

## **That's amore!**

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In Italy, food equals love, so who better to turn to for a romantic dinner menu to spice things up for Valentine's Day?

Italians are known for their cooking. To the long list of delicacies from Italy pasta, prosciutto, Parmesan cheese and olive oil Americans often forget to add chocolate.

The Italian trade commission has launched a campaign focused on educating American consumers on authentic Italian sweets available in the U.S. that includes chocolate, baked goods, specialty cakes and candy made with natural, healthy ingredients.

Francine Segan, food historian and cookbook author and recently named the U.S. spokesperson by Dolce Italia for The Italian Confectioners Association, has come up with the following "Mystical Love Potion Menu," to help put a little romance into your Valentine's Day this year.

### **Salad with Chocolate Balsamic Vinaigrette**

By Francine Segan, [www.francinesegan.com](http://www.francinesegan.com)

Serves 8

cup balsamic vinegar  
1/2 ounce dark chocolate (63-85 percent)  
4 to 5 cups arugula  
1 head radicchio, shredded  
1 purple onion, thinly sliced  
1/2 cup olive oil

Put the vinegar and chocolate in a small saucepan and heat over very low flame until the chocolate is melted and the vinegar reduced, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the oil and season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss in a serving bowl with the arugula, radicchio and onion. Serve.

### **Drunken Figs with Prosciutto and Chocolate**

By Francine Segan, [www.francinesegan.com](http://www.francinesegan.com)

Serves 8

18 dried whole dry Calimyrna figs (green figs)  
1 cup dry white wine  
4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto  
4 ounces milk chocolate  
Smoked coarse sea salt

Bring the figs and wine to a simmer in a small saucepan, over low heat until the figs are soft, about 5 minutes. Allow to cool. Cut a tiny opening into the bottom of the figs and fill with the prosciutto. Melt the chocolate in a double boiler or in the microwave. Drizzle the chocolate onto the figs and lightly sprinkle with salt.

### **Sage Pasta with Chocaviar**

By G.B. Martelli, Venchi Chocolates

Serves 6

1 pound spaghetti or fettuccine  
8 tablespoons butter, 1 stick  
1 shallot, thinly sliced  
20 fresh sage leaves, plus more as garnish or 1/2 teaspoon dried sage  
cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano  
Venchi Chocaviar or bittersweet chocolate, coarsely grated

-more-

Prepare the pasta according to package directions. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat and sauté the shallot and sage leaves about 8 minutes until the butter is golden brown. Toss the pasta with the sage-shallot butter, about a cup of the pasta's cooking water and the Parmesan cheese. Serve topped with a generous sprinkling of Chocaviar or grated chocolate. Garnish with small sage leaves.

### **Oysters with Spinach and Capers**

Adapted from *Shakespeare's Kitchen*, by Francine Segan, [www.francinesegan.com](http://www.francinesegan.com)

Serves 4

1 loaf French baguette bread, cut in 1/2-inch-thick slices  
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil  
2 tablespoons butter  
12 large oysters, shelled, liquid reserved  
2 tablespoons small capers, rinsed and drained  
teaspoon ground marjoram  
teaspoon ground thyme  
teaspoon salt  
8 ounces baby spinach  
2 lemons, thinly sliced

Preheat the broiler. Brush the bread slices with the olive oil and broil for 2 to 3 minutes, or until lightly browned. Melt the butter in a frying pan over medium heat. Add the oysters, the reserved oyster liquid, the capers, marjoram, thyme, and salt to the pan. Cover and cook for 1 minute per side.

Remove the oysters from the pan with a slotted spoon and place in a warm dish. Add the spinach to the pan, cover, and cook for 1 minute, or until just wilted.

Place a heaping tablespoon of spinach in the center of each plate and top with 3 oysters. Spoon the caper sauce over the oysters and arrange the lemon slices around the plate. Serve the French bread slices on the side.

### **Italian Kisses Baci Molten Lava Cake**

By Francine Segan, [www.francinesegan.com](http://www.francinesegan.com)

Serves 2

2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder  
cup sugar  
cup (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces  
2 large egg yolks  
1 large egg  
2 teaspoons all purpose flour  
2 Perugina Baci chocolate candies  
Raspberries or sliced strawberries, as garnish, optional

Butter two -cup ramekins or custard cups. With an electric hand mixer, beat the cocoa, sugar and butter in medium bowl until smooth and creamy. Beat in the egg yolks, then the whole egg and flour. Divide the batter between the two prepared ramekins. Press one Baci, nut side down, in the center of each ramekin. (If you like, at this point, you can refrigerate them for up to 24 hours before baking). Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake the cakes uncovered until edges are firm, about 18 minutes. Cut around the cakes with a butter knife to loosen them, then turn out onto plates.

Francine Segan is an acclaimed food historian, public speaker, and author of four cookbooks, including *Shakespeare's Kitchen* and *Opera Lover's Cookbook*, which was a finalist for both James Beard and IACP awards. She has appeared on hundreds of TV programs, including the Today Show and the Early Show, as well as the Food Network, PBS, History and Discovery channels.

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