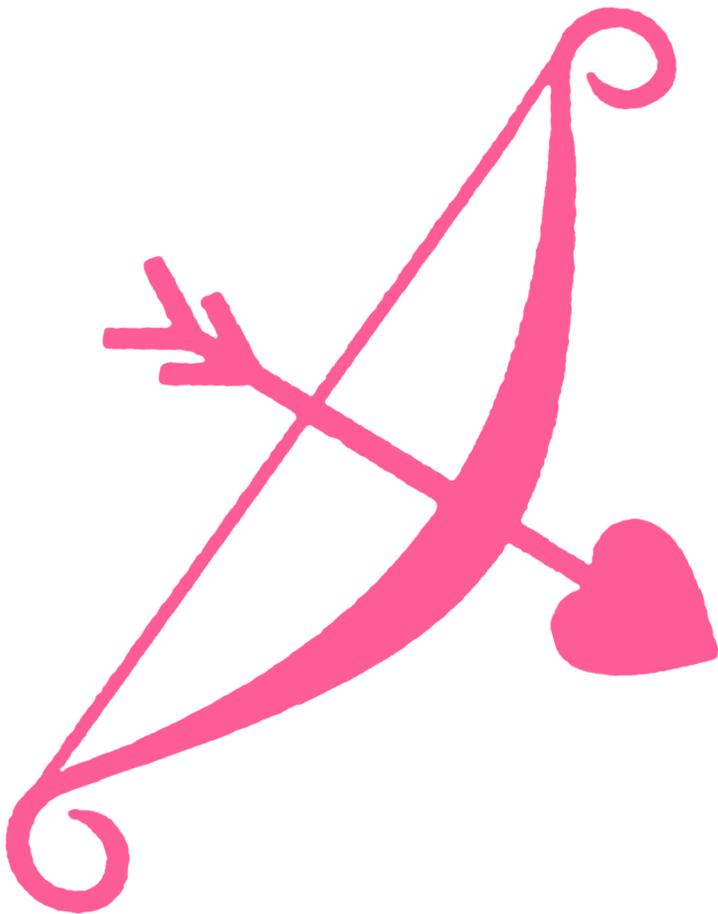


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TUTORIALS, RECIPES,
PRINTABLES &
INSPIRATION FOR
VALENTINE'S DAY

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
About	2
Baked Red Velvet Donuts.....	4
Strawberry Muffins.....	6
Strawberry Pancake Topping	7
Spinach Balls.....	9
Grilled Romaine with Blue Cheese Vinaigrette.....	10
Pasta with Gorgonzola Sauce and Beef Tenderloin.....	12
Strawberry Pretzel Salad.....	14
Paul's Favorite Cheesecake	15
Chocolate Raspberry Vanilla Bean Marshmallows.....	18
Cinnamon Heart Bark	20
Cinnamon Valentine Caramels	21
Cranberry White Chocolate Blondies	22
Fudgy Brownie Hearts with Fresh Raspberry Buttercream.....	24
Heart-Shaped Stained Glass Sugar Cookies.....	26
Oh Baby Bars	27
Rice Krispie Treat Hearts.....	28
Unbelievable Chocolate Applesauce Bars	29
Conversation Heart Candy Count	31
Puffy Heart Wreath.....	32
Purr-fect Kitty Valentines	33
Valentine Art You Can't Buy.....	34
Valentine Fairies	35
Homemade Salt Scrub	37
Love Letters to Your Children.....	38
Be-Mine Topiary.....	40
Burlap Valentine's Day Wreath.....	41
Felt Flowers.....	42
LOVE Sign.....	43
Valentine Garden Flag	44
Wool Roses on a Stem.....	46
Free Printables	48
About Mandi Ehman and Life...Your Way.....	49

About

As a mom, I absolutely love Valentine's Day. It's one of those holidays – like St. Patrick's Day or April Fool's Day – that is about having fun, making memories and embracing traditions...all without the expectation of big family get-togethers, fancy meals or lots of presents.

The girly-girl inside of me (who doesn't always show her face!) also loves the palette of pink, red and lots and lots of hearts. And, of course, the chocolate doesn't hurt.

Whether Valentine's Day includes a romantic dinner at home, a play date with friends or just a chance to enjoy your family, this ebook is *packed* full of recipes, crafts, activities and DIY décor tutorials.

The blogosphere is full of incredibly talented people who share tips and ideas every day, and I consider it a privilege to be able to bring some of them together through ebooks such as this one. It's really a showcase of their talent!

Enjoy!

Mandi

[Life...Your Way](http://lifeyourway.net)

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BREAKFAST

Baked Red Velvet Donuts

Becca is the oldest of four sisters. They have 11 children between them who inspired the name of their shared blog, [Crumbs and Chaos](#), as they deal with their fair share of both on a daily basis. At Crumbs and Chaos, you'll find their favorite recipes, tips on controlling the chaos and weekly Seasonal Inspiration link parties every Saturday!

Originally posted on [Crumbs & Chaos](#).



Ingredients:

Donuts

- 2 ¼ cups flour
- 1 Tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 Tablespoons butter, melted
- 2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, melted
- ½ Tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 1 Tablespoon red food coloring

Glaze

- 2 ounces cream cheese
- ¾ cup powdered sugar
- 4 Tablespoons cream
- ½ teaspoon vanilla

Directions:*Donuts*

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease a donut pan with cooking spray.

In a medium bowl, combine flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

In a large bowl, combine sugar and egg. Add the melted butter and melted chocolate; stir well. Add vanilla, buttermilk and food coloring.

Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet mixture, mixing just until combined. Fill each donut well about $\frac{2}{3}$ full.

Bake for 12-15 minutes, do not over bake!

Cool slightly before adding glaze.

Glaze

Microwave cream cheese for 15-20 seconds.

Stir in remaining ingredients until smooth.

Spread on donuts, allowing to drip down the sides

Makes 12 donuts.

Visit [Crumbs and Chaos](#) for more recipes, tips and inspiration!

Strawberry Muffins

Melissa Harvey, a former pastry chef, is the publisher behind [Cajun Sugar Pie](#). She enjoys sharing her love of sweets by baking and blogging about her kitchen adventures. She currently lives in Nashville with her songwriter/musician husband and their two daughters.

Originally posted on [Cajun Sugar Pie](#).



