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## Valentine's Day Fun

How do you celebrate Valentine's Day? Well, in case you haven't looked at your calendar lately, the big day is on Saturday! Traditionally, the day is marked with roses and candy, but you can also give simple, yet sweet, homemade gifts or more importantly, just the gift of time spent with your loved ones.

Plan an activity with your children. Making homemade cookies is always a big hit with young ones. Let them do fun cut-out hearts and provide frosting and valentine sprinkles for decorating. Then let them go! Make extra cards and deliver to grandparents, shut-ins, neighbors, or just someone who needs to feel special. This also teaches our children how to give of their time to others.

Another project would be to let them make their own Valentine Cards. All you need is some construction paper, scrapbooking paper, markers, glitter, glue, or any other items you might have in your craft supplies. The cards are perfect for family members who would love something that comes from the heart.

How about spending a couple of hours curled up with a great movie? Have everyone in the family gather around the television and provide movie-night snacks. Popcorn is a must, but also provide other family favorites. An easy idea for the pre-movie dinner is a Taco Bar. Set up a buffet-style dinner with taco shells, meat, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, guacamole, and picante sauce. Then everyone can build their own taco. You might also want beans, rice, or warm tortillas to round out the meal. It is simple, but kids love it! For most busy families time spent like this is rare, so enjoy!

Having fun on Valentine's Day doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. Be creative and carve out some quality time with the ones you love. No matter what the activity, make it something everyone will enjoy and it will be a success! If you want to do a little special baking yourself, here's a great cookie recipe.

## Chocolate Caramel Thumbprints

- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 16 caramels, unwrapped
- 3 tablespoons whipping cream

1-1/4 cups finely chopped pecans  
1/2 cup (3 ounces) semisweet chocolate pieces  
1 teaspoon shortening

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. and lightly grease a cookie sheet

Separate egg and place yolk and white in separate bowls. Cover and chill egg white until needed. In a large mixing bowl beat butter with an electric mixer for 30 seconds. Add sugar and beat well. Beat in egg yolk, milk, and vanilla.

In another bowl stir together the flour, cocoa powder, and salt. Add flour mixture to butter mixture and beat until well blended. Wrap the cookie dough in plastic wrap and chill for 2 hours or until firm and easy to work with.

Slightly beat reserved egg white. Shape the dough into 1-inch balls. Roll the balls in egg white, then in pecans to coat. Place balls 1 inch apart on prepared cookie sheet. Using your thumb, make an indentation in the center of each cookie.

Bake for 10 minutes or until edges are firm. If cookie centers puff during baking, repress carefully with your thumb. Spoon melted caramel mixture into indentations of cookies. Transfer cookies to wire racks; cool. (If necessary, reheat caramel mixture to keep it spoonable.)

In a saucepan heat and stir caramels and whipping cream over low heat until mixture is smooth. Set aside. In another saucepan heat and stir chocolate pieces and shortening over low heat until chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth. Let cool slightly. Drizzle chocolate mixture over tops of cookies.\* Let stand until chocolate is set. Tip: If desired, transfer the warm chocolate mixture to a resealable plastic bag. Cut a small hole in one corner of the bag. Drizzle cookies with chocolate mixture. Makes about 36 cookies

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