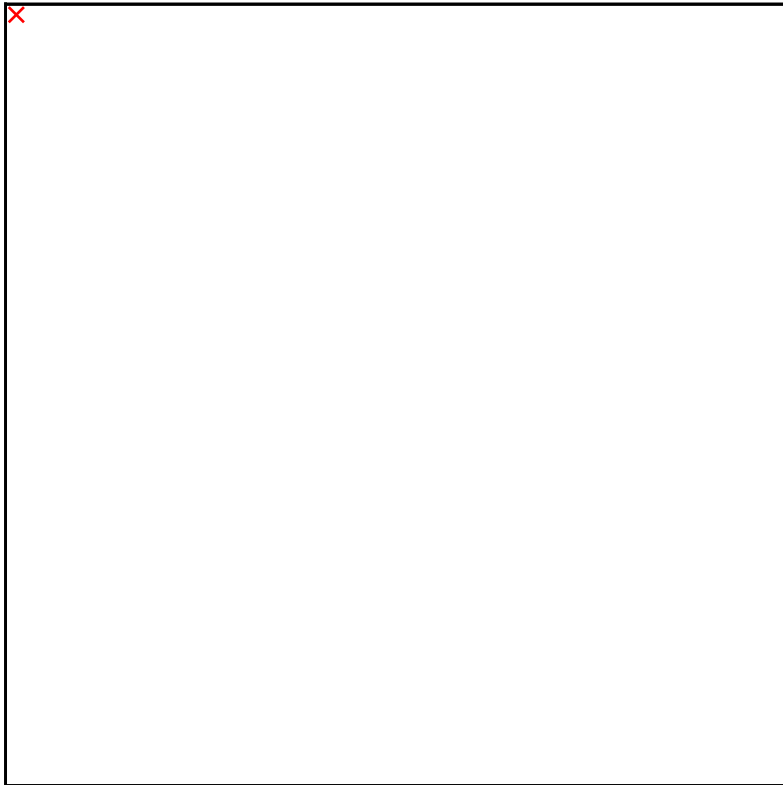


Top Chefs Create Glorious, Amorous Sweets for Sweethearts

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, February 2018 ... Desserts are the divas of the culinary world – dramatic, intense, and irresistible. Infused with lush liqueurs, topped with peaks of cream, nuts and berries and drizzled with fine chocolate, they are top performers at any time of year, ending a memorable meal in singular style. On Valentine’s Day, desserts do double duty, setting a seductive scene with decadent dishes that are, indeed, the food of love.

The chefs from [Benchmark Resorts & Hotels](#) and [Gemstone Collection](#) love lovers. These creative cooks come to the aid of Cupid with an array of lavish desserts from elegant hotels and resorts across the USA.

Does love, in fact, need a little sweetener? “It can’t hurt,” says renowned chef, Stephan Pyles who, as a major partner with Benchmark, is revolutionizing culinary operations and advising on menu development, restaurant design, training and research.

“For thousands of years, certain foods were thought to have aphrodisiac properties – oysters, asparagus, chocolate, coffee, almonds, pistachios, figs, pomegranates, strawberries and bananas,” Chef Pyles notes. “These ideas were often dismissed as old wives’ tales, but modern science has shown that many of these foods have elements that drive energy and libido.”

Many of these amorous ingredients appear in Benchmark’s Valentine’s Day desserts. They are often infused with Champagne, Kahlua, Irish Cream, Grand Mariner, Sambuca, and Espresso - all designed to sweeten and spark romance.

Chef Stephan Pyles’ Chocolate and Dried Cherry Tamales

With Sambuca-Milk Chocolate Sauce

Chef Stephan Pyles

Internationally Acclaimed Chef-Restaurateur and Benchmark F&B Partner

Known as The Father of Southwestern Cooking, Chef Stephan Pyles creates a dessert that’s rich with cream and chocolate but kicked up several notches with a salsa of cherries soaked in tequila and infused with kirsch, Sambuca and strong coffee. The tamales are soaked in Hibiscus water!

