and even fudge if you are challenged in the kitchen area.

So is the gift of clothing what you want to give? Key off the colors rather than items. Choose red and white items and package them to show off the colors. How about choosing a red, pink, and a white tee shirt, a red sweater, or a pair of red socks.

Presentation is important with Valentine's gifts, but luckily there are lots of things out there to help. Choose solid red tissue paper or plain white lunch bags. Decorate with red ribbon, or buy a package of red or white paper doilies in a heart shape. The red wrapping paper or ribbons from Christmas are perfect for now. So check through those first. Or many of the stores have bright sacks with hearts on them at a fraction of a dollar.

Are you flat broke this Valentine's Day? Pen a note to your loved one that tells them how much you appreciate them. As a mother, there is nothing I would treasure more than a note from one of my children. No gift is necessary. As I was working on this news column, my son told me that the ultimate Valentine's gift is love—and that is free (Guess I raised him right!). Remember to tell your loved ones that you care, whether with a gift, or the gift of your love.