

Ten Tips for Men to Survive Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day: The holiday that men fear and women adore.

Recently, I was speaking with my brother about Valentine's Day. He recounted that several years ago he suggested to his wife of 40 years that they ignore Valentine's Day, telling her that the day "was for the young and they were old."

I will leave to your imagination how these comments went down with his wife. Doug was explaining her reaction, but I was laughing too hard to hear most of what he said.

Why is it that we guys, or at least many of us, dislike Valentine's Day? And why do so many woman find the Feast of Love so special?

Certainly the traditional Valentine's Day gifts lean female: heart-covered cards, bouquets of flowers, boxes of candy, even those candy hearts with messages like "Be Mine" or "Crazy 4U." For some guys, Valentine's Day is like a chick flick, only they're starring in the movie, all too often playing the part of the bumbling boyfriend or husband who is clueless about romance. Women think of Valentine's Day as "Sleepless in Seattle;" men view it as more akin to parachuting behind German lines in "The Dirty Dozen."

During my years of marriage, I was on occasion one of the many guys shambling shame-faced through the grocery store line on February 14, flowers in one hand, card in the other. We'd pay the checkout clerk, head into the parking lot, sit in our cars writing something affectionate on the card, and go home to wives or girlfriends who knew as soon as we walked through the door that we'd stopped at the grocery store.

Anathema.

Men, it doesn't have to be this way, take it from an old guy. Here are some tips to help you enjoy, or at least endure, Valentine's Day without feeling like a jamoke:

1. Keep mum.

I don't mean the species of flower. Unless your significant other also dislikes Valentine's Day, keep your negative feelings to yourself. Never, for example, say the whole thing was created by Hallmark in collaboration with growers of roses and makers of chocolate.

2. Appreciate history.

Valentine's Day has its roots in Ancient Rome. By your participation, you are honoring history and maintaining tradition. *Omnia vincit amor* – love conquers all, as those ancients used to say. Make it your Valentine's Day motto.

3. Shop before Valentine's Day.

Card, flowers, and gifts. When you arrive home February 13, tell the lady in your life you picked up the flowers a day early, and ask for a vase. Be sure to let her see the other packages and bags under your arm. Remember: Early, early, early. She'll not only be flattered, but amazed by your forethought.

4. Love by delivery.

If your loved one works outside of the home, call a florist and have the flowers (preferably roses) delivered to her place of employment. You will score points both for the flowers and for calling public attention to your love for her.

5. Plan the evening.

Make sure her calendar is clear. Hire a babysitter. Make a reservation at a restaurant. Valentine's Day is a busy day for restaurants, so if you dislike crowds and want privacy, pick a

weekend night near Valentine's Day.

6. Remember: "The key to a woman's heart is an unexpected gift at an unexpected time."

This is a line from the movie Finding Forrester. Now, Valentine's Day makes it difficult to deliver on the "unexpected time" part of the formula, but it's not impossible. Think outside the box on a gift. Skip the chocolates and buy her some jewelry or a beautiful scarf. Take her to the ballet or present her with a gift certificate for a beauty spa. Just make sure to give her something that will leave more of a memory than candy wrappers or dead roses.

7. Avoid practical gifts.

You may want a gym membership or a tool kit from her, all well and good. But if you give the lady an exercise bike or a Cuisinart mixer, no matter how pricey, the day will end badly. A gallows or a firing squad might be preferable to the fate in store for you.

8. Make it personal.

Of course, buy the Valentine's card and add a personal message, but then write her a separate note, preferably by hand. Here's where you tell her what she means to you, how much you appreciate all she does, how much you love her. Your prose doesn't have to be flowery, or even well written, but it must come from the heart. Sincerity trumps bogus pomposity every time.

9. Celebrate.

Instead of enduring or disparaging Valentine's Day, why not have some fun? You must mark the occasion anyway, so why not whoop it up? Make the evening an extravaganza for the woman you love and for yourself. Here's a great excuse to dine at that Thai restaurant you've wanted to try, or to visit that

brewery you both enjoy. Invite some friends to your house or apartment, and throw a party.

10. Crown that lady queen for the day.

That's about it.

February 14th is the Feast of Love. Make it so.

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