

Saint Valentine's Day....love and friendship

By Seena Chriti

Many different versions of San Valetine's Day exist. No matter what version, this day is celebrated on February 14 around the world. Some countries may celebrate the day before or after.

In ancient times, the Romans celebrated the Lupercalia during the 13 to 15 in February, during which the men sacrificed a goat, and, with the bloody leather, they lightly stroke the women who were anxiously waiting for it. It was believed that this action would help them to be fertile.

During this celebration, both women and men drank wine, which also included a lottery during which the men took a name with a woman's name from a bottle. The couples then spent this night together, and if they wanted, they would stay together in the future as a couple.

It has been said that the ancient Romans were responsible for naming the actual day of love. The Emperor Claudio II executed two men, both were named Valentine, on February 14 during different years in the third century A.D. It is said that they were killed because they were helping to marry Christian couples against the imperial orders which said that young people should not marry because the family distracted the men from being efficient in the army. Their martyrdom was honored by the Catholic church for the San Valentine's celebration.

In the fifth century, Pope Gelasius I complicated things by combining San Valentine's (the Catholic holiday) with Lupercalia (the pagan Roman holiday), accomplishing his mission to eliminate the rituals of Roman excesses during this holiday.

Shakespeare helped to make this celebration romantic in his literature, which acquired a lot of popularity in England and Europe. Hand-made paper cards were the favorite gift during the Middle Ages.

Eventually the tradition and celebration came to the new world. The Industrial Revolution gave way to commercial Valentine's cards in the 19th century. In 1913, Hallmark Cards of Kansas City, Mo., began to mass produce the cards.

Since then, the month of February has never been the same. Now, the chocolate, candy, flowers and gift retailers have taken advantage of this day to celebrate the biggest sales of the year.

On this day, people celebrate their love, and for many, chocolates and hearts are their choices. For others, it is a simple hug.

I would like to write about the culinary tradition of a far-away country that honors love, faithfulness and a couple's commitment. In Vietnam, a special dessert named Banh Phu The, the love cake, is prepared to give to the fiancé's family to announce the engagement of the couple. This dessert is also served in traditional weddings in Vietnam and also as a wedding invitation. The dessert is very sticky, which symbolizes the wish that the couple will be strong and close. It has a golden filling of yellow mung beans which signifies the loyalty and fidelity of the couple, symbolizing a golden heart.

Banh Phu The is made out of tapioca, pandan, mung bean paste, sugar and sesame seeds. Normally, it is covered with coconut leaves in a perfect little box. It is called Banh Phu The for the way in which it is wrapped. The top and bottom of the box are identical, symbolizing the perfection of the couple as twin souls.

This is a very special and traditional cake, and even though it is principally a wedding cake and not necessarily the only symbol of February 14, I find it very symbolic to include it in this article where the commercial part of San Valentine's is so dominant that sometimes we forget the main elements, which really are love and friendship.



BANH PHU THE

BANH PHU THE FILLING

½ lb. (1 cup) mung beans
240 ml. water (1 cup)
8 tbsp. Sugar
2 tbsp. vegetable oil
1 pinch of salt
2 tbsp. vanilla extract

CAKE MIX

½ LB. (2 cups) tapioca
2 cups water
2 tbsp. mung bean starch
2 tbsp. water
8 tbsp. sugar
2 tbsp. oil
½ cup of unsweetened shredded coconut
A few drops of coloring or Pandan extract
Toasted sesame seeds

PREPARATION

Rinse the mung beans until the water is clear, and soak in water for an hour. Heat with 1 cup of water, and lower the flame when it boils, cover and cook for 10 minutes, until the beans are soft and can be mashed.

Blend the following in a food processor; beans, sugar, vegetable oil, salt and vanilla until a thin paste is formed. Divide and form small balls.

Combine all the ingredients for the cake and mix well to dissolve the sugar and tapioca. Heat in the microwave for 1 ½ minutes, take out and mix. Return to heat for another minute. Take out, and while it is hot, use a whisk to vigorously mix until a very sticky and homogenous paste is formed. If necessary, you can repeat this process by heating the mix for 1 minute until the desired consistency is formed. The traditional method is by doing this on the stove to obtain the desired consistency.

Add the coloring extract of pandan or other food coloring. Grease the molds (can use muffin tins), add 1 tbsp. of the tapioca mix, add one bean ball and cover with another tbsp. of tapioca. Smooth it with a spatula, and repeat with all of the mixture. 🚩