



# Friends, *a Love Story*

*Who says Valentine's Day is only for couples? Instead of booking a table for two, invite the whole gang over for some festive, heartwarming fare.*

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**February 14** is a day for proposals—usually of the marriage and living-happily-ever-after kind. But I have a proposal of a different sort: that we recast Valentine's Day as a food holiday celebrating community and friendship so that everyone, whether single or in a relationship, can join in.

I got married in my 30s and stayed married until my mid-40s. Like many couples, my husband and I had our Valentine's Day traditions—those cozy, unquestioned romantic rituals that cause single people to refer to paired-off friends as “smug.” In our case, we celebrated every year with a meal at a special-occasion restaurant in New York City. That was the beginning of my associating the day with eating, and I lumped it in with all the other food-related holidays—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July. I looked forward to our February dinner >





*Vadouvan  
Curry  
Shrimp*

as much as I did an Independence Day barbecue.

Then my marriage ended. When the next Valentine's Day came, I had no one to celebrate it with. I reflected instead on the deeply unsettling weirdness of a day that fetishizes romantic love and therefore makes brutally clear, for many people, what they may lack. That's not true of most other holidays. On Thanksgiving, for example, those who can't afford turkey and the trimmings aren't alone—churches and soup kitchens make a point of serving a meal to anyone in need—and people living far from their families often get invited to friends' homes. Where are the Saint Valentine's

charities to provide the uncoupled with holiday affection?

Romantic love is a slippery, inexact commodity, after all: You can't buy it, you can't conjure it, and you can't count on its being there tomorrow. But if the holiday were food-related, we could all look forward to it as a collective, warm, easy pleasure. "What are you cooking for Saint Valentine's?" we could ask one another, or "Want to go out with us for Valentine's Day dinner?"

Shortly after that solitary February 14, I fell in love again. Last year, our third Valentine's Day together, Brendan and I found ourselves alone in his family's remote New Hampshire farmhouse. >





## VADOUVAN CURRY SHRIMP

*Vadouvan is a French-Indian spice mix that gives this dish a sophisticated depth of flavor.*

- ½ Tbsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. ground cardamom
- ½ tsp. ground mustard
- ½ tsp. turmeric
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 1½ tsp. thinly sliced fresh curry leaves (optional)
- ½ tsp. ground fenugreek (optional)
- 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 4 large shallots (½ pound), thinly sliced lengthwise
- 6 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced lengthwise
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 24 large shrimp (about 1¼ pounds), shelled and deveined
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp. yellow mustard seeds, toasted, for garnish (optional)
- Lime wedges, for serving

- 1.** In a small bowl, combine cumin, cardamom, ground mustard, turmeric, and red pepper flakes. Add curry leaves and fenugreek, if using.
- 2.** In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add shallots and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until they start to soften, about 2 minutes. Add 2 Tbsp. water, cover, and reduce heat to low, stirring a few times, until golden brown and very soft, about 10 minutes more. Add ¼ tsp. salt and 1 tsp. spice mixture and cook over medium heat, stirring, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Scrape mixture into a medium bowl. Return skillet to stove.
- 3.** Add butter to skillet and cook over medium heat until starting to brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Add shrimp in an even layer and season with ¼ tsp. salt. Cook over medium heat until shrimp start to curl, about 1 minute per

side. Sprinkle with 2 tsp. spice mixture and continue to cook, stirring, until fragrant and shrimp are almost cooked through, about 2 minutes more. Stir in shallot-garlic mixture and lime juice and simmer until heated through, about 1 minute more. Season with remaining ¼ tsp. salt.

**4.** Spoon shallot-garlic mixture onto 6 small plates. Add 4 shrimp to each plate and scatter on top scallions and mustard seeds, if using. Serve with lime wedges.

**MAKES 6 SERVINGS.**

*Active time: 25 minutes*

*Total time: 45 minutes*

## CAULIFLOWER SOUP WITH CRÈME FRAÎCHE

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 1½ heads (3½ pounds) cauliflower, cored and coarsely chopped
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 1 cup crème fraîche
- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ cup minced chives
- Truffle oil, for drizzling (optional)

- 1.** In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onion, cover, and cook until soft, stirring occasionally, about 8 minutes. Add 3 cups water, cauliflower, and heavy cream and bring to a boil. Lower heat to medium-low and simmer until cauliflower is soft, about 25 minutes. Stir in crème fraîche.
- 2.** Working in batches, puree cauliflower mixture in a blender until very smooth. Return soup to pot, add Parmesan and salt, and bring to a gentle simmer.
- 3.** Ladle soup into bowls and garnish with chives. Drizzle with truffle oil, if using, and serve.

**MAKES 6 SERVINGS.**

*Active time: 30 minutes*

*Total time: 50 minutes*

Not the standard Valentine's menu: warm, velvety soup and exotically spiced shrimp set the tone from the start.



## Cauliflower Soup with Crème Fraîche