

# FOOD

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## Sweetest Valentine pair CHERRIES & CHOCOLATE

BY MARY ANN MENENDEZ  
STAFF WRITER

One sweet way to say "Happy Valentine's Day!" to your loved ones is with cherries and chocolate.

While chocolate-covered cherries have been around for a long time, there are many other ways to present the duo on Saturday, Feb. 14. February is also National Cherry Month.

Who hasn't tasted the sensational chocolate covered cherry? The bold red of the round fruit is encased in a creamy filling, and the whole thing is captured up in a delightful blob of decadent chocolate, whether it's the dark variety or milk chocolate.

Featured today are many other variations of cherries and chocolate. Whatever you decide to present to your sweetheart on Saturday, may he or she also feel the love tucked inside.

### Sweet Nibbles

**1/2 cup shortening**  
**1/4 cup brown sugar**  
**1/2 teaspoon salt**  
**1 egg, separated**  
**1 square (1 ounce) unsweetened chocolate, melted**  
**1 cup all-purpose flour, sifted before measuring**  
**1 cup chopped pecans**  
**1/3 cup cherry preserves**

Cream together the shortening, brown sugar, salt and egg yolk until light and fluffy. Blend in melted chocolate then stir in the sifted flour. Chill dough for 30 minutes. Shape into 1-inch balls. Lightly beat the egg white in a small bowl. Dip cookie dough balls into egg white then roll in chopped nuts. Place about 2 inches apart on greased baking sheet; press centers with thumb to make indentation. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 minutes. Remove from oven and press centers again. Bake 6 to 8 minutes longer, until done. Cool slightly; remove from baking pan. When cool, fill centers with preserves.

### Chocolate Covered Cherry Cookies

**1 and 1/2 cups all-purpose flour**  
**1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder**  
**1/4 teaspoon salt**  
**1/4 teaspoon baking soda**  
**1/4 teaspoon baking powder**  
**1/4 cup butter, room temperature**  
**1 cup granulated sugar**  
**1 egg**  
**2 teaspoons vanilla**  
**1 (10 ounce) jar maraschino cherries, drained, reserve juice**  
**1 (6 ounce) package semisweet chocolate chips**  
**1/2 cup sweetened condensed milk**

In a large bowl, combine flour, cocoa powder, salt, baking soda and baking powder, blending well; set aside. In a mixing bowl, beat together butter and sugar on low speed until fluffy. Add egg and vanilla; beat well. Gradually add dry ingredients to the creamed mixture; beat until smooth and well blended. With hands, shape dough into 1-inch balls; place on ungreased baking sheet. Press down center of dough with thumb. Drain maraschino cherries well, reserving juice. Place a cherry in the center indentation of each cookie. In small saucepan combine chocolate pieces and sweetened condensed milk; heat over low heat until chocolate is melted. Stir in 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon of the reserved cherry juice. Spoon about 1 teaspoon of the topping over each cherry, spreading to cover cherry. If frosting seems too thick, thin with a little more cherry juice. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes, or until done. Remove to wire rack to cool.

### Chocolate Hugging Cherries

**2 and 1/2 boxes powdered sugar**  
**1 cup butter**  
**1 tablespoon vanilla**



**1 (14 ounces) can condensed milk**  
**2 (12 oz.) pkg. chocolate chips**  
**1/2 cake paraffin wax, slivered**  
**3 bottles maraschino cherries, drained well**

Melt butter in milk and vanilla. Pour over powdered sugar. Mix well. Dough will be stiff. Refrigerate for 3 hours. Pinch off bits of dough, flatten out and shape around each cherry. Chill. Melt chocolate chips and wax in a double boiler. Use a toothpick, dip each dough-covered cherry individually in chocolate mixture and set on wax paper to cool and set. Refrigerate.

