

## 9 Tips on How to Survive Valentine's Day When it's Complicated

BY MARYKATE FENSTERMAKER

**T**HIS VALENTINE'S DAY, you and your s/o are more than friends. Over the last few months, you may have developed a strong physical or emotional connection. You're trying to decide if you should spend time with them... on Valentine's Day. As a young individual with experience in complicated situationships, my advice is this:

1. **Don't overthink it.** Don't treat it as an overly serious occasion. It's recommended that people stay in for Valentine's Day this year, so take advantage of this by keeping the night casual, and unless you can confidently anticipate what the night will bring, do not expect anything more than a friendly hug.
2. **If appropriate, gifts are fine; THEY SHOULD BE THOUGHTFUL BUT INFORMAL.** Based on former gift exchanges, do not give gifts out of the ordinary. Try to get on the same page pertaining to price expectations. Informal items I personally resort to include food, sweets, coffee, tea, and socks.
3. **Watch what you eat and drink throughout the night.** If you have a history of excessive disclosure while impaired, avoid any substance that could lead to an embarrassing disclosure.
4. **If you have multiple "friends," remember to stay focused on the person you are with.** Trying to engage with multiple people while you are with someone can be difficult. Giving 100 percent of your attention to one person versus 25 percent to four people will make your night easier by letting you deal with one set of emotions at a time. On the flip side, my friend Alexis says, "I would want to know if they had anyone else on their mind. Maybe their original Valentine's plans fell through. Essentially, I would want to know if I am their first pick or their backup plan." In this situation, the latter is not preferred, so don't do either.
5. **If anything particularly wild happens, resist the urge to send a lengthy follow up text regarding the incident.** Try not to discuss your evening until after you have processed it. While texting can be an instant reaction, especially if you want to resolve any wandering thoughts or questions, in-person discussion is significantly more revealing and sincere.
6. **Acknowledge the fact that Valentine's Day is traditionally a romantic occasion.** I suggest that you don't overthink your casual occasion; however, you should be able to admit that there's something special among you. Take this time to get to know the person and decide if you want to pursue anything moving forward.
7. **If you are nervous, don't make it worse.** If you are nervous, confused, or stressed about the state of your situationship, I would advise you to skip Valentine's plans altogether. Getting together could further complicate your already confusing situation. This does not sound fun, so why do it?
8. **Whatever happens, put yourself first.** Just because it's Valentine's Day and the beginning of a new year does not mean you have to take your relationship to the next level. Your foremost considerations should be your wants and needs. After you examine this, decide how you want your relationship to function.
9. **If all else fails, do not forget about Galentine's Day on February 13<sup>th</sup>.** Following the drawn-out depressing year of 2020, you should spend Valentine's free of emotional drama. Surround yourself with the people who make you happiest. Indulge in all your favorites this month while still being safe and considerate of others.

## Plants: Why You Need One, and Where to Start

BY BRITTANY MCCARTY

**G**ROWING UP, my family hardly had plants in the house. I never thought anything of this. I thought it was normal for a pot of flowers to die after a couple months. Whatever the opposite of a green thumb is, that's my family. The first plant to enter my childhood home and survive more than a year was a little cactus from Home Depot. This little cactus not only survived, but thrived. He grew and grew over the years. This little cactus brought so much joy to my family just because we managed not to kill it.

When a plant you care for thrives in addition to surviving, it brings unparalleled joy. Dogs are easy. Food, water, walks, cuddles (and the occasional vet visit) make them happy and healthy. Plants, however, can be very confusing. Do you need more water? Less water? Are your roots too wet? Is the soil lacking nutrients? Which nutrients? All of this can be overwhelming, but succulents (including cacti) are a great place to start.

Succulents are known for being low-maintenance plants. This is true, but taking the time to learn more about plant care will help your succulents thrive and grow for years. The most important part of succulent care is the soil. Succulents hate sitting in water, so soil should be loose and have good drainage. Good drainage can be achieved by putting rocks, moss, or sand at the bottom of the pot. I usually use a layer of river rocks and some activated charcoal (to add nutrients to the soil) and then put in the succulent soil mixture. Next, it is important to water your plants a certain way to encourage strong roots. This is done by imitating desert weather. Sunlight should be maximized, but always indirect. Direct sunlight can burn your little plants! In the desert, it doesn't rain often, but when it does rain, it rains a lot. By "flooding" your succulents with water and allowing the soil to completely dry out before "flooding" them again, the roots will grow thick and strong. This makes succulents happy and helps them grow and thrive.

This can feel like a lot of work at first, but you get into a pattern/routine of caring for your plants. Naming them and talking to them might seem silly, but has its benefits! Then, when you see little Gilbert has new growth and you know you've succeeded as a plant-parent, you'll feel that little rush of joy. Especially during this pandemic and especially as college students, it's those little things that make your day brighter.

Additionally, these plants will help clean the air. Some plants are known to sap formaldehyde out of the air along with other harmful chemicals. Plants improve not only your mental health, but air quality too! Start out with small, easy-to-care-for plants like succulents, and slowly get to know more about other plants. Growing herbs and produce have even more benefits, but sticking with plants like English Ivy or lavender have a whole other set of benefits as well.

If my plants have taught me anything, it's that a green thumb isn't something you're born with. It's like an achievement. It's like those little awards you got at the end of fifth grade. If you already have plants, make sure to repot them in the spring. And if you're not sure about getting a plant, just go for it!



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