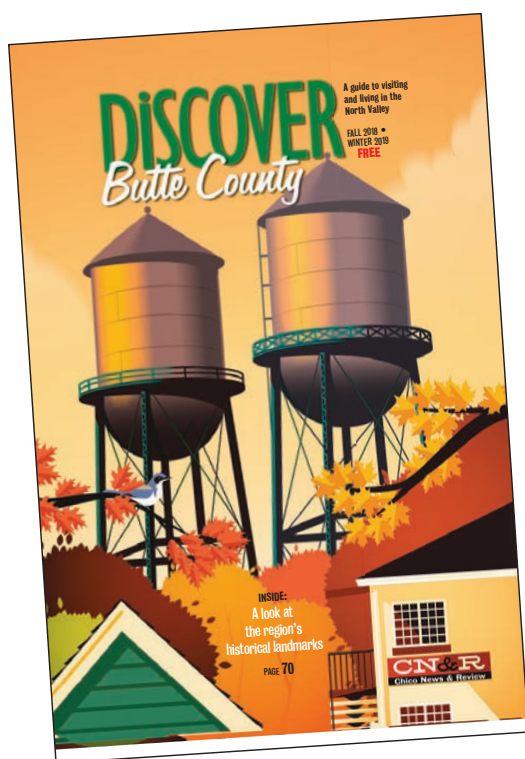


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Let's get cookin'

Are there aphrodisiacs in your pantry?

The best thing in life may be free—but love isn't necessarily easy. People have known this through many ages of trembling voices, wobbly knees and throbbing chests—and some of the greatest works of art, music and literature were created from the

by
Alastair Bland

gloomy depths of heartache. Wouldn't it be nice, so many have wondered, if affection could be won via some medicine, potion or food?

Indeed, the notion of the aphrodisiac may be as old as humanity. The word itself, of course, derives from the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, and for ages the Greeks and Romans, the Egyptians, cultures of East Asia, and indigenous peoples of the New World have been touting certain herbs, spices and miscellaneous odd edibles as enhancers of libido and affection. But has an aphrodisiac ever truly worked? Most scientific sources seem to believe not—and the fact that so many items in so many cultures are named as love enhancers may indicate that people are still looking for that secret powder or potion that actually does the trick.

Should you want to experiment this Valentine's Day, you might as well start cheap and simple: Get some onions simmering at low heat in a pan of olive oil—for even this vulgar bulb of the farm field has been credited by some as bearing aphrodisiacal powers. Garlic and ginger are also believed to induce feelings of desire; so mince them and add to the simmering onions, and have the house fragrant and hot by the time your sweetie gets home.



Doubt that cheap bulbs and roots will work? Then boost your budget and move to the fancy-food aisle, where dark chocolate, caviar, lobster, truffles (both the chocolate ones and the fungal), and fresh figs are often said to be passion promoters. In Imperial County, in an attempt to capitalize on the perceived sexual powers of figs, farmers have used advanced farming methods to extend the annual autumn harvest of figs through the fall, past the winter, and well into the new year with the chief objective of selling fresh figs on Valentine's Day.

Shape and form are obvious reminders of sexuality, and it's the physical build of certain fruits and vegetables that have garnered them reputations as aphrodisiacs. Indeed, such ubiquitous staples as bananas and asparagus can supposedly spark passion. Aroma, too, undoubtedly affects the brain and memory—and if a smell hits your lover just right, it could get him or her purring (not that you should necessarily hang your Valentine's Day evening on a saucepan of onions).

One of the oddest foods I've ever heard touted as an aphrodisiac is burro meat, which cowboys in Baja California have told me will

charge a man's engine like a jumper cable from a Chevy. Other sorts of folks, meanwhile, may get witchy on Valentine's Day; among their favored libido builders are frog bones, a lover's hair, bird brains, and even human skin burned to ashes and mixed into blood.

But let's get real: Many sources say the chemical effects of aphrodisiacs are imaginary and that the only results, if any, of applied love potions can be attributed simply to placebo. If that's the case, then no sense in stealing bones from the cemetery and grinding them into a powder (another supposed trick) and secretly sprinkling it over your lover's morning latte. Instead, make it plain and obvious what you're up to: Put a bottle of sparkling wine in a pail of ice cubes, bring it to your partner in bed, tell them it's organic and add that it cost you \$50. Then push a tray of oysters at them, plus some of those figs, if you can land a handful.

No, these foods won't have any chemical effects that turn your lover on. Instead, like so much else in the game of love, it's the thought that counts—and if this gourmet platter doesn't win you a kiss, heck, get the shovel and wait until sundown. □