### Hugs and Kisses Cake

**1 box Devil's Food Cake Mix**  
**1 can cherry pie filling**  
**2 eggs**  
**1 teaspoon almond flavoring**  
**Frosting:**  
**1 cup granulated sugar**  
**5 tablespoons butter**  
**1/3 cup milk**  
**6 ounces semisweet chocolate chips**

Mix cake mix, cherry pie filling, eggs and almond flavoring by hand. Pour batter into greased and floured 9 by 13-inch pan and bake at 350 degrees about 30 minutes, or until a wooden pick or cake tester inserted in center comes out clean. For frosting, place sugar, butter, and milk in a saucepan. Bring to a boil stirring constantly. Boil for one minute. Remove from the heat and stir in chocolate chips until smooth. Pour over warm cake.

### Crazy in Love Cake

**1 package white angel food cake mix**  
**2 tablespoons baking cocoa**  
**1 can (16 1/2 oz size) pitted dark sweet cherries in heavy syrup, undrained**  
**1 tablespoon cornstarch**  
**1 container (8 oz size) frozen whipped topping, thawed**  
**1/2 teaspoon almond extract**  
**1/3 cup sliced almonds, toasted**

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Make cake mix as directed on package for angel food (tube) pan, except stir cocoa into cake mix (dry). Bake 37 to 47 minutes or until top is dark golden brown. It should have a cracked appearance, feel very dry but not sticky. Cool completely, about 2 hours, as directed on package. Mix cherries and cornstarch in 2-quart saucepan. Cook over medium

heat, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens and boils. Boil and stir 1 minute. Cool completely. Mix whipped topping and almond extract; spoon onto slices of cake. Top with cherry mixture. Sprinkle with almonds.

### True Love Brownies

**1 pkg. German chocolate cake mix**  
**1 can coconut-pecan frosting**  
**1 can cherry pie filling**  
**1 egg**  
**4 tablespoons butter**  
**1 cup chocolate chips**

Put all ingredients except chocolate chips into medium-sized bowl. Mix well with wooden spoon, until well blended. Pour into 9 by 13-inch pan and spread evenly. Bake in preheated 350 degree oven for 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle 1 cup chocolate chips over top of cake. Let stand for five minutes. Spread melted chips evenly to cover cake. Cool completely before serving.

### Love, Italian Style

**1/2 cup butter, softened**  
**Three-fourths cup white sugar**  
**3 eggs**  
**2 teaspoons almond extract**  
**3 cups all-purpose flour**  
**2 teaspoons baking powder**  
**1/2 cup chopped candied cherries**  
**1/2 cup mini semi-sweet chocolate chips**  
**1/2 cup chopped white chocolate**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a large cookie sheet. In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar until smooth. Beat in the eggs one at a time, then stir in the almond extract. Combine the flour and baking powder; stir into the creamed mixture until just blended. Mix in candied cherries and mini-chocolate chips. With lightly floured hands, shape dough into two 10-inch long loaves. Place rolls 5 inches apart on the prepared cookie sheet; flatten each to 3-inch width. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until set and light golden brown. Cool 10 minutes. Using a serrated knife, cut loaves diagonally into 1/2-inch slices. Arrange slices, cut-side down on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes or until bottoms begin to brown. Turn, and bake an additional 5 minutes, or until brown and crisp. Cool completely. Melt white chocolate in the microwave, stirring every 20 to 30 seconds until smooth. Drizzle cookies with melted white chocolate. Store in tightly covered container.

## A green makeover for stuffed manicotti

By J.M. HIRSCH  
AP FOOD EDITOR

It's hard to get excited about manicotti, those oversized cheese-stuffed tubes of pasta slathered with pasta sauce.

That's probably because they are too similar to lasagna. Some recipes even call for using lasagna noodles to form the tubes. But the idea is worth playing with. After all, a giant tube of pasta jammed with cheese could be a great thing.

Start with the filling. It should be creamy, rich and abundantly cheesy. A blend of ricotta and mozzarella was just right. A bit of thick Greek-style yogurt gave it a creamy consistency, and a couple eggs helped hold it all together.