Ingredients:

- 1-½ cups chopped fresh strawberries
- ¾ cup plus 2 Tablespoons sugar, divided
- ¼ cup butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 ¾ cups flour
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425°. Line 12 muffin cups with paper liners.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, cook strawberries and ½ cup sugar for 2 minutes or until just beginning to boil. Stir. Remove from heat. Drain, reserving liquid. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, cream butter and ¼ cup sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one-at-a-time until well combined. Add vanilla. Mix in flour, soda, and salt. Add liquid from strawberries until well combined. Fold in strawberries.

Spoon batter into muffin cups. Sprinkle remaining sugar over each muffin. Bake for 20 minutes or until lightly brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.

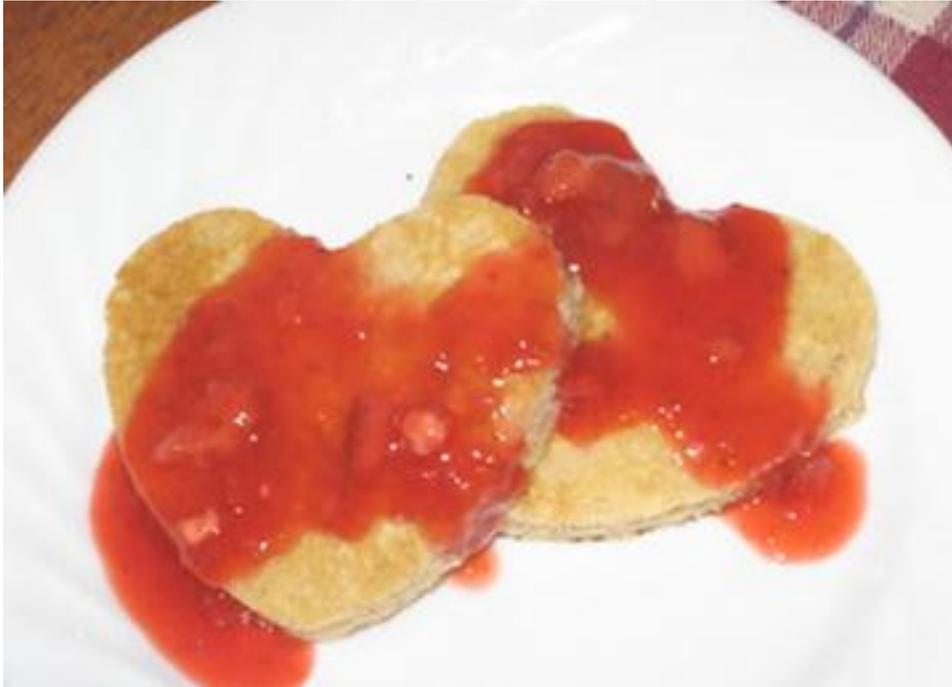
Makes 12 muffins.

Visit [Cajun Sugar Pie](#) for dessert recipes and more!

Strawberry Pancake Topping

Whether changing diapers or prepping food for her husband's football team, Amy strives to embrace the extraordinary in every day. She blogs about it all at [The Finer Things in Life](#).

Originally posted on [The Finer Things in Life](#).



Ingredients:

- 2 cups frozen, sliced strawberries (fresh works, too)
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 1 t. lemon juice
- 2 t. cornstarch (dissolved in a little water)

Directions:

Combine strawberries, sugar and water in a small saucepan. Bring to a slow boil, stirring occasionally until sugar is dissolved, mashing the strawberries as they cook. Add lemon juice and cornstarch/water mix. Stir until thickened. Remove from heat. Serve warm.

Visit [The Finer Things in Life](#) to embrace the extraordinary in every day!

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DINNER

Spinach Balls

Jo-Lynne is a freelance writer, blogger and happily married mom of three living working from her suburban home near Philadelphia. [Musings of a Housewife](#) is a personal memoir and lifestyle blog about faith, fashion, food and family with a side of humor. Find nutritious gluten free recipes, blog design tips, mom fashion, photography and tales about the busy life of a work at home mom.

Originally posted on [Musings of a Housewife](#).



Ingredients:

- 2 10-oz packages frozen & chopped spinach, cooked and drained
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup melted butter
- 3 cups herbed stuffing mix
- ½ cup shredded cheddar
- 1 cup grated Parmesan
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- garlic to taste

Directions:

Mix all ingredients. Roll into 1-inch balls.

Microwave at 70% power for 10-12 minutes. (The cooking time varies depending on your microwave and how many spinach balls you cook at one time.) Or try them in the oven at 350° for 15-20 minutes.

Makes lots!

Visit [Musings of a Housewife](#) for recipes, fashion tips, photography tips and more!

Grilled Romaine with Blue Cheese Vinaigrette

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#). Shaina can usually be found in one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera. More often than not, these three things occur in the kitchen simultaneously.

Originally posted on [Food for My Family](#).



Ingredients:

Dressing

- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons raw honey
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- black pepper to taste
- ¼ cup blue cheese, crumbled
- ⅓ cup extra virgin olive oil

Salad:

- 4 hearts of romaine
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled, or ¼ cup toasted pecans, chopped
- extra blue cheese crumbles

Directions:

In a small to medium bowl add minced garlic, honey, white wine vinegar, salt and pepper. Whisk to combine. Add in blue cheese and, using fork tines or small food processor, smash into the sauce until

partially smooth. It is not necessary to remove all the lumps, but the mixture should become thick. Using a slow, thin stream, pour in olive oil while whisking to incorporate until all olive oil is emulsified into the dressing. Set aside.

Preheat grill to medium-high heat. Cut romaine hearts in half, leaving the root ball on to hold them together. Brush lightly with olive oil. Place heads down on grill, grilling 3 minutes on each side until slightly browned.

Drizzle grilled romaine hearts with dressing. Sprinkle with blue cheese crumbles and bacon or pecans.

Makes 8 servings.

Visit [Food for My Family](#) for more home-cooked real food recipes!

Pasta with Gorgonzola Sauce and Beef Tenderloin

Katie's lifelong interest in food has shown her that part of the goodness in life is enjoying delicious food with friends and family. Katie is the author of [GoodLife Eats](#) where she shares what she finds good in the kitchen and in life. A mix of great recipes, yummy photography, family memories, and good reads is what Katie serves up each week.