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: https://www.benchmarkresortsandhotels.com/The_Ridge/recipes/

Champagne Mousse Cups

Heather Wallace, Bake Shop Manager

The Essex, Vermont’s Culinary Resort & Spa, Essex, VT

A culinary destination, The Essex is known for its fine restaurant and cooking classes as well as year 'round sports. Champagne and sugar cane juice give this delectable mousse extra sparkle. Poured into chocolate cups and topped with strawberries, it's a perfect Valentine.

<http://www.essexresort.com/burlington-vt-restaurants/vermont-recipes/>

Ingredients:

2 egg yolks
3 tablespoons evaporated cane juice or sugar
2/3 cup champagne
1/2 teaspoon gelatin
1 tablespoon water
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream

Method: Whip the heavy cream and refrigerate. Combine the yolks and evaporated cane juice in a glass or stainless steel bowl and whisk thoroughly until the mixture whitens. Add the champagne and whisk together completely. Place the bowl over a pot of simmering water and cook, beating constantly until the mixture thickens to the consistency of a light hollandaise sauce. Remove from heat and continue whisking for about 1 minute. Set aside and allow to cool. Combine the gelatin and water in a small bowl and let stand for 5 minutes to soften the gelatin. Heat the softened gelatin mixture until the gelatin dissolves and the liquid clears. Whisk the dissolved gelatin into the champagne mixture. Then fold in the whipped cream with the aid of a rubber spatula. Chill for 1 hour before piping the mousse into champagne glasses or chocolate cups. Garnish with fruit marinated in champagne and Macarons.

Affogato

Chef John Andreola

The Nautical Beachfront Resort, Lake Havasu City, AZ

This luscious Italian dish puts the express in espresso, with vanilla gelato and biscotti drowned with espresso and topped with caramel and whipped cream.

<https://www.nauticalbeachfrontresort.com/valentines-day-decadent-dessert/>

Ingredients:

4 oz. Vanilla Gelato
1 oz. Biscotti
1 mini Sugar Waffle Cone
¼ oz. Espresso Beans crushed
2 oz. Espresso chilled
1.5 oz. Caramel Sauce
2 oz. whipped cream
1 sprig of fresh mint

Method: Scoop vanilla Gelato into a 10 oz. clear rock glass. Crumble biscotti and sprinkle around gelato to where the pieces fall between the ice cream and the glass. Pour chilled Espresso over Gelato and then drizzle with caramel sauce. Fill mini waffle cone with whipped cream and place inside glass. Garnish with crushed espresso beans and fresh mint.

Decadent Avocado Brownie

Pastry Chef Robert Zang

Garden of the Gods Collection, Colorado Springs, CO

Here's a Rocky Mountain High - Avocados, almonds, coconut, honey, and deep dark chocolate give an incredibly indulgent taste and texture to these decidedly decadent brownies. And you'll never guess - they're gluten-free.

<http://www.gardenofthegodsclub.com/co-springs-resort/dining/valentine-recipe/>

Ingredients:

1/3 Cup Coconut Oil

5.5 Hass Avocados

2 tsp Vanilla Extract

8 Room Temperature Eggs

1 1/3 Cups Cocoa Powder

1 1/3 Cups Almond Flour

800 grams of 62% Dark Chocolate

Method: Grease a 9 x 13 pan with coconut oil and line with parchment. Double boil the dark chocolate and coconut oil together until the chocolate has melted. In a blender or food processor, blend avocados until smooth. In a mixer blend the avocados, honey and vanilla into the chocolate mixture. Mix in eggs gradually. Add almond flour and cocoa powder and mix until smooth. Pour into prepared 9 X 13 pan and bake at 375 for 30 minutes. The top should be firm to touch. Serve with cashew milk ice cream of your choice.

