

# Straight from the Heart

This Valentine's Day, delight your friends and family with special heart-shaped treats, from candies to pancakes



## breakfast in bed

Start off the day with heart-shaped pancakes (\$5.95/2 molds). Add bananas, blueberries, or chocolate chips to King Arthur Flour's all-natural pancake mix (\$5.95). Top off with warm maple syrup. (800) 827-6836; [bakerscatalogue.com](http://bakerscatalogue.com).



## sweet hearts

### BAKE COCONUT MACAROONS

Toss 2½ cups of shredded sweetened coconut, ½ cup sugar, and 2 tablespoons flour together in a large bowl and set aside. Whisk 2 egg whites, ½ teaspoon vanilla extract, and ¼ teaspoon salt together to soft peaks and stir in the coconut mixture. Spread heaping tablespoonfuls of the batter into 2-inch heart shapes 1 inch apart on a parchment-lined baking pan. Bake at 350°F until macaroons begin to brown around the edges—about 12 minutes. Sandwich between two macaroons a filling of raspberry preserves, peanut butter, or hazelnut spread.



**Be mine:** Tie one of Tops Malibu's vintage-inspired tags around your sweetheart's morning coffee mug. At dinnertime, you can use them as napkin rings. \$1.70 each; (808) 828-0071; [topsmalibu.com](http://topsmalibu.com).



**OFFER YOUR HEART** with a box of Pierre Marcolini's sublime white chocolate-covered red hearts. One bite reveals a smooth raspberry chocolate ganache. B.T. McElrath handcrafts his "Love Notes" in small batches, using fresh cream and butter from local dairies.

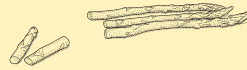
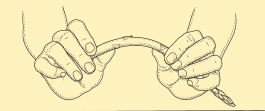
# Fresh Asparagus

Springtime is the peak season for asparagus. Here, some easy tips for preparing and serving the vegetable.

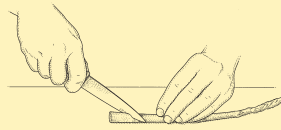
**Choose** asparagus with crisp stalks and tightly closed purple tips. Snap or cut off ends of spears and trim away fibrous skin (see below), especially for thicker, slightly woody stalks. Roast, steam, or grill asparagus, but keep watch; they cook in under 5 minutes and can become mushy and bitter.



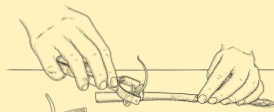
## 3 simple steps



**SNAP** off the tough bottom by grasping both ends with your hands and gently bending. Stalk will break naturally.



**CUT** off the woody bottom of the stems with a sharp knife. Be sure to cut on a diagonal for a nice presentation.



**REMOVE** tough skin from larger asparagus by lightly trimming the bottom third of the stalk with a vegetable peeler.



## a perfect dressing

Sweet and tart, aged balsamic vinegar drizzled lightly over cooked asparagus offers a simple and elegant way to serve it forth.

- 1 A secret blend of aged and young vinegars that make up Villa Manodori Aceto Balsamico Artigianale create a tangy syrup that can be served with berries, ice cream, or cheese. \$44.95; [mackenzieltd.com](http://mackenzieltd.com).
- 2 Cavalli Riserva Nando's smooth, rich balsamic seasoning is ideal for homemade vinaigrettes. \$44.95; [mackenzieltd.com](http://mackenzieltd.com).
- 3 B.R. Cohn's Balsamic Vinegar balances its sweet and sour flavors with hints of fresh fig. Try this as a marinade for grilled meats. \$15; [brcoholiveoil.com](http://brcoholiveoil.com).

**From pot to platter** Present asparagus on this hand-painted ceramic platter and bowl. Small holes on the bowl's bottom keep steamed spears crisp. Bonus: The platter beneath can be used on its own.