Originally posted on [GoodLife Eats](#).



Ingredients:

- 1 lb. filet mignon, cut into 2 inch medallions
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons butter
- ¾ cup half-and-half
- ¼ cup chicken broth
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese, plus extra for garnish
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon black pepper
- 8 ounces uncooked pasta, linguine or fettuccini

Directions:

Toss the filet mignon medallions with the balsamic vinegar, brown sugar, salt, and pepper. Let rest in the refrigerator for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare a pot of water to boil and cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and set aside.

In a sauté pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the beef. Cook without turning for 2-3 minutes, or until browned. Turn and repeat. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm. (If you would like the meat more well done, cook for additional time)

Combine the butter, half and half, chicken broth, and white wine in a saucepan. Bring to a slow simmer and stir in the Parmesan and Gorgonzola. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Let simmer for 2 minutes, stirring to ensure the cheese has dispersed evenly.

Toss the pasta with the sauce and filet mignon medallions. Garnish with additional Gorgonzola.

Visit [GoodLife Eats](#) for recipes, photography and more!

Strawberry Pretzel Salad

Whether changing diapers or prepping food for her husband's football team, Amy strives to embrace the extraordinary in every day. She blogs about it all at [The Finer Things in Life](#).

Originally posted on [The Finer Things in Life](#).



Ingredients:

- 2 cup crushed pretzels
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup butter, melted
- 4 Tablespoon sugar
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- 1 cup sugar
- 12 oz. whipped cream
- 1 small box strawberry gelatin
- 2 cup boiling water
- 10 oz. fresh or frozen strawberries

Directions:

Mix together pretzels, butter, and sugar. Pat mixture into a 9×13 pan and bake 6 minutes at 400°. Let cool.

Mix together cream cheese, sugar, and whipped cream. Spread over cooled pretzel crust.

Dissolve gelatin in water. Add strawberries. Put in freezer until slightly gelled. Spread over top of other layers and chill.

Cut into squares to serve.

Visit [The Finer Things in Life](#) to embrace the extraordinary in every day!

Paul's Favorite Cheesecake

Jo-Lynne is a freelance writer, blogger and happily married mom of three living working from her suburban home near Philadelphia. [Musings of a Housewife](#) is a personal memoir and lifestyle blog about faith, fashion, food and family with a side of humor. Find nutritious gluten free recipes, blog design tips, mom fashion, photography and tales about the busy life of a work at home mom.

Originally posted on [Musings of a Housewife](#).



Ingredients:

Crust

- 1-½ cup graham cracker crumbs
- 3 Tablespoons sugar
- 1/3 cup butter

Filling

- 16 oz. cream cheese (room temperature — leave out overnight for best results)
- 2 eggs (also room temp — leave out overnight)
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoon real vanilla (use real vanilla — it matters)
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice

Topping

- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 Tablespoon sugar
- 2 teaspoon real vanilla

Berry Sauce

- small package frozen fruit

- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup water

Directions:

Crust

Mix together all crust ingredients and press into a springform pan or pie plate. (For years I made this in a cheap glass pie plate. Now I have a nice springform pan, which I love, but either one will work just fine.) Do NOT bake.

Filling

Combine the filling ingredients in a large mixer bowl and beat until light and fluffy. Pour into uncooked pie crust.

Bake at 325 or 350 until the top is lightly browned and it looks cooked, approximately 40 and 60 minutes.

Topping

Combine topping ingredients in small bowl, and when the cheesecake is cool, spread on top. Refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.

Berry Sauce

Combine berries, sugar and water on the stove. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Pulse a few times in the food processor and strain in a mesh strainer to get the seeds out.

Refrigerate until ready to serve and then use it to decorate the plate. Feel free to put a dollop on top as well!

Visit [Musings of a Housewife](#) for recipes, fashion tips, photography tips and more!

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TREATS

Chocolate Raspberry Vanilla Bean Marshmallows

Katie's lifelong interest in food has shown her that part of the goodness in life is enjoying delicious food with friends and family. Katie is the author of [GoodLife Eats](#) where she shares what she finds good in the kitchen and in life. A mix of great recipes, yummy photography, family memories, and good reads is what Katie serves up each week.

Originally posted on [GoodLife Eats](#).



Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons plus 2 ½ teaspoons unflavored gelatin
- ½ cup cold water
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- ½ cup cold water
- ½ cup light corn syrup
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 large egg whites
- ¾ - 1 whole scraped vanilla bean
- ⅓ - ⅔ cup crushed, freeze-dried raspberries (such as Just Raspberries)
- ⅔ cup powdered sugar
- 6-8 ounces dark baking chocolate, for dipping (I like 70% Cacao Scharffen Berger Dark Chocolate)

Directions:

Grease the bottom and sides of a 9x13 rectangular metal baking.

In a large bowl, sprinkle the gelatin over ½ cup cold water. Allow to stand and soften while you complete the next step. Combine the sugar, cold water, corn syrup, and salt in a heavy 3-quart saucepan. Cook mixture over low heat, stirring constantly, until the sugar has dissolved.

Bring mixture to a boil over medium heat without stirring. Cook until mixture registers 240° F on a candy thermometer. This should take about 8-12 minutes.

Turn heat off. Pour sugar mixture over the gelatin mixture Cut the vanilla bean in half, then cut a slit down the middle in the half you are using. Use a knife or spoon to scrape out the beans. Add to the sugar and gelatin mixture. Beat on high speed (using either a hand mixer or a stand mixer) until it is tripled in volume, thick, and white – approximately 10 minutes if you're using a hand mixer and 5 for a stand mixer.

Using a clean bowl and beaters beat the egg whites until they begin to hold stiff peaks. Add the whites and crushed raspberries to the sugar mixture and beat until combined. Pour the mixture into the prepared 9x13 – note: you will not be able to get all of the mixture out. Don't worry! Smooth batter across the top using a greased spatula. Place the uncovered marshmallows in the fridge and chill for 3 hours, or until firm.

Loosen the marshmallows and invert over a large cutting board. Cut into one inch cubes using a large knife or cut out with a cookie cutter (leftover scraps can be cut into cubes). Place the cut marshmallows back in the baking pan, sift with powdered sugar, and toss until fully coated.

