

# LOVE *potions*

Aphrodisiacs are everywhere.  
Just pay attention to what works.

By **Jamie Beckman** for USA TODAY

## **IF YOU WANT A LITTLE SPICE**

in your love life, you don't need to whip up a pot of shark-fin soup or Spanish fly potion.

The aphrodisiacs that really work are subtler. Everyday flavors, smells, and sounds can turn up the heat with your partner. Putting a little effort into the way you cook, smell, and speak can have a big payoff.

## Flavors ♥

### **Shellfish**

In addition to their sexy shape, shellfish like oysters and mussels contain a mineral that promotes sexual performance.

"They're loaded with zinc, which increases testosterone levels," says Martha Hopkins, author of the book *InterCourses: An Aphrodisiac Cookbook*. "And testosterone is important for the libido for both men and women."

Serve mussels steamed in a light broth with a piece of bread on the side. Or, if you're out to dinner, order oysters as an appetizer to share. Watching your partner eat oysters is sexy, and they're light enough not to hinder your performance later.

### **Artichokes**

"Artichokes are the ultimate couple food," Hopkins says. "You're sharing this flower, with its greens and purples and whites and yellows, and you cook it, and you spread apart the leaves. It's this over-the-top affair if you think of it in the right way."

Making one for you and your partner is easier than you think: Cut a small, horizontal slice off the stem at the bottom. Set the artichoke upright in a glass bowl or pan. Add a little bit of water to the container. Put it in the microwave and cook it on high for eight minutes. Take it out, and let it sit for 15 minutes.

While it sits, whip up an easy mayonnaise dip: A half-cup of mayo with a teaspoon of butter and a teaspoon of curry powder. Then pluck the artichoke leaf by leaf, dipping the leaves and pulling them through your teeth to remove the meat.

### **Chocolate**

Chocolate contains phenylethylamine, the same chemical that courses through our veins when we experience love. Eat enough of it, and you'll feel like you're in love.

Instead of going straight for the cheap stuff, shoot for chocolate that's more than 65 percent cacao, Hopkins



suggests. "When you increase cacao percentages, you thin the blood, and anytime you thin the blood, blood flow can move to the erogenous zones." For an easy dessert, grab a can of crescent rolls at the supermarket. Roll them up on a cookie sheet and place a square of cacao-packed chocolate in the center of each.

### Truffles

Men, if you splurge on one expensive ingredient when preparing dinner, make it a truffle or two. "Truffles seduce a woman. It's the scent," says Amy Reiley, author of *Romancing the Stove*. "The scent of truffle is very similar to a male pheromone."

Try a little bit of shaved truffle over pasta with mushrooms. Or splash some truffle oil on plain pasta, then serve the dish warm so the truffle scent is released immediately.

### Wild game

Think hunter-gatherer on your next trip to the grocery store and pick up some bison or venison meat. (Or plan ahead and shop online.)

"The flavor and the scent of wild game has this musky, outdoor, wild flavor," Reiley says. "Historically wild game has been considered to be among the aphrodisiacs of the world."

### Coffee

Don't discount the humble coffee date or a post-dinner espresso. "Coffee helps to elevate mood, and sometimes in our minds we mistake that for sexual arousal," Reiley says. "Plus it gives you that little spark of energy. And suddenly other things will sound appealing."

## What *not* to do

Guys, don't make these mistakes when trying to turn on your lady.

### Don't put on sexy tunes by Barry White or Marvin Gaye.

"One problem with playing someone like Barry White is that they might think, 'This guy has a really nice voice. Your voice doesn't seem so good anymore,'" says Greg Bryant, assistant professor of communication studies at UCLA. "So depending on how good your voice is, you might want to stick to instrumentals."

### Don't fake a low voice.

You don't want to try and talk like Barry White, either, even though women prefer a lower-pitched voice. "People can tell when you're artificially lowering your voice," Bryant says. "It doesn't work. In fact, it can actually make it worse. People actually have the opposite reaction: It's even less attractive than the high-pitched version."

