Round 1:
https://www.seattletimes.com/life/food-drink/valentines-day-inspires-a-spike-in-home-cooking-for-two/

Valentine’s Day inspires a spike in home cooking for two

By Jennifer Allen

The Associated Press

As Valentine’s Day reservations book up weeks in advance and prices inch higher, home kitchens offer flexible timing, reasonable costs, and evenings free from hovering servers. Instead of racing the clock, couples choose intimate dinner plans that move on their own terms, with no rush to clear the table.

To celebrate Valentine’s Day, couples spend time preparing home-cooked meals, putting money toward better ingredients while skipping prix fixe menus. Grocery delivery and meal kits handle the planning, keeping the night special without turning it into a chore. These at-home plans ease the pressure and expectations, leaving room for real conversation and teamwork that is more romantic than waiting on a check.

Couples choose home meals

Cooking at home has become a common choice for Valentine's Day, especially among couples looking to manage costs and avoid crowded dining rooms. About 41% of those celebrating Valentine's Day in 2025 planned to eat at home rather than go out, a shift tied in part to tighter budgets and a desire for simpler plans. Many couples also prefer skipping fixed reservation times, which gives the evening more flexibility.

In the days leading up to Valentine's Day 2024, recipe apps saw usage rise 38% on Feb. 12 and stayed 28% higher by Feb. 14 after steady gains earlier in the week. Social media played a role as well, with food-focused videos promoting low-cost date ideas that center on cooking together. Preparing a meal at home gives couples control over ingredients, portions and dietary needs, making it an appealing option for shared celebrations.

Grocery carts get upgraded

Valentine's Day shopping patterns point to a shift toward at-home celebrations built around food. Grocery delivery orders rose about 60% on last year's holiday compared with a typical day, as couples turned dinner into an interactive part of the evening. Rather than relying on restaurant meals, many shoppers planned full menus at home and timed deliveries to build the night.

What went into those carts also changed, with orders showing higher demand for premium ingredients, such as lobster, scallops and steak. Alongside food staples, baskets often included items meant to set the tone for the evening, such as wine and sparkling options like rosé, Champagne and prosecco.

Reservation timing tightens

Restaurant dining still plays a role in Valentine's Day plans, but booking patterns show how tightly the calendar fills. Nearly half of diners who plan to eat out secure reservations two to four weeks ahead, while about 29.4% book roughly a week before the holiday. A smaller share plans even further out, with 12.9% reserving more than four weeks in advance, and about 10.6% waiting until the same day.

Those timelines show the pressure created by limited seating and fixed schedules. Popular time slots fill up early, leaving late planners with fewer options or higher prices. For many couples, that reservation squeeze helps explain the growing appeal of cooking at home, where timing stays flexible and plans feel easier to manage. The pressure grows even stronger in years when Valentine's Day falls on a weekend and restaurant demand already peaks.

At-home date alternatives

Couples also choose options that keep the focus on time together rather than reservations or price tags. Meal kit services, such as HelloFresh, offer structured recipes with clear steps and optional drink add-ons, which makes cooking feel intentional without adding planning stress. The format supports shared prep and pacing while keeping costs easier to manage.

Others take the experience outside the traditional dining setup altogether, with al fresco meals and picnics if the weather allows, or even meals by an outdoor fire pit. Long-distance partners continue to adapt as well, sharing the same meal over video calls so the evening still feels coordinated despite the physical distance.

Shared meals feel personal

Cooking at home shifts the focus from appearance to participation, with both partners sharing prep, timing and cleanup in a way that feels naturally cooperative. Couples can create a romantic dinner together, like a delicious pasta with fresh tomato sauce made with gourmet noodles from Pasta Tirrena or an easy-to-make seafood dish. The kitchen creates built-in pauses that make conversation easier, without the pressure of waiting for courses or managing a formal dining schedule.

