



Extension News Column

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It is that time of year. We are coming up on Valentine's Day and the stores and restaurants are ready for you with lots of costly options to show your beloved how much you care. If you are planning that special night out with your loved one, it is easy to see that all these special meals and presents can cost big bucks. When you are on a tight budget, it is tempting to forgo any kind of celebration, but that usually isn't the best idea when it comes to building a relationship.

What you need to keep in mind is that romance isn't about the environment or the stuff; rather it is about people and emotions. It is about spending time with someone you love.

So the romance is in spending the time, not necessarily the money. Sometimes the gifts that cost the least mean the most because of the time required to think about what the recipient would really enjoy.

If it is your idea of romance to send a dozen roses, be prepared to spend the money.

Notice that the cost of roses always goes up around this time of year due to high demand and the fact that they have to be shipped in from warmer places. Consider giving your sweetie a miniature rose bush or even seeds or bulbs. I still remember the year I got six rose bushes for Mother's Day. It was a beautiful gift that cost my family about the same amount as cut roses and resulted in many years of enjoyment, not just a week. If you choose to give seeds or bulbs, be sure to make a tag that fits the occasion—that your love will grow just like the seeds. Again, it isn't the money; it is the words that create the romance.

Instead of having a meal at a restaurant, consider preparing a meal at home. Think of prepare ahead meals that allow you to enjoy time with your sweetie. Or opt out of a meal completely by selecting a variety of prepare ahead appetizers that you can snack on. It's not the meal; it is the time you spend talking that makes for a romantic night.

Or if you do choose to go to a restaurant, think outside the box. This year Valentine's Day falls on a Sunday, so the restaurants will be packed on Saturday and Sunday night.

Take your valentine for a breakfast. Breakfast meals are less expensive and can be just as special.

We have the weekend on our side this year, so you might even plan an outing. If your Valentine enjoys outside activities, plan a ski day, a snowmachine trip, go sledding, or hearty types might even want to picnic. Finish the day with hot chocolate and cookies. The idea is that you spend time doing those things that you enjoy together.

What about taking in the latest romantic movie? Great idea, but this too can be pricy. Hit the early movies for a discounted rate. Those before 5 p.m. have reduced costs. If you are set on a later showing, swing by Sourdough Fuel locations for reduced price tickets. These tickets save you \$2 off the cost of the regular showings. Or take in a movie at the Blue Loon for an even lower price than the major chain.

If this isn't in your budget, arrange for a movie night at home. Rent a DVD of a classic movie, have microwave popcorn and iced sodas. Instead of braving the cold and sitting up straight in uncomfortable chairs, you can snuggle with your honey in the convenience of your own sofa.

Whatever way you choose to put some romance in your relationship, remember that the time you spend putting together the perfect gift is far more valuable than an expensive gift that is sold everywhere and is completely impersonal. And Dan, if you are reading this, I expect diamonds!