ITALIAN ASPARAGUS  
PLATTER AND BOWL  
Sur la Table, \$52.95  
[surlatable.com](http://surlatable.com)



# Springtime Centerpiece

This easy—and delicious—project brings color to the table, and calls for just a few common grocery store items



## 1 shaping

Use large marshmallows for bodies. Slice a thin piece for a lamb's head, and a trimmed half for chick's. For pig snout, use half a mini marshmallow. For ears, snip a mini diagonally.



## 2 coloring

Set up a different bowl for each desired color. Dilute each drop of food coloring with 1 tablespoon of water for pastels. Add a drop at a time to the bowl to control the shade of your mix.



## 3 coating

Use chopped sweetened coconut flakes, sprinkles, or colored sugar to coat marshmallow bodies. For barnyard grass, toss coconut with green coloring. Spread on a baking pan to dry.



## 4 assembly

Apply a thin layer of marshmallow spread to body parts and roll in your coating from step 3. Attach heads, ears, and snouts with a dab of spread. Let sit for half an hour before handling.



## 5 final touches

Cut jellybeans in half to use as feet, noses, and arms. Attach with dabs of marshmallow spread. Use decorating icing for facial details. Store in an airtight container for up to two days.

**The Barnyard:** Use a plant tray for the base and popsicle sticks or twigs for the fence.

# Tea Party

Display your teapot collection—or get one started for Mother’s Day. Here, a look at what’s new and a few classics.



- 1.** Botanique: Bernardaud, \$588. **2.** Vintage Stacking: Elegant Eggcup, \$250. **3.** Blue Canton: Mottahedeh, \$160. **4.** Oriente Italiano: Richard Ginori 1735 Inc., \$229. **5.** Ballet Ribbon: Waterford Wedgwood USA, \$200. **6.** Cobalt Blossom: Milestones by Mottahedeh, \$40. **7.** Old Country Roses: Royal Albert, \$160. **8.** American Wildflowers: Herend, \$765. **9.** 1948 Mark Hopkins Hotel Silver: Paris Hotel Boutique, \$225. **10.** Opal Innocence: Lenox, \$299. **11.** Laque de Chine: Haviland, \$570. **12.** Floral Haven Teapot: Spode, \$200 for 3-piece set. **13.** Everyday Whiteware teapot: Fishs Eddy, \$6.95. **14.** Imperial Promise: Porcel for Mottahedeh, \$85. SEE SHOPPING GUIDE FOR DETAILS.

# A Taste for Tea

Tips, trends, and some extraordinary aromatic infusions

## fancy yourself in the sipping set?

■ **COLLECTIONS** Often one's first collecting endeavor, tea-cups frequently reflect family history and personal tastes.

■ **TEA SERVICE** Specialty shops and many hotels offer afternoon tea service. Log on to [countryliving.com](http://countryliving.com) for our editors' favorite locations.

■ **SAVORIES** Branch out from scones and serve tea with dim sum or spicy Indian dishes.

■ **GIFT IDEA** This Mother's Day, present Mom with a tea journal, where she can make note of her favorite blends, shops, and teatime experiences.

■ **DID YOU KNOW?** The Dutchess of Bedford, one of Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting, is credited with inventing the afternoon tea in order to alleviate the dutchess's late-day "sinking feeling."



High tea is served on a dining (i.e., high) table with a substantial meal. Afternoon, or low, tea is served on a shorter table with small dishes that constitute a light snack.



**floral** Celebrate any occasion with flower teas. Store in airtight containers in a cool area.

- 1&5. Silver-needle white: mellow; hints of rose.
2. Chrysanthemum: sweet; soothing.
3. Green with chrysanthemum blossom: nutty; sweet aftertaste.
4. Green with rose: heady floral aroma.
6. German chamomile: fresh meadow scent.
7. White with amaranth flower: earthy; mellow.
8. Assorted bags of chamomile, green, rooibos teas: bold; tangy.
9. Jasmine with rosebuds: intense perfume.
10. Green with cornflowers: fruity; vibrant.

## exotic

Zhena's Gypsy Tea offers bold flavors of global origin in her certified organic blends of fruit extracts, spices, and flowers. [gypsytea.com](http://gypsytea.com).