### Don't have satin sheets, animal prints, or overly curated decor.

"Women want guys to be guys, and they expect a single guy to have a bachelor apartment. Probably what they care about most is: Is it clean? Is it tidy? Or is it disgusting?" says Geoffrey Miller, author of *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice*

*Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*. "Women probably don't care that much about what exact kind of furnishings or paint he has because they're figuring that if they end up together, she's going to make most of those choices anyway."

### Don't burn scented candles.

If you plan to cook dinner for your lady in your home (or even if you don't), lay off the scented candles. "Scented candles tend to be loaded with fake scents, and it really competes with the food," says Martha Hopkins, author of *InterCourses: An Aphrodisiac Cookbook*. "If you use a candle, make sure it has essential oils like lemon or basil that relate to the foods you're eating."

### Don't share cheese fondue.

You'd think that slowly swirling bread in a melting pot of gooey cheese would set the mood, but it actually does the opposite. "Not that it isn't an adorable idea, and interactive foods are wonderful," says Amy Reiley, author of *Romancing the Stove*. "But you're literally eating cheese and bread. It's not going to give you the right kind of energy for the bedroom."

## Smells

### Candy and pumpkin pie

Here's another tip for men: The smell of Good & Plenty candy combined with the scent of cucumber was the No. 1 enhancer of female sexual arousal according to a study done by neurologist Alan Hirsch, founder of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation. That scent combination, as well as the smell of baby powder,



increased blood flow by 13 percent.

Try buying a box of Good & Plenty for your partner as a surprise at the movies, or place a bowl of the candy within her reach on your coffee table.

Meanwhile, women should throw a fall staple in the oven. Hirsch's study found that men react positively to the scent of pumpkin pie and lavender.

## Au naturel

Don't mask your natural odor. "Women are very sensitive to male smell if they're up close," says Geoffrey Miller, an evolutionary social psychologist and author of *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*.

"We know that women are more attracted to guys who have highly symmetrical bodies and are fit, and they can sense that health and physical fitness through a guy's smell," Miller says. "They can only detect it if a guy is already pretty well-bathed and clean."

## Vanilla

The smell of vanilla enhances feelings of empathy in both men and women, Hirsch says. While you might not want to light a vanilla candle (see sidebar), try stocking your bathroom with vanilla-scented hand soap or topping your dessert with vanilla ice cream.

## Nostalgic odors

To make your partner feel warm and fuzzy inside, remind him or her of childhood. In a study of nearly 1,000 people from 45 different areas of the country, Hirsch found the No. 1 scent associated with nostalgia is baked goods.

If you don't have time to hit a bakery before your date, try other nostalgia-inducers. Natural scents from a person's childhood, like grass or pine trees, can do the trick. "The positive feelings will then be transferred to other people around them in a positive way," Hirsch says.



## Sounds

### Deftly given compliments

Telling your partner he or she is sexy without then pouncing is key for encouraging intimacy.

"Always look for moments where you can give a sincere compliment and you're not expecting anything in return," says human behavior and relationship expert Patrick Wanis. "Say, 'Wow, you look absolutely gorgeous today,' and just keep doing what you were doing. Whereas if you say it and then you stand in front of her, then she'll think, 'Oh, he wants something.' But if you say it passing by or almost matter-of-fact, then she'll start to think there's a chance that it's sincere versus there's an ulterior motive."

### A calm voice

Keep your voice relaxed, even if there's mild chaos or a lot of chatter around you. A calm voice sounds lower and more pleasant.

"Your normal pitch comes out when you're most relaxed, calm in a

crisis. If you have two guys and one guy's calm and one is more excited, the calm one seems dominant."

And in turn, the lady will choose the cool cucumber: you.

### An accent

Forget about trying to ditch your Southern drawl or your Boston twang. Sounding like you don't belong can actually work to your advantage.

"There are situations where women are attracted to a foreign accent," Bryant says. "An outsider is sometimes appealing, and a guy with some kind of European accent could indicate cultural sophistication. Exotic becomes erotic."

But don't fake an accent, as it will immediately ring false. ■