Remove the marshmallows from the pan, discard any excess powdered sugar and store in an airtight container or Ziploc bag. Marshmallows keep for one week.

Melt 6-8 ounces baking chocolate per instructions on the packaging. (Sometimes I add a very small amount, like ½ teaspoon, of canola oil if I feel it need to be thinned for dipping) Cover a baking pan with parchment paper for your work station. Arrange the marshmallows and melted chocolate in separate containers next to the parchment paper.

Dip marshmallows in melted chocolate, place on the baking sheet until dry. You might have to reheat the chocolate throughout this process as it cools and thickens.

When finished, you can place the marshmallows in the fridge to speed the hardening. Store in an airtight container for about a week (if they last that long!).

Note: To crush the raspberries, place in a resealable bag and smash using a meat mallet or rolling pin. Or, pulse them in a small food processor until desired texture is achieved.

Visit [GoodLife Eats](#) for recipes, photography and more!

Cinnamon Heart Bark

Allison McDonald is the founder of the blog [No Time for Flash Cards](#), mother of two and former preschool teacher. Allison's passion is teaching through play with creativity and, when appropriate, lots of glitter.

Originally posted on [No Time for Flash Cards](#).



Ingredients:

- 1 package semi-sweet or dark chocolate chips
- 1 package white chocolate chips
- cinnamon hearts or candies
- 1 Tablespoon butter, divided

Directions:

Put the cinnamon candies in a Ziploc bag and crush them into little pieces with a hammer or meat mallet. If you're using hearts, crush half and leave the other half whole.

Melt your chocolate chips and ½ Tablespoon butter in a double boiler or microwave.

Spread the chocolate in a wax-paper lined cookie sheet or bar pan. Pop in the freezer for a few minutes to help it set.

Melt your white chocolate chips and ½ Tablespoon butter in a double boiler or microwave.

Spread on top of the chocolate layer and sprinkle with cinnamon candies.

Freeze until it's set and then break into pieces.

Visit [No Time for Flash Cards](#) for more ways to promote play, discovery & learning!

Cinnamon Valentine Caramels

With a passion for spending time in the kitchen, plus a desire to share her favorite recipes, family photos and traditions, Brenda's everyday life can be found at [A Farmgirl's Dabbles](#).

Originally posted on [A Farmgirl's Dabbles](#).



Ingredients:

- 2 cup white sugar
- 1-½ cup light corn syrup
- 1-½ cup heavy cream
- 1 cup butter, plus ½ T. for buttering the pan
- 2 teaspoon cinnamon oil
- 1-½ teaspoon no-taste red food color gel

Note: Cinnamon oil is very strong. Be careful to not get it on your skin, as it can cause irritation. For a more subtle cinnamon flavor, substitute 3 teaspoon cinnamon extract for the cinnamon oil.

Directions:

Butter a 9" x 13" pan and set aside.

Place all ingredients except the cinnamon oil and the red coloring in a heavy medium sauce pan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until it reaches 240°. This will take a while, but don't wander too far away, as the temperature seems to rise quickly right at the end.

Take off heat and stir in the cinnamon oil and red coloring. Pour into your buttered pan. Let cool to room temperature, then refrigerate to set.

Take out of refrigerator and let sit for about 10 minutes before cutting.

If you want to gift these caramels, simply cut them into your desired size and wrap in wax paper.

Visit [A Farmgirl's Dabbles](#) for more recipes, life stories and inspiration!

Cranberry White Chocolate Blondies

Melissa Harvey, a former pastry chef, is the publisher behind [Cajun Sugar Pie](#). She enjoys sharing her love of sweets by baking and blogging about her kitchen adventures. She currently lives in Nashville with her songwriter/musician husband and their two daughters.

Originally posted on [Cajun Sugar Pie](#).



Ingredients:

- ½ cup unsalted butter, at room temp
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- ½ cup chopped fresh cranberries
- 2 oz. white chocolate, chopped

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°. Line 8-inch square pan with foil leaving overhang on all sides. Lightly spray foil.

In a mixing bowl, beat butter and brown sugar until well combined. Add egg and vanilla and mix well. Slowly add flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir in pecans, cranberries, and white chocolate pieces.

Spread batter into prepared pan.

Bake 25 minutes or until center is set and blondies are golden. Remove from oven and let cool completely on wire rack.

Carefully remove blondies from pan by lifting foil overhang and placing on cutting board. Slice into 16 squares.

Visit [Cajun Sugar Pie](#) for dessert recipes and more!

Fudgy Brownie Hearts with Fresh Raspberry Buttercream

With a passion for spending time in the kitchen, plus a desire to share her favorite recipes, family photos and traditions, Brenda's everyday life can be found at [A Farmgirl's Dabbles](http://www.farmgirlsdabbles.com).

Originally posted on [A Farmgirl Dabbles](http://www.farmgirlsdabbles.com).



Ingredients:

Brownies

- nonstick vegetable oil spray
- ½ cup unsalted butter, diced
- 3 oz. unsweetened chocolate, chopped
- 1-½ cup sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon instant espresso powder
- 1-½ teaspoon vanilla
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup flour
- powdered sugar, to sprinkle on the finished brownie hearts

Fresh Raspberry Buttercream

- ½ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 12 oz. raspberries, fresh or frozen
- ½ teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 3-½ cup powdered sugar
- pinch of kosher salt
- 1 to 2 Tablespoon milk, if needed to thin out the frosting

Directions:

Brownies

Preheat oven to 325°.

Fold a long piece of heavy foil into a 13" wide strip and fit it inside a 9" x 13" metal baking pan, leaving foil overhang on the 2 long sides. Spray the foil with nonstick spray.

Stir the butter and chocolate in a large heavy saucepan over very low heat until chocolate is melted. Remove from heat and whisk in the sugar, and then the eggs, 1 at a time. Whisk in espresso powder, vanilla, and salt. Then sift the flour over the chocolate mixture and stir to blend well. Transfer batter to prepared pan.

Bake brownies until slightly puffed and dry-looking and tester inserted into center comes out with some moist batter attached, about 20 minutes. Let cool completely in pan on rack.

Fresh Raspberry Buttercream

Cook the raspberries in a medium saucepan over medium heat, stirring frequently until the raspberries are broken down into a sauce. Pour the sauce through a fine mesh strainer to remove the seeds, and then pour the raspberry sauce back in the pot. Simmer until the sauce reduces to a ¼ cup. It will be a very rich red and concentrated sauce. Set aside to cool.

