

Valentine Wishes With a Healthy Touch

A red-ribboned box of chocolates or red roses are tried and true Valentine gifts. Let's face it, red is a rich, vibrant color that most people love, but this year why not send a "red" Valentine's wish with a healthy touch. While all fresh produce provides a myriad of vitamins, minerals and fiber, who knew that red-hued foods add another nutritional bonus to the mix.

Foods like tomatoes and tomato products, watermelon, pink grapefruit, guava, red peppers, apricots and papaya, especially Caribbean Red papaya, all get their natural pigment color from a class of phytonutrients called carotenoids. Primary dietary carotenoids include lutein, beta-carotene, lycopene and beta-cryptoxanthin all of which act as anti-oxidants in the body. As anti-oxidants, they temper down inflammation and can be effective as cancer fighting agents. While many people have heard about the lycopene value of tomatoes and their products, most folks don't realize that all those other red-colored foods can also contribute lycopene to the diet.

As fruit ripens and gets darker, the lycopene content increases so it stands to reason that a ripe, Caribbean Red papaya would be a particularly good way to consume this important phytonutrient. Papayas, as a terrific source of vitamin C, folate, potassium and the digestive enzyme, papain, along with lycopene make for a very nutritionally powerful fruit.

So this year, use Valentine's Day as an excuse to try some recipes using Caribbean Red papayas and give the gift of health.

Papaya-Fig Truffles Makes 20-24

2 ounces	dark chocolate (60-70% cocoa content), finely chopped
2 Tbsp	boiling water
1/3 cup	almonds, unsalted (pecans or cashews)
1 cup	dried figs, diced
2 tsp	orange zest
1/8 tsp	salt
1/2 cup	dried papaya, finely chopped
1/2 cup	coconut, unsweetened

1. Combine chocolate and boiling water in a small bowl, stirring until melted.
2. In a food processor, grind nuts then add figs, orange zest, salt and chocolate mixture creating a thick consistency. Transfer to a bowl and stir in dried papaya. Refrigerate for several hours.
3. Spread coconut on a plate, then roll fruit-nut-chocolate mixture into small balls then roll in coconut. Chill again before serving. Store in airtight container.

Jellied Papaya Pineapple Candy Makes 36 pieces

Transforming papaya into a juice is a novel way to use the fruit for making jellied candy. Alternate other fruit juices with the papaya for different variations. These can be made ahead and boxed up in a pretty fashion for gift giving to adults as well as children.

2/3 cup	papaya juice (see method below)
8 Tbsp	unflavored gelatin, separated
2/3 cup	pineapple juice
3/4 cup	sugar, separated
1/2 cup	light corn syrup
Sugar and/or unsweetened coconut	

To make papaya juice: In a saucepan, boil papaya and 1 cup water, cover and simmer for 10-15 minutes until fruit is very soft. Transfer to blender and puree till thin. Use 2/3 cup for recipe.

1. Stir 4 Tbsp gelatin into 1/3 cup cold water. Meanwhile, heat papaya juice, 6 Tbsp sugar and 4 Tbsp corn syrup, over medium heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Stir in gelatin mixture until gelatin dissolves. Pour into 6 X 6 (or similar dimension pan) that has been lightly moistened with water. Refrigerate for 1 hour before proceeding to step #2
2. Repeat step #1 using pineapple juice, allowing juice to slightly cool before pouring on top of papaya layer. Refrigerate 1 hour till firm.
3. When set, cut into small cubes. Toss in sugar and coconut mixture or just sugar. Store in airtight container in refrigerator.

For more Caribbean Red papaya recipes, go to

<http://www.brookstropicals.com/tropicalrecipes>