

As you get to know French culture better, you might wonder what the customs and history of French Valentine's Day are. Actually, you might be surprised to find out that Valentine's Day might possibly have started in France.

To some it will be no surprise that a country regarded as one of the most romantic in the world (France) should have invented Valentine's Day. On the other hand, the history of the holiday is not clear enough to say with certainty that the holiday originated in France.

History of French Valentine's Day

There are two reasons why many people link Valentine's Day with France. One is that it was commonly known, in both England and France, that birds and other animals paired off and mated 'in the middle of February'. Coincidence? Most likely not, since February 14 is exactly the middle of February. It is thought that people began celebrating this as the special day for lovers because of this association with 'love' in nature.

In addition, a Frenchman, the Duke of Orléans, is thought to have written the first love letters that later became Valentine's Day cards. The Duke of Orléans, Charles, was captured in 1415 and taken as a prisoner to London; while imprisoned in the Tower, he is thought to have written love letters to his wife back in France. These are thought to be what became *cartes d'amitiés*, now known as French Valentine's Day cards.

St-Valentin, France

In France, in the department of *Indre* (Central France), there is a village called St-Valentin. Although nobody really knows anymore who St. Valentine was historically, there's no doubt that the village of St-Valentin has capitalized on its name and marketed itself as *le village des amoureux*! Of course, with a name like that, one can't help but make the association.

Each year in the Village of St-Valentin, there's a celebration on the weekend closest to Valentine's Day. Not only do the locals grasp the chance to celebrate the patron saint of their city, but travelers arrive from all over France for a romantic weekend or even to renew their wedding vows in what they deem to be an appropriate location. Indeed, mid-February is an ideal time of the year to get away and celebrate love, and this town in France has built a booming tourist business based on their name.

Create a Valentine's Day à la française

Looking for a new way to celebrate Valentine's Day? Create a French theme for your special day and surprise your loved one with a French evening. Use the opportunity to try out a delicious French dessert, serve French bread and cheese between the dinner and your delectable dessert, and have some romantic French music playing in the background all evening. Don't forget to set the table in a French way, which is to say that the table should look like art: complete with a tablecloth, cloth napkins, a tasteful centerpiece, and an array of cutlery and glasses suitable for each course you will serve. Your valentine will never forget the year you made the most romantic day of the year even more romantic!

French Valentine Vocabulary

Express your sentiments with these French holiday words and phrases:

Bonne St. Valentin/Joyeuse St. Valentin - Happy Valentine's Day

Je t'aime. - I love you.

Je t'adore. - I adore you.

Je pense à toi. - I'm thinking of you.

Sois mon valentin. - Be my Valentine (said to a boy/man)

Sois ma valentine. - Be my Valentine (said to a girl/woman)

Les fleurs - flowers

La rose - rose

French Poetry

If you haven't already captured your true love's heart, you surely will with one of these poems:

Partons / dans un baiser / pour un monde inconnu -- Let's leave / in a kiss / for an unknown world -- by Alfred de Musset

Chaque jour je t'aime davantage / aujourd'hui plus qu'hier / et bien moins que demain -- Each day I love you more / today more than yesterday / and much less than tomorrow -- by Rosemonde Gérard

L'amour est la poésie des sens -- Love is the poetry of the senses -- by Honoré de Balzac

L'amour n'est pas seulement un sentiment / il est un art aussi -- Love is not only a feeling / it is also an art -- by Honoré de Balzac

Voici des fruits, des fleurs / des feuilles et des branches / et puis voici mon coeur / qui ne bat que pour vous -- Here are fruits, flowers / leaves and branches / and then here is my heart / that beats only for you -- by Paul Verlaine

L'amour n'est rien d'autre que la suprême poésie de la nature -- Love is nothing other than the supreme poetry of nature -- Novalis

Le chocolat - chocolate

Le coeur - heart

Le baiser - kiss

Cupidon - Cupid

French Terms of Endearment

Mon amour - my love

Mon ange - my angel

Mon chéri - my dear (said to a boy/man)

Ma chérie - my dear (said to a girl/woman)

Mon trésor - my treasure

Ma biche - my doe

Mon petit chou - my little cabbage

Ma puce - my flea (that's right . . . flea!)

Crepes

Recipe courtesy Alton Brown

Prep Time: 5 min Cook Time: 20 min

Serves:

17 to 22 crepes

Ingredients

- 2 large eggs
- 3/4 cup milk
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup flour
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- Butter, for coating the pan

Directions

In a blender, combine all of the ingredients and pulse for 10 seconds. Place the crepe batter in the refrigerator for 1 hour. This allows the bubbles to subside so the crepes will be less likely to tear during cooking. The batter will keep for up to 48 hours.

Heat a small non-stick pan. Add butter to coat. Pour 1 ounce of batter into the center of the pan and swirl to spread evenly. Cook for 30 seconds and flip. Cook for another 10 seconds and remove to the cutting board. Lay them out flat so they can cool. Continue until all batter is gone. After they have cooled you can stack them and store in sealable plastic bags in the refrigerator for several days or in the freezer for up to two months. When using frozen crepes, thaw on a rack before gently peeling apart.

*Savory Variation Add 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 cup chopped fresh herbs, spinach or sun-dried tomatoes to the egg mixture.

*Sweet Variation Add 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract and 2 tablespoons of your favorite liqueur to the egg mixture.

Les activités du jour des crêpes! (Crêpe Day Activities!)

- 1) Read about La Chandeleur on this page.
- 2) Make and eat crêpes when it is your turn.
- 3) Read about the French history of Valentine's Day.
- 4) Make *une carte d'amitié* (a Valentine's Day card) using one or more of the expressions given on the French Valentine Vocabulary sheet.

La Chandeleur (Candlemas / Crêpe Day)

La Chandeleur, celebrated on February 2, is originally a religious holiday, yet today it is known as the day of crêpes. The story is that Pope Gélase gave crêpes to the pilgrims who arrived in Rome. The crêpes with their round shape and golden color, signified the sun and helped Spring to arrive.

This holiday is used as an indicator of upcoming weather, just as Groundhog Day is in America. French

"Quand la Chandeleur est claire, l'hiver est par derriere; Chandeleur couverte, quarante jours de perte!" (If February 2 is clear, no more winter to fear; if the Chandeleur is overcast, forty days winter to last).

Some people use crêpes to predict how well their year is going to go.

La Chandeleur to Predict the Future

- 1 Make crêpe batter.
- 2 Find a French franc or another lucky coin.
- 3 Cook a crêpe on one side.
- 4 Loosen the crêpe from the pan with your spatula/pancake turner.
- 5 Hold the franc/coin in your weakest hand (for example, the left if you are right-handed), when the crêpe is ready to be turned.
- 6 Attempt singlehandedly to flip the crêpe.
- 7 Enjoy good luck for the rest of the year if the crêpe lands perfectly in the pan. Suffer bad luck if the crêpe does not land well - or try again!