With a mixer, cream the butter with a paddle attachment on medium high speed about 2 minutes, until lightened in color and a bit fluffy. Add 2 cups of powdered sugar, the ¼ cup of cooled raspberry sauce, lemon juice, and salt. Mix until smooth.

Add another 1-½ cups of powdered sugar and mix until smooth. If you want the frosting less stiff, add some milk, 1 tablespoon at a time. I did not add any milk to mine, and thought it was perfect for piping.

Fit a pastry bag with a medium-large round tip (I used a Wilton #12) and fill with fresh raspberry buttercream.

Run a knife around the inside edge of the brownie pan. Use the overhanging foil as an aid and gently lift the brownies from the pan. The pan I used produces a brownie that is ½" thick. Be sure your cookie cutter is taller than ½". Press heart-shaped cookie cutters (the cookie cutters used in my photos measure 3" wide and 1-½" wide) firmly into the cooled brownie. Use a thin metal spatula to lift the cookie cutter filled with brownie from the foil. Gently press the brownie out of the cookie cutter. Repeat the cutting process until your brownie looks like a big piece of Swiss cheese. (And I hope you're eating up some of those brownie scraps!)

With the pastry bag filled with fresh raspberry buttercream, pipe a line of frosting around the inside edge of one of the brownie hearts. Then fill in the inside of the line with frosting, too. Top with another brownie heart, very gently pressing down to make a sandwich. Repeat until all your brownie hearts are completed. To finish off, sprinkle the brownie hearts with powdered sugar. I like to fill a small hand sieve with powdered sugar and gently tap the side of the sieve to let the powdered sugar rain down.

Visit [A Farmgirl's Dabbles](#) for more recipes, life stories and inspiration!

Heart-Shaped Stained Glass Sugar Cookies

Tara Kuczykowski is a married mom of three boys and two girls, ages 4 to 9 years. For the past three-and-a-half years, Tara has been helping families stretch their budgets at the popular money-saving blog, [Deal Seeking Mom](#), and she's now sharing her tips, tricks, recipes and more at [Unsophisticook](#), where she's "keeping it real in the kitchen!"

Originally posted on [Deal Seeking Mom](#).



Ingredients:

- sugar cookie dough, handmade or store bought
- Life Savers candy, or another clear hard candy

Directions:

Line your cookie sheet with Silpat or parchment paper to prevent the centers from sticking. Roll out your cookie dough and cut out your cookies using the largest cookie cutter size. Using a smaller cookie cutter, cut out the middles of your cookies. You can either bake the middles separately to decorate, or you can add this dough back in and cut more large hearts.

Crush up your Life Savers or hard candy. I just gave them a good whack with the rolling pin.

Sprinkle it in the centers of the cookies. You'll want to really mound it up so that it's fairly thick when it melts. Then just bake your cookies according to your recipe! The candy will melt down and then solidify as the cookies cool -- be sure to let them cool thoroughly before removing them from the cookie sheet.

Visit [Deal Seeking Mom](#) for grocery deals, freebies and frugal living tips!

Oh Baby Bars

Becca is the oldest of four sisters. They have 11 children between them who inspired the name of their shared blog, [Crumbs and Chaos](#), as they deal with their fair share of both on a daily basis. At Crumbs and Chaos, you'll find their favorite recipes, tips on controlling the chaos and weekly Seasonal Inspiration link parties every Saturday!

Originally posted on [Crumbs & Chaos](#).



Ingredients:

- 2 Tablespoons light brown sugar
- 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups powdered sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup creamy peanut butter
- 7 oz. milk chocolate (baking chocolate or chocolate chips)
- 4 oz. semi-sweet chocolate (baking chocolate or chocolate chips)
- 1 tablespoon butter

Directions:

Blend together brown sugar, powdered sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter until it's a smooth paste-like consistency. It's important that it be smooth and not just crumbly.

Line a 9x13 pan with foil. Press the peanut butter mixture into the bottom of the pan.

Melt the chocolate and 1 Tablespoon butter over low heat in a saucepan or in the microwave (stirring every 30 seconds until smooth). Pour over peanut butter layer.

Let cool completely and then refrigerate for 30 minutes. Cut into squares.

Visit [Crumbs and Chaos](#) for more recipes, tips and inspiration!

Rice Krispie Treat Hearts

Myra is wife to her childhood sweetheart and mommy to a rambunctious two-year-old named Ridley. She enjoys blogging at [My Blessed Life](#) about thrifty home decor, DIY projects, crafts, recipes, and more to inspire you to creatively thrive in your home.

Originally posted on [My Blessed Life](#).



Ingredients:

- 9x13 pan of Rice Krispie treat mixture {rice krispies, marshmallows, butter and vanilla}
- semi-sweet chocolate morsels
- sprinkles
- heart-shaped cookie cutter

Directions:

Use your cookie cutter to cut out hearts from your Rice Krispie treat mixture.

Melt chocolate morsels in the microwave and then dip the front of each heart treat into the mixture, using a spatula to smooth out any bumps.

Decorate with Valentine's Day sprinkles.

Move the treats to the freezer to help the chocolate harden. Serve on a platter or wrap in individual treat bags!

Visit [My Blessed Life](#) for *DIY home decor, seasonal crafts, delicious recipes and more!*

Unbelievable Chocolate Applesauce Bars

Leigh Ann's life goal is to create a home where it is impossible to not think about God. At [Intentional By Grace](http://IntentionalByGrace.com), she blogs about her journey of intentional living in order to make this goal a reality. She takes joy in spending her days creating memorable moments with her husband, conducting kitchen experiments, researching every natural alternative known to man, and making her little boy laugh...all by the grace of God.

Originally posted on [Intentional by Grace](http://IntentionalByGrace.com).



Ingredients:

- ½ cup coconut oil
- 2 ounces of chocolate
- ½ cup sucanat (or organic sugar)
- 1 cup pastry flour
- 1 cup applesauce
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla (preferably homemade)
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¾ - 1 cup chopped walnuts

Directions:

Heat oven to 350°. Melt coconut oil and chocolate over low heat until melted; remove from heat. Stir in remaining ingredients. Spread in a greased 9x13 baking pan. Bake until top springs back when touched, about 20-25 minutes.