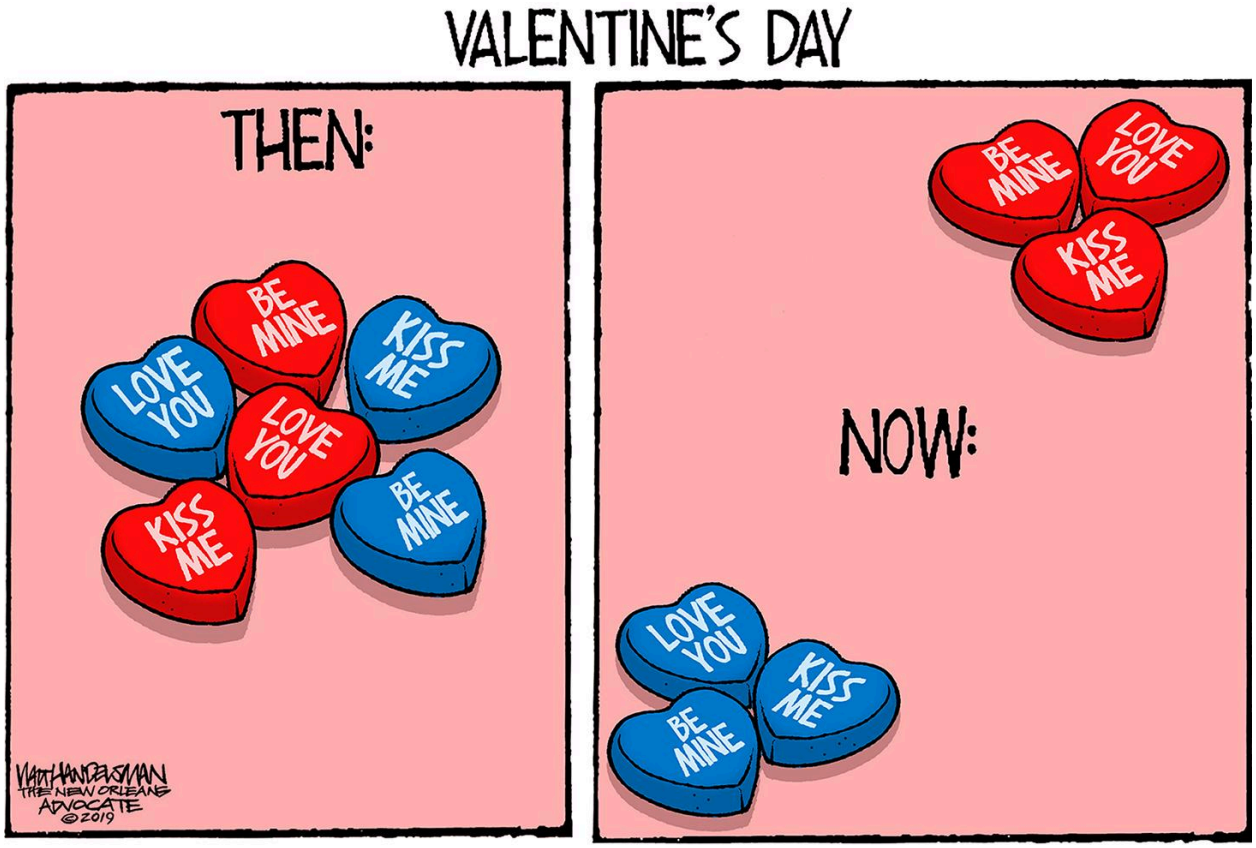
A home setting also removes expectations tied to reservations, outfits and public attention, allowing couples to set the pace for the evening. It also gives them a chance to try new ingredients, like a high-end cheese for their carbonara or an Italian olive oil like Laudemio Frescobaldi extra virgin olive oil

for their salad. Small challenges tend to strengthen the experience rather than derail it, since dividing tasks and solving minor issues together builds a sense of teamwork. Those unscripted moments often stay memorable because they feel relaxed, personal and built on shared effort rather than presentation.

Romance moves to kitchens

Valentine's Day continues to steer couples toward the kitchen as a way to celebrate without crowds or rigid plans. Cooking at home fits easily into real life, giving couples control over timing and cost while keeping the focus on the experience they want to share. Over time, that preference has made Valentine's Day one of the clearest moments when quieter, flexible celebrations outweigh fixed dining traditions.

Round 2:


VALENTINE'S DAY
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Round 3: https://www.myheraldreview.com/opinion/commentary/the-wrong-definition-of-love/article_b1c8ae20-70d0-4ef8-8dca-0fbb21abb322.html

The Wrong Definition of Love

David Brooks The New York Times Company
Aug 29, 2025
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5 min to read

The time I used to spend on Twitter I now spend on Substack, and my life is much better for it. There are a lot of interesting, eclectic writers in the world. This week, for example, I stumbled across a post from Antonia Bentel, who asked six strangers and friends about how they fall in love.

One woman responded, “I fall in love when someone sees me in a way I didn’t know I could be seen.” A young man answered, “Falling in love is like seeing yourself reflected in someone else’s mind.” Another woman said, “I fall in love when I don’t feel like I’m performing competence.” She added that love happens “when someone sees you in the absolute mess of it — your pain, your

pettiness, your unpaid parking tickets." Another man replied, "Falling in love is like entering a room you didn't know existed in your own house."

Bentel makes it clear that this is far from a scientific survey, but what struck me about these answers is that they all had a common definition of love — that love blooms when somebody else makes you feel understood and good about yourself.

We can all relate. We all want to be seen and to be beheld. You've probably come across Raymond Carver's famous poem, "Late Fragment":

And did you get what / you wanted from this life, even so?

I did.

And what did you want?

To call myself beloved, to feel myself / beloved on the earth.

