



# Rural Intelligence

## RI Selects: Aphrodisiacs: Myth or Reality?

February 13, 2010

Before Viagra, there was rhinoceros horn. On Saturday night, apropos of Valentine's Day, parttime Berkshire County resident, the noted food historian and cookbook author Francine Segan, will talk about the history of aphrodisiacs from ancient Egypt through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and up to today.

Segan's talk is rife with such tantalizing trivia as why the ancient Romans ate penis-shaped bread, which vegetable was thought to be responsible for King Henry VIII's renowned stamina, the foods Casanova swore by to insure a passionate partner, and the erotic origins of the champagne glass. She will talk about the bawdy jokes, riddles, and puns customarily told during Renaissance banquets to add spice to the dessert course. And she will discuss the foods that have, through the ages, been thought to do the trick—not just the obvious oysters, truffles and caviar, but also such alarming exoticia as frog saliva and rhinoceros horn.



**RI:** How did you become an expert on aphrodisiacs?

**FS:** I'm a food historian. I've written four cookbooks and then I did a book on the history of entertaining. As far back as Hippocrates, foods were used as prescriptions. Casanova in his memoirs talks about the foods he used to seduce, he even advises which plates you should serve things on.

**RI:** Is there any scientific basis to these claims?

**FS:** Chocolate has been studied recently. It releases endorphins—a warm rush of energy—similar to jogging.

**RI:** There are a lot of chocolatiers in the Berkshires, do you have a favorite?

**FS:** I love the artisans up here but nobody in the Berkshires makes chocolate. They play with chocolate that has already been made. Guido's has some terrific chocolates from Italy. I also love Lock, Stock & Barrel in Great Barrington. At the fancy food show in Parma recently, I discovered a cookie called pistachio croccante—by the Sicilian company Falanga—that won the prize for the Best New Sweet of the Year. When I got back, I went into Lock Stock & Barrel, and he already had it! I asked him, 'How did you get this cookie?' and he said, 'Ah, I have my sources.'

At the end of Segan's talk, there will be a lavish dessert tasting—chocolates, cakes and cookies—all provided by Dolce Italia, followed by a screening of the Italian-American-themed rom com, *Moonstruck*.

### Valentine's Eve at The Mahaiwe

Great Barrington, MA

Francine Segan's talk, 7 p.m.

Dessert reception, 7:30 p.m.

*Moonstruck* screening, 8 p.m.

URL: <http://www.ruralintelligence.com/index.php>

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