For color and flavor, chopped spinach is added to the filling, but any finely chopped vegetable would be good, including roasted red peppers, sauteed mushrooms and artichoke hearts. Just be sure to drain and dry the veggies.

Rather than the usual — and too often watery — tomato-based pasta sauce, this recipe uses pesto, which could be made from scratch or purchased in a tub (often near the fresh pasta at the grocer).

Pesto has an intense, fresh flavor

thanks to loads of basil, garlic and Parmesan. It goes perfectly with this cheese filling and doesn't water down the flavors of the dish.

To change it up, add minced jalapeno peppers to the cheese mixture, then make a pesto from fresh cilantro, toasted pumpkin seeds, manchego cheese, lime juice and olive oil.

If the prepared pesto is too thick to spread easily, microwave it for 10 to 15 seconds.

### Pesto manicotti

**8-ounce package manicotti pasta**  
**10-ounce bag frozen chopped spinach, thawed**  
**2 eggs, beaten**  
**2 cups ricotta cheese**  
**1 1/2 cups grated mozzarella cheese**  
**1 cup fat-free Greek-style yogurt**  
**1 teaspoon garlic powder**  
**1 teaspoon dried oregano**  
**1 teaspoon dried basil**  
**Two 7-ounce packages prepared pesto**

**1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese**  
Heat the oven to 400 F. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish (or multiple smaller dishes) with cooking spray.

Bring a large stockpot of salted water to a boil. Add the manicotti and cook according to package directions. Drain

and arrange them on a kitchen towel so they don't touch. Set aside.

Meanwhile, place the spinach at the center of a kitchen towel, wrap the towel around it and squeeze tightly over the sink to remove excess water. Continue squeezing until no more water runs out. Unwrap the spinach and coarsely chop.

In a large bowl, combine the spinach, eggs, ricotta, mozzarella, yogurt, garlic powder, oregano and basil. Transfer the cheese mixture to a zip-close plastic bag, squeeze out the air and seal. Set aside.

Spread 1 package of the pesto in an even layer over the bottom of the prepared baking dish.

Snip off one corner of the bag of cheese mixture. Holding a manicotti tube in one hand and the bag in the other, insert the tip of the bag into the pasta tube and squeeze gently to fill it. You may need to fill from both ends of the tube.

As each tube is filled, arrange them in a single layer in the prepared baking dish. When all the tubes are filled, spoon the remaining package of pesto over them. Cover with foil and bake for 15 minutes.

Uncover the pan and sprinkle the manicotti with Parmesan. Bake, uncovered, for another 15 minutes, or until the Parmesan is melted and lightly browned.

## Timely Tips

### Equivalents

BY MARY ANN MENENDEZ  
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■ 12 ears of corn equal 2 cups cut kernels  
■ 1 pound cabbage equals 4 cups, shredded  
■ 1 pound carrots equal 4 cups diced  
■ 1 pound celery equals 4 cups diced  
■ 1 clove garlic equals 1/8 teaspoon minced, dried garlic  
■ 1 tablespoon snipped fresh herbs equals 1 teaspoon dried herbs  
■ 1 medium onion equals 1/2 cup chopped  
■ 1 medium onion equals 1 tablespoon minced dried onion  
■ 1 pound unpeeled raw potatoes equals 3 medium or 2 1/4, cooked or 2 cups mashed  
■ 1 medium tomato

equals 1/2 cooked  
■ 15 ounce can tomato sauce equals 6 ounce can tomato paste plus 1 cup water  
■ 16 ounce can of tomatoes equals 3 fresh, medium tomatoes, cut up  
■ 10 ounces frozen vegetables equals 1 1/4 cups cut-up fresh vegetables  
■ 1 medium apple equals 1 cup sliced  
■ 1 pound of apples equals 2 large or 3 medium or 4-5 small  
■ 2 pounds apples equal 6-8 medium or enough for one 9-inch pie  
■ 1 bushel of apples equals 40 pounds or about 120 medium which is enough for about 20 9-inch pies or 20-24 quarts apple sauce or 30-36 quarts apple slices