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Budget-crunched?

How about a night out . . . at home

Sometimes investing \$20 or more for a "superb dining experience" at a nice restaurant can only mean indigestion and feeling uncomfortable.

Do you and your bank account a favor. Stay home.

Nice, inexpensive evenings at home are just as enjoyable as high-priced evenings, and much more practical. They could be the most charming (and safe) way to woo.

After all, you're on your home turf, you don't have to get dressed up, you know where everything is—and most important, it's really cheap. You don't have to worry about how you're going to afford everything, because you've already bought it.

You're in control. You, not the stuffy maitre'd, can set the mood through music, light, food and wine (Venus' magic elixir).

Kindly ask your roommates to scram until *at least* midnight, invite your honey over, and don't forget to go to the store.

Usually a simple meal works the best. An enormous menu of recipes exists for the homebody chef. All it takes is a little imagination to whip up a classy, cheap and easy-to-make meal. For example, stir-fry chicken mixed with a potpourri of vegetables and a side of rice will impress the most finicky digestive tracts. If you're not into meat, leave out the chicken.

Making the meal together can be a good ice-breaker. You're both doing something, so the automatic self-conscious response goes away. With that impediment dissolved, talk may move more freely, more relaxed.

Cook the rice before you start frying. Usually a package of chicken Rice-A-Roni (I know it's sleazy, but so are pre-packaged bean sprouts) will do. Then fling the chicken and veggies into a frying pan or a wok and literally stir-fry them. Try not to saturate the pan with oil, just use one tablespoon.

After cooking about five minutes on medium heat, the chicken should be finished.

Pile it on the rice, pour two more glasses of white wine and chow down.



A loaf of bread, a glass of wine, and a pot full of melted cheese can make for an extremely enjoyable (and inexpensive) evening.

White wine works well with white meat. Plus you can drink a lot and not feel bloated. Usually grocery stores carry a wide selection of wine for low budgets.

Now, for the music.

Depending on your tastes, relaxing tunes sound better than noise. Light jazz is nice (Pat Metheny, Tom Scott or Jeff Lorber Fusion are good bets). Then there are "everyone's favorites" like

The Beatles, The Who, Crosby-Stills-Nash, Fleetwood Mac, and Jackson Browne. Maybe borrow your neighbor's Mozart and Wagner discs. Use your imagination. Just remember, acid rock leads to acid stomachs.

A fire blazing in the fireplace is the ultimate romance-setting prop for a date at home. If your house or apartment lacks this or a wood-burning stove, you can always make do with candles.

After dinner, lay back, mellow out, play chess, cards, Monopoly, tell jokes, watch an old movie on TV, reveal intimacies. Just use this time to learn about your date.

Cheap dates can involve anything from a walk in the rain to studying at the library together. Flowers, candy, and a posh dinner certainly will make an impression, but save that date for a stupendous occasion, like your engagement.

by caroline petrich



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