Cut into bars, 2x1 inch, while warm.

Makes about 36 bars

Visit [Intentional by Grace](http://IntentionalByGrace.com) for ideas and inspiration for a natural, faith-filled intentional life!

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CRAFTS

Conversation Heart Candy Count

Amanda Morgan is a graduate of Utah State University who holds a BA in both elementary and early childhood education and an MS in childhood development. She is a mom, educator, consultant, and writer for her blog [Not Just Cute](#), which focuses on the development of the whole child.

Originally posted on [Not Just Cute](#).



Ingredients:

- [free printable graphing sheet](#)
- box of conversation hearts

Directions:

Print out a graphing sheet for each child.

Give each child a small box or scoop of conversation hearts.

Help the children sort and graph their candy hearts.

Discuss the questions included on the sheet to further build math concepts.

Visit [Not Just Cute](#) for intentional art and learning activities!

Puffy Heart Wreath

Allison McDonald is the founder of the blog [No Time for Flash Cards](#), mother of two and former preschool teacher. Allison's passion is teaching through play with creativity and, when appropriate, lots of glitter.

Originally posted on [No Time for Flash Cards](#).



Supplies:

- paper plate
- glue
- foam heart picks
- red markers
- scissors

Directions:

Start by coloring the paper plate with markers. We used red but use whatever color your child wants to.

Next, pull the tops off the heart picks. I twisted them so they were easier to pop off. This step was really fun!

While they do that cut the middle out of the plate to make a wreath form.

Add a lot of glue. If you don't normally let your child do the glue because they use too much, let them with this one. You need a lot of glue so let them at it!

Add your hearts, randomly or in a pattern. You can also sneak some counting practice in here if you want.

Let dry.

Visit [No Time for Flash Cards](#) for more ways to promote play, discovery & learning!

Purr-fect Kitty Valentines

Amy is happiest surrounded by her husband, two daughters, stacks of books, and craft supplies. With a background in psychology, early childhood education, and elementary teaching, Amy is a supporter of playing dress-up, digging in the dirt, and squeezing out puddles of glue. At her blog, [Let's Explore](#), Amy shares her family's experiences creating, imagining, and playing together.

Originally posted on [Let's Explore](#).



Supplies:

- construction paper or cardstock for the card
- one large heart for the head
- two medium hearts for ears
- one small heart for the nose
- googly eyes
- marker for drawing whiskers
- glue

Directions:

Make your kitties out of whatever you have on hand — paper, felt, fabric, stickers, doilies, etc.

Glue the large heart upside down on the background. Add the two medium hearts upside down at the top as ears. Add the eyes and nose and draw on whiskers.

Print labels or write, "You are a purr-fect friend!" across the top. Have your child sign their name on the back.

Visit [Let's Explore](#) for more crafts and learning activities!

Valentine Art You Can't Buy

Amanda Morgan is a graduate of Utah State University who holds a BA in both elementary and early childhood education and an MS in childhood development. She is a mom, educator, consultant, and writer for her blog [Not Just Cute](#), which focuses on the development of the whole child.

Originally posted on [Not Just Cute](#).



Ingredients:

- canvas
- vinyl hearts in various sizes
- paint

Directions:

Base paint chosen canvas and let dry. (Omit this step if you like.)

Apply heart shapes cut from vinyl.

Have children paint over the entire canvas using a variety of colors and texture tools (combs, sponges, bubble wrap, etc.).

Peel off the vinyl.

Help your child sign and date the back of the canvas and enjoy the piece for years to come!

Visit [Not Just Cute](#) for intentional art and learning activities!

Valentine Fairies

Amy is happiest surrounded by her husband, two daughters, stacks of books, and craft supplies. With a background in psychology, early childhood education, and elementary teaching, Amy is a supporter of playing dress-up, digging in the dirt, and squeezing out puddles of glue. At her blog, [Let's Explore](#), Amy shares her family's experiences creating, imagining, and playing together.

Originally posted on [Let's Explore](#).



Ingredients:

- pink construction paper (cut in half)
- tracing paper for the wings
- heart doilies (small) for the skirt
- shiny red hearts or red puffy stickers for the top
- glue stick

Directions:

Cut out hearts for the wings from tracing paper and glue in the center of your construction paper.

Add a small red heart for the body and the upside down doily for the skirt.

Draw a head, arms and legs with a black paint (this is a great time to get creative with their hairstyles!).

Add a Valentine's Day message at the top, "Happy Valentine's Day" or "My Heart's a-Flutter for You!"

Visit [Let's Explore](#) for more crafts and learning activities!

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GIFTS

Homemade Salt Scrub

[Simple Organic](#) is all about green living for real families. Editor Nicole Bennett loves sharing her passion for baby-stepping towards a more natural, handmade lifestyle. In addition to editing Simple Organic, she blogs about daily life, including crafts, faith, homemade ice cream and other inspiration, at [Gidget Goes Home](#). She loves to read, sew, surf and watch baseball, and can often be found in the kitchen as well.

Originally posted on [Simple Organic](#).



Ingredients:

- 1 cup Epsom salts
- ½ cup carrier oil (mix of olive and grape seed oils)
- essential oil drops to your taste (start with 4-8)
- 3 baby food jars

Directions:

Mix salt and oil together in a bowl.

Add essential oil drops, a few at a time until you get your desired scent.

Decorate your jar with a label and/or fabric scraps.

Visit [Simple Organic](#) for green living and handmade ideas!

Love Letters to Your Children

Lisa Byrne is the founder of [WellGrounded Life](#), an organization that equips moms to live vibrant, healthy lives through courses, workshops and coaching.

Originally posted on [WellGrounded Life](#).

My husband and I have written letters to each other every New Year's eve since we first met. We seal them up and keep them for the following year– when we read last year's letter and write the new letter to be sealed. To be sure, these are not award winning letters. We don't try to be overly witty or sentimental or stress over the perfect flow or wording. We just write what's on our hearts, some thoughts about the past year, some dreams of the upcoming year...sometimes we include a prediction or two. Light, sincere and fun. That is what keeps us doing it.