And yet I'd say the Substack answers betray a common misunderstanding of how you become beloved. There was a lot of self in these answers and not much about the other person. There was a lot about being paid attention to, and not much about maybe serving and caring for another person, or even putting that person's interests above your own.

These answers didn't come from nowhere; they're a perfect distillation of the cultural trends that social critics have been describing for many decades. Way

back in 1966, Philip Rieff wrote “The Triumph of the Therapeutic," arguing that shared moral frameworks were being discarded and replaced by therapeutic values. The highest good is not some sacred ideal, but rather, personal well-being and psychological adjustment. Then in 1979, Christopher Lasch wrote “The Culture of Narcissism,” which built on Rieff and argued that therapeutic values and consumer capitalism combined to produce narcissistic individuals — self-absorbed, fragile and desperate for recognition.

In such a culture people are naturally going to define love as the feeling they get when somebody satisfies their craving for positive and tender attention, not as something they selflessly give to another.

In other, less self-oriented cultures, and in other times, love was seen as something closer to self-abnegation than to self-comfort. It was seen as a force so powerful that it could overcome our natural selfishness. Such love begins with admiration, a glimpse of another person who seems beautiful, good and true. Suddenly you can’t stop thinking about her. You think you see her face in every crowd. Then comes the decentering. You realize your most sacred treasures are in another. In his 1822 book, “On Love,” Stendhal describes the process of “crystallization,” during which we idealize the people we love as if they were coated with shimmering crystals.

Falling in love in this view is not a decision you make for your own benefit, but a submission, a poetic surrender you assent to, often without counting the cost. It is not empowering, but rather it involves a loss of self-control. “There

is a lovely disarray that comes with attraction," essayist and poet John O'Donohue wrote. "When you find yourself deeply attracted to someone, you gradually begin to lose your grip on the frames that order your life. Indeed, much of your life becomes blurred as that countenance comes into clearer focus. A relentless magnet draws all your thoughts toward it."

He continued: "When you are together, time becomes unmercifully swift. It always ends too soon. No sooner have you parted than you are already imagining your next meeting, counting the hours."

Love is not an emotion (though it kicks up a lot of emotions); it is a motivational state — a desire to be close to and serve another. It blurs the boundary between one person and another.

This blending of one whole person with another whole person reduces the distinction between giving and receiving, because when you give to your beloved it feels like you are giving to a piece of yourself, and this giving is more pleasurable than receiving. The goal of this giving, the goal of love, is to enhance the life of another.

In his 1956 book, "The Art of Loving," psychoanalyst and philosopher Erich Fromm argued that love is not a feeling; it's a practice, an art form. He wrote, "Love is the active concern for the life and growth of that which we love." It's a series of actions that requires discipline, care, respect, knowledge and the overcoming of narcissism. It's a form of love, for example, to go downstairs

and get someone a glass of water in the middle of the night, and it's a great gift to ask for that water and give the other the opportunity to serve. (This is a conviction I have trouble keeping at top of mind at 2 a.m.)

I'm not saying people actually lived in this altruistic way back then, but it was a prevailing social ideal — the subject of romantic poems, stories and songs — something to shoot for. The kind of love these people are describing is an outpouring. In this conception of love, feeling beloved is a byproduct two people receive *after* they have given themselves away to each other. In this view of love, self-centeredness is our main problem, and love is a delicious and demanding remedy. Marriage is an attempt to institutionalize this generosity so that it lasts after the first delirium has faded away.

It's been a long time since the prevailing view was that self-centeredness is our main problem. We have too many Me decades under our belt for that. The ethos of self-effacement (I'm no better than anybody else and nobody is better than I am) has been replaced by the ethos of self-display. Look at Instagram, TikTok or the occupant of the White House if you doubt me.

I wonder if the general misery and disconnection all around is partly a product of the gradual buildup of the culture of the therapeutic, the narcissistic, the performative. When the culture encourages people to idolize the needs of the self — to focus on self-actualization, self-esteem, self-display — that doesn't produce strong people but needy, touchy and insecure ones. A narcissist has

trouble loving because a narcissist can't really see another person. The only reality he perceives is the effect other people are having on him.

When I look at the self-help bestsellers of our day, they are not generally about how to pour out service; they are more often about how to protect yourself from other people. The general theme is, don't let other people get you down. As I write, a book called "The Let Them Theory" is the No. 1 seller on Amazon, a prime example of the genre. The core idea is that you need to release your impulse to manage and improve others and focus on YOU — your own well-being. If somebody's doing something annoying or judgmental, just let him or her.

It's not surprising that a culture that centers the self is going to produce inverted theories of love. I sometimes hear people say that you have to love yourself before you can love others. But this is backward. You have to observe yourself loving others before you can see yourself as lovable and before you genuinely are lovable.

Final Round:


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THE ONLY THING MORE POWERFUL THAN HATE IS LOVE
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