Give the Gift of Love

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It seems as if no sooner are the holidays over than it is time for another gift-giving holiday: Valentine's Day. The problem is Valentine's Day is not just another bigger-is-better gift-giving day. For Valentine's Day, it really is "the thought that counts," and if your experiences are anything like mine, you know that you better put a lot of thought into the gift you give your significant other.

Of course, the box of stale, low-quality chocolates you bought at the gas station when you were filling your car's gas tank makes a statement. Unless the statement you are trying to make, however, is "Our relationship is like a box of chocolates: stale and low-quality," you had better spend a few minutes considering your options and plan ahead.

The type of Valentine's Day gift you give depends a lot on your relationship. For example, you would undoubtedly give an entirely different gift if your relationship were only a few months old than if you had been married for 20 years. This month, "Online Connection" offers several ideas to keep you out of the proverbial dog house on Valentine's Day.

RELATIVELY NEW RELATIONSHIPS

If your relationship is new, you don't want to overwhelm your significant other with over-the-top schmaltzy romance. Instead of sending two dozen red roses (which could not only put a significant dent in your wallet but also unwanted pressure on your relationship), consider one of the quirky gifts available at NiftyGifty.com (www.niftygifty.com) or Uncle Mame (www.unclemame.com).

NiftyGifty.com specializes in pop-culture gifts. For example, peruse the virtual shelves of the Wacky and Wonderful department to find items such as a Freeloader Fork—a fork with a two-foot extendible handle for tasting other people's meals. Or perhaps your significant other would appreciate a set of pink lawn flamingoes or a rubber chicken. The gifts you’ll find at NiftyGifty.com appeal to the whimsical and fun, but don’t spell commitment.

Uncle Mame also sells memories—or at least the icons of memories. For example, Uncle Mame sells commemorative local and national cereal boxes from the 80s through the 90s—plus a healthy selection of the intentionally brief promotional cereals.

At Uncle Mame, you may also find the perfect Valentine's Day card in the Weird Cards section. Or, check out the PEZ section to find a perfect candy dispenser for your sweetheart.

Hammacher Schlemmer (www.hammacherschlemmer.com) also sells less traditional gifts. For example, you could give one of America's most famous trees—such as offspring from the red maples at Walden Pond, an apple tree with lineage back to John Chapman's (Johnny Appleseed) sojourn through the midwest, or a descendant of the Sycamore seeds that traveled aboard Apollo 14.

A SEASONED VETERAN

If you have been in a relationship for quite a while, you should know exactly what your significant other likes. The problem is that you have probably given him or her the gifts you can come up with and you may be fresh out of ideas. You can't go wrong giving someone a day devoted entirely to them.

For example, you could give a day at a spa, complete with massage and other pampering treatments. Give a spa gift certificate from SpaWish.com (www.spawish.com). SpaWish.com has arrangements with more than 1,000 day spas throughout the United States to accept the SpaWish.com gift certificate.

If you would like someone to give you a day at the spa, SpaWish.com can drop the hint for you. Simply complete the To and From fields of the Drop a Hint form, and click send.

Round out the day with a quiet, romantic gourmet dinner you have prepared. Can't cook? No problem. Check out Impromptu Gourmet (www.impromptugourmet.com). The fresh ingredients for your gourmet meal arrive shopped, chopped, cleaned, and measured. You perform the simple final cooking steps, and in less than 30 minutes, a fabulous gourmet dinner is ready. The menus available through Impromptu Gourmet have been designed and approved by some of the most well-known chefs in the country.

The Impromptu Gourmet web site is designed so that you can prepare for your meal. Each selection includes a list of what is provided by Impromptu Gourmet (almost everything) and what you have to provide (items such as pans, serving dishes, and sometimes small amounts of items like salt, pepper, and oil). You can also view step-by-step cooking instructions so that you can determine if you are up to the task. Also included is a suggested wine pairing to complement your meal.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

If you still can’t find something to suit your tastes, put a twist on the traditional Valentine's Day gifts. For example, instead of sending flowers, enroll the recipient in a flower-of-the-month club. The Fresh Cut Flower of the Month Club (www.flowermonthclub.com) will send a bouquet of flowers once a month for U.S. $38.95 per month. Each shipment is sent with a newsletter that explains where the featured selections come from, how they’re grown, how to care for them, and plenty of great gardening tips.

A bit pricier option is the tropical flower of the month club offered by WithOurAloha.com (www.withouraloha.com). For U.S. $188.35 for three months, you can send beautiful tropical flowers from Hawaii.

Clubs of America (www.clubsfamerica.com) not only features a flower of the month club but also features other monthly clubs. You are sure to find something that your Valentine will love. Choose from pizza, coffee, chocolate, beer, wine, or cigars. Prices range from U.S. $24 a month to U.S. $40 a month. ☮