This year we are adding a letter tradition for our children. For Valentine's Day we will be writing them each a letter. Because they are very young, and because we intend to give this as a gift to them when they are older, we'll write the letter and then keep it in a special book. I bought two small scrapbooks, with pages that will fit the size of a standard envelope. I've glued an envelope, face down so the letter can go in and be sealed on the first page. And I've also indicated the date and year on this page. Maybe I'll embellish later, maybe not. I purposely tried to keep this simple so I wouldn't get intimidated.

While, I am sure some years we will want to write a letter free-form, I also brainstormed some topics that we can pick from that I think would be very special to have chronicled. Here are some of my ideas:

- Describe how your pregnancy went. Any cravings, dreams, aches and pains? Did they move a lot, hiccup, respond to someones voice in the room? Were you working or at home? Did other siblings know of your coming? How did you prepare for their debut?
- Describe the details of the day they were born.
- Talk about who they take after. Describe their features, expressions, personality– let them know who in their family shares that ("your toes look just like Aunt Cat's").
- The story of how they were named (even if its 'just a name we liked'). What were other names you considered? Did you and your husband have a hard time choosing or agreeing? Did you know for sure before they were born or did you wait to hold them in order to confirm the name? Are they named after someone special?
- "If I had to guess, you will grow up to be..."
- "This is my prayer for you"
- "What I Know is True"- What values and beliefs you hold true and dear that you want to pass on
- "This is what life was like when you were young" (describe what the world is like now- how we travel, where you live, what you do for a living, state of world affairs, who you spend time with, what you do for fun)
- The man called your Daddy/The woman called your Mommy. Consider describing your spouse in a letter for your children.

Some of these letters may be very short and sweet. Some may go on for a few pages. Don't worry about the details, your handwriting, your spelling. Your children will be so grateful for this treasure of YOU – and your love and honesty will be the only things shining through.

Visit [WellGrounded Life](#) for more inspiration to live a vibrant life!

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DECOR

Be-Mine Topiary

Myra is wife to her childhood sweetheart and mommy to a rambunctious two-year-old named Ridley. She enjoys blogging at [My Blessed Life](#) about thrifty home decor, DIY projects, crafts, recipes, and more to inspire you to creatively thrive in your home.

Originally posted on [My Blessed Life](#).



Supplies:

- container or pail
- stick or dowel
- 2 styrofoam balls
- batting or newspaper to stuff around the base to secure it
- cupcake liners
- glue gun & glue sticks
- vinyl decal & burlap to finish off the base

Directions:

Begin by folding and hot gluing individual cupcake liners to one styrofoam ball until the entire ball is covered. I used 75-80 liners.

For the base, hot glue the other styrofoam ball into your container or pail. Stuffed batting around it to further stabilize the ball.

Push a stick or dowel into the base and secure with glue. Then attach the cupcake liner covered ball to the other end of the stick and secure it with glue.

Embellish the container with vinyl letters. So cute!

Visit [My Blessed Life](#) for *DIY home decor, seasonal crafts, delicious recipes and more!*

Burlap Valentine's Day Wreath

Jenna, Interior Designer and Home Decor Blogger of SAS Interiors, strives to inspire and deliver smart, stylish, and sophisticated design solutions for your space. Visit her at [SAS Interiors](#).

Originally posted on [SAS Interiors](#).



Supplies:

- wire hanger (from any ole' laundry mat or cleaners)
- scissors
- burlap
- florist wire (optional)
- pliers
- felt flowers

Directions:

Use pliers to bend your wire hanger to create a round wreath form. If you want to use two hangers to create a larger wreath, attach the wire hangers with florist wire.

Cut your burlap (I used $\frac{3}{4}$ yard for the whole project) into 4" wide strips. Fold the burlap strips into an accordion style. The fold should be about 3-4" wide.

Poke and feed the wire through the center of the new accordion bunch. Just keep on doing this until you create your wreath and you've used enough burlap to cover the wire. I would actually recommend using at least one yard so the wreath is dense. (I only had $\frac{3}{4}$ yard at the time).

Attach felt flowers (see the next project!).

Visit [SAS Interiors](#) for more simple, affordable and stylish DIY décor ideas!

Felt Flowers

Jenna, Interior Designer and Home Decor Blogger of SAS Interiors, strives to inspire and deliver smart, stylish, and sophisticated design solutions for your space. Visit her at SAS Interiors.

Originally posted on SAS Interiors.



Supplies:

- felt (any color you choose)
- scissors
- glue (I prefer and recommend hot glue because it adheres fast)
- buttons (optional)

Directions:

Cut out 6 petals that are about 1" wide by 1-½" long. Cut out 6 more petals that are slightly smaller.

Hint: Create a template on a piece of paper. Cut it out and trace it onto the felt to create the petals. Then trim the paper to create a smaller template repeat.

Using glue (hot glue works best), dab a little on the end of the larger petal. Lay the smaller petal on top. Put another dab of glue, and pinch it together. Careful...the glue is hot!

Repeat until all of your petals are done.

To keep the petals together, cut out a circle from the felt and glue it onto the back of the flower.

Embellish with buttons and fabric petals, or glue a smaller felt circle on the front.

Visit SAS Interiors for more simple, affordable and stylish DIY décor ideas!

LOVE Sign

Diana [usually] prefers to make things herself instead of buying them, whether it's in the kitchen, the craft room, or the sewing room. Visit [Saving by Making](#) for recipes, tips and tricks that will save you both time and money.

Originally posted on [Saving by Making](#).



Supplies:

- small wooden plaque
- indigo watercolor paint
- white gouache

Directions:

Paint your plaque with the watercolor until it's covered. After it dries, paint a little white gouache on the top panel to lighten it up a little bit. (Or don't. It's totally up to you on that one. It doesn't make a huge difference.) Then dab at it with a tissue until it looks like you want it to.

Now for the letters. Using the outline version of the font "Franklin Gothic Demi Cond," print out the word LOVE at font size 155. Cut out those letters and glue them backwards onto the back side of some blue-striped scrapbook paper. (Or whatever flavor of paper you'd like.) Then trace around the outside of the backwards letters with a pencil so you can see them and cut them out—the straight lines with scissors and the curved lines with a craft knife.

Concoct a mixture of Elmer's glue and water to imitate Mod Podge and paint it onto the top panel of your plaque. Arrange your letters and decorations onto the wet glue and let dry. Cover with a second coat of glue mixture and let dry again.

Visit [Saving by Making](#) for more DIY projects and hacks!