Heart Shaped Chocolate Cake for Two

Pastry Chef Janell Pascual

Turtle Bay Resort, Oahu, HI

A romantic heart-shaped cake will be on the Valentine's Day menu at the Pa'akai Restaurant at Oahu's magical Turtle Bay Resort. Chocolate cake and cream are sealed with a rich ganache, topped with white chocolate and garnished with a heart-shaped strawberry.

<http://www.turtlebayresort.com/Events/Holiday-Events/Valentines-Day/Paakai-Dinner>

Requirements:

Medium Heart Shape Mold.

Chocolate Cake Recipe or Mix

Ganache Pour Over

White Chocolate bar or morsels.

Chocolate Cake:

Bake your favorite Chocolate Cake recipe, let cool.

Ganache Instructions:

Place 8 ounces semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped chocolate in a medium heatproof bowl; set aside.

Place 1 cup heavy cream in a small saucepan over medium heat and bring to a simmer. Pour over chocolate and let stand until chocolate has softened, about 5 minutes.

Add 1 tablespoon unsalted room temperature butter, and stir until smooth.

Let cool slightly before using.

White Chocolate Drizzle:

Place 6 oz of white chocolate morsels in a heavy saucepan over very low heat, stirring constantly till the chocolate begins to melt.

Immediately remove the pan from the heat and stir the chocolate until it is smooth.

Finishing Steps:

Dip fork into chocolate and drizzle over cake.

Refrigerate until chocolate is set, about 10 minutes.

Garnish with berries.

Chef Billings' Mud Pie

Chef John Billings CEC

Eaglewood Resort & Spa, Itasca (Chicago), IL

Cupid's darts are dipped in chocolate at Chicagoland's Englewood Resort & Spa, where this meld of cookies, ice cream, chocolate chips and luscious liqueurs make a mud pie to die for.

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: http://www.eaglewoodresort.com/chicagoland_restaurants/happenings/

Rose Yogurt Panna Cotta

Pastry Chef Matt Kelley

Willows Lodge, Woodinville, WA

This heavenly Italian classic from the Barking Frog Restaurant is a marvel of meringue, strawberries, rose essence and a pink peppercorn cake, topped with pistachios.

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: https://www.willowslodge.com/barking_frog/chef_bobby/

Coconut Dacquoise

Chef Lauren Steffen

Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke, VA

Dessert takes on a tropical touch at the historic Hotel Roanoke. Virginia is for lovers and here they can enjoy a fabulous concoction of fluffy meringue filled with crushed almonds, hazelnuts, coconut and cream.

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: http://www.hotelroanoke.com/downtown_restaurants/hotel_roanoke_recipes/

Jack Daniels Chocolate Cake

Chef Nevil Barr

Stonewall Resort, Roanoke WV

West Virginia has a proud history of creating superb Bourbons and other whiskeys and the bar at the Stonewall Resort offers an amazing sampling. With its sweet, smoky taste, Jack Daniels' legendary Sippin' Whiskey revs up the chocolate mousse filling for a lavish three-layered cake

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: <http://www.stonewallresort.com/dining/recipes/>

Chocolate Coffee Pot de Crème

Executive Chef Armando Galeas

Costa d'Este Beach Resort & Spa, Vero Beach, FL

Romance is in the air at this fabled Florida Resort owned by Gloria and Emilio Estefan. Just one lovin' spoonful of this scrumptious combination of coffee, cream and chocolate will set the mood for a memorable Valentine's Day.

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: https://www.costadeste.com/verobeach_restaurants/wave_kitchen_bar/

Chocolate Meltdown Dessert

Executive Sous Chef Joseph Natale

Villas at Grand Cypress, Orlando, FL

Is it the enchantment of the of the nearby Magic Kingdom that makes these rich puffs of chocolate rise? This sweetest sweet is sure to melt hearts.

For Decadent Dessert recipe & photo visit: https://www.grandcypress.com/orlando_dining/Recipe_Month/

Benchmark Decadent Desserts photography

link: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lku9cac1oly5fw1/AAAEXHnuBPIWzA7gNXSm9fGTa?dl=0>

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