Valentine Garden Flag

Brittany blogs at [Pretty Handy Girl](#), a DIY tutorial blog empowering people to complete their own DIY project. Her mantra is that if a human being can do it, then there is a 95% chance that she can do it too! As a woman, she refuses to bow to the stereotypes that women aren't handy. From a young age, her father and mother taught her and her two sisters that they could do anything a man could do (and sometimes better!)

Originally posted on [I Am Momma Hear Me Roar](#).



Supplies:

- dollar store placemat
- ruler
- soap sliver (pencil or disappearing fabric marker)
- letter stencils (I chose a set by Martha Stewart plaid)
- round paint brush
- tulip fabric paint (white and black)
- tulip glitter fabric paint
- tulip glitter transfer sheets
- fabric scraps (red, pink and white)
- polyester stuffing
- scrap fabric, towel or rag (for ironing the glitter iron-ons)
- white thread
- scissors

Directions:

Begin by ironing all the fabric you will be using (including the placemat).

Fold over one of the short sides of the placemat at 2.25 inches. Crease the fold by ironing it.

Stitch along the edge to create a pole pocket.

Use your stencils (or freehand) to paint the letters M-I-N-E onto red fabric.

Draw a heart around the words using the soap sliver. Cut out your heart shape.

Cut several more hearts out of the fabric scraps. Cut some hearts out of glitter transfer sheets.

Cut out a bee shape using gold and black glitter iron-on sheets (or fabric scraps.) Create wings for the bee by cutting a figure 8 shape out of white fabric.

Lay out the shapes on the placemat and adjust them until you are happy with the design (and you have strategically covered the stain!) Pin all the fabric pieces in place.

Stitch around the edges of the fabric shapes using a blanket or other decorative stitch.

Leave an opening at the top of some of the bigger hearts. Push a small wad of stuffing into the hearts using the eraser end of a pencil.

Finish stitching the heart closed and stitch the remaining fabric hearts onto the placemat flag.

Time to iron on those glittery hearts! Peel the clear backing off the hearts and bee.

Lay them onto the placemat/flag, lay a piece of scrap cloth on top and then heat the glitter shapes with an iron for 40 seconds to adhere them to the flag.

Sew around the bee's wings and add some stuffing if desired.

Paint a little bee travel line with the round paint brush and black fabric paint.

Paint glitter hearts to fill in any "holes" in your design.

Let the paint dry and then prominently display your new garden flag.

Visit [Pretty Handy Girl](#) for more step by step tutorials and projects!

Wool Roses on a Stem

Brittany blogs at [Pretty Handy Girl](#), a DIY tutorial blog empowering people to complete their own DIY project. Her mantra is that if a human being can do it, then there is a 95% chance that she can do it too! As a woman, she refuses to bow to the stereotypes that women aren't handy. From a young age, her father and mother taught her and her two sisters that they could do anything a man could do (and sometimes better!)

Originally posted on [Pretty Handy Girl](#).



Supplies:

- [felted wool roses](#)
- hot glue
- tacky glue (or e-6000 but that is overkill)
- cardstock scrapbook paper
- scissors
- sticks

Directions:

Turn your felted wool roses over and snip off the middle flap. Squeeze a fair amount of hot glue into the back center of the rose and insert a stick into it.

Next fold your scrapbook paper in half and cut out a leaf shape with the stem landing on the fold. Bend the stem down slightly. Next make a crease along the length of your leaf. Put a small dollop in the middle of the two leaves to secure them together.

Next glue the stem of your leaf to the stick. I used hot glue, but half my leaves fell off. Therefore, I recommend using a tacky glue instead.

Visit [Pretty Handy Girl](#) for more step by step tutorials and projects!

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date: _____ time: _____
location: _____
backup location: _____

reserve venue
 send invitation
 plan food
 plan activities
 prepare party

(attendees)

name	address	invited

[Party Planner](#)



["Flying High" Valentines](#)

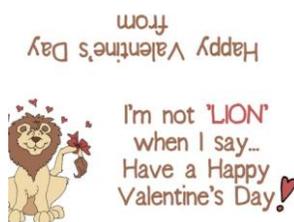
How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

<i>I love you because...</i>	<i>You are so...</i>
<i>After all these years...</i>	<i>I love when you...</i>
<i>Thanks for being...</i>	<i>Remember when...</i>

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About Mandi Ehman and Life...Your Way



You might wonder, with a name like [Life...Your Way](#), whether I believe in any absolutes. Let me assure you that I do.

I believe in right and wrong, the God of the Bible, the covenant of marriage and the sanctity of life.

However, I also believe there are lots of gray areas where each of us have to make our own decisions. Some of these are a good/better/ best kind of thing. But most are simply to-MAY-to versus to-MAH-to.

In this internet age, we're hit with opinions, facts and information from every angle every day — about food, finances, motherhood, success and more. And each day we have to wade through it all and try to decide what's best for ourselves, our family and our children.

Life...Your Way has one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.

About Mandi

Nine years ago I married the guy who lived across the street.

We set off on a cross-country adventure, moving 3,000 miles away from our family to a city where we knew no one. We made a lot of stupid decisions and did a lot of growing up, and two years later our oldest daughter was born. In the five years that followed, we had three more babies, moved three times and built our dream home on a little slice of heaven in the middle of nowhere. We made a few more mistakes, and our hearts broke as we said goodbye to three babies that we never got to hold in our arms.

These days, my husband has the privilege of being a stay-at-home dad, and I have the incredible privilege of pursuing my passion — writing, blogging and more — while also being home for all of the milestones I wouldn't want to miss and the boobos that need kissing. We're a homeschooling family, which means we get to spend every day together. And most days we consider that a blessing!

Although it might sometimes seem like I've got it all figured out, let me assure you that I don't. There are probably dirty dishes in my sink right now, and I end up wasting time on Facebook more often than I care to admit. Our marriage is beautiful, but not perfect, and I still get buyer's remorse after a stupid impulse purchase. I'm the spokesperson for [Plan to Eat](#), but sometimes I totally ignore my meal plan and we end up eating out because mama doesn't feel like cooking.

But through it all, we're just a family trying to make the best decisions we can while pursuing our passions and enjoying each other. And here at Life...Your Way, I try to share the things I'm thinking about and the lessons we're learning along the way.