



52

Date Ideas Under \$20

by Meridith Lane

© 2013 BY MEREDITH LANE

introduction

Did you know that doing new things and enjoying new experiences with your partner ignites the same circuit in your brain as does falling in love? That's right, the simple act of engaging in a new activity together is scientifically proven to flood both of your minds with dopamine and norepinephrine, those wonderful chemicals that fill your eyes with stars and your tummies with butterflies. But when money is tight and creativity is in short supply, date nights sometimes become predictable and boring. Perhaps you would like to be able to provide your partner with extravagant evenings filled with six-course meals, expensive cocktails, and box seats at the opera. But, these days, who

has the money for that? And anyway, you can do better. You can plan an imaginative date that will make a big impression on your partner and provide both of you with lots of fun, romance, and warm memories, all for \$ 20 or less. In the following chapters, you'll find 52 ideas for dates, each of which costs no more than \$ 20 total (and many of them are free). These date ideas are guaranteed to get the two of you off the couch and, finally, away from your standard Friday night Chinese takeout and Netflix movie. Enjoy!

for the foodies



CHECK OUT A FARMER'S MARKET

Supplies Needed: Reusable grocery bag
Cost: \$15

Grab your reusable grocery bag, and head over to your local farmer's market to score some locally grown goodies for dinner. Explore the booths together. Check out produce and ask vendors about ingredients with which you're not familiar. Focus on things that are fresh and in season. Think in terms of courses—get some bread, olive oil, and herbs for an appetizer; yummy vegetables and a good-qual-

ity piece of meat for the main course, and some fresh fruit or sweet pastries for dessert. Don't worry about stocking up on groceries for the coming week. This date is just about tonight! Then take home your finds and use them to cook and enjoy dinner together!

GO WINE TASTING

Supplies Needed: a picnic basket with cheese, crackers, fruit, and sandwiches
Cost: \$10

For those nights when the two of you are in the mood for a quiet, sophisticated night out, wine tasting at a local winery is a great option. Wineries are an enjoyable place to visit as a couple, and not just because of the delicious, inexpensive booze. They are quiet and peaceful

and often situated in beautiful and bucolic settings. Plus, a visit to a winery usually includes a free tour with an explanation of the wine-making process and tastings that will cost you very little—usually around \$ 5 for tastings of about five different wines. Often, you get to keep your

wine glass as a souvenir. Some wineries also host local musicians for free shows. For an extra dose of adorable-ness, pack a picnic of cheese, crackers, fruit, and sandwiches to enjoy together on the beautiful winery grounds.

NANTUCKET VINEYARD
NANTUCKET, MA



CHECK OUT A DIVE BAR

Supplies Needed: None
Cost: \$20
for two beers and an appetizer

On nights when your mood is more casual than sophisticated, skip the winery and grab a few beers at your local dive bar. You know, the type of place that features on its draft list Miller Light and Bud Light and little else and has a flappy, poorly laminated menu and a chalkboard

special listing the special as a tenderloin sandwich and cole slaw. Find a place that has a pool table or dart-board and challenge your date to a few games. Choose jukebox songs together. Share an appetizer. People watch. Sit back and relax with your beers and have a great time!

SILHOUETTE LOUNGE
BOSTON, MA





ALDEN & HARLOW
CAMBRIDGE, MA

HIT HAPPY HOUR FOR DINNER

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$20

If you're in the mood to have dinner with the early birds, check your local newspaper or search online for nearby restaurants and bars that offer happy hour specials. Many places will run food and drink specials that are half the normal price and most of which are more than substantial enough to serve as a full meal. Plan ahead, show up at your favorite place (or try a new restaurant or genre of food) at five or six, and the two of you will be able to get two drinks and a couple of appetizers for less than \$ 20.



ORTA RESTAURANT
PEMBROKE, MA

ROAD TRIP TO DINNER

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$20

There is something magical about taking a road trip with your sweetie, even if it's only an hour or two away from home. You're spending quality time together, cruising in your car on the open road, and headed somewhere fun and unfamiliar to explore. It's an adventure! So instead of sticking with your usual local restaurants, head to dinner at a new hole-in-the-wall place (aka, the best places to find amazing food at dirt-cheap prices) at least an hour away from your home. Search online ahead of time, or just hop in the car and see where you end up, it doesn't matter! Use your time in the car together to talk, catch up, share funny stories, whatever. If, on your way to dinner, you pass a beautiful meadow perfect for snapping some pictures or a fun antique store, don't hesitate to make a pit stop. This date isn't just about the destination; it's also about the journey!

**PAVEMENT COFFEEHOUSE
BOSTON, MA**



HANG OUT AT A COFFEE SHOP

Supplies Needed: Deck of cards

Cost: \$15

Find a locally owned coffee shop. Go order a delicious seasonal beverage (I love iced macchiatos or iced green tea in the summer, hot apple cider or caramel lattes in the winter, and cappuccinos all year long). Sit together at a table near a window, chat, and enjoy the outdoor scenery and the peaceful hum of the coffee shop. Watch the people coming in and out.

Enjoy the atmosphere and the amazing scents. Bring a deck of cards and play some games. Have a fresh baked snack. Maybe even do a little research ahead of time and pick an evening when the coffee shop is featuring a performance by a local musician or poet.

JAPANESE TEA



VISIT A JAPANESE TEAHOUSE

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$15

Check out a Japanese teahouse and enjoy an authentic tea service, which traditionally includes beautiful rituals like pouring ceremonies. Teahouses are usually quiet, peaceful, and relaxing places that present those of us who live busy and stressful everyday lives with an opportunity to pause, relax, and enjoy healthy herbal teas in a calm, open space. The tea is typically served in a small teapot and will run you less than \$ 4.

Order some traditional Japanese fare to go along with your tea. Most teahouses offer a menu of small plates, like edamame, gyoza, and tea sandwiches, as well as soups (miso soup is my favorite) and desserts (be sure to check out any green tea flavored desserts. Ahhh-mazing!). The food is usually very inexpensive, at around \$ 3 to \$ 5 per plate. Enjoy your tea and snacks and take the time to unwind with your date.

FRO-YO CRAWL

Supplies Needed: None
Cost: \$20

Do an online search for frozen yogurt shops in your area and then map out a fro-yo crawl—you know, sort of like a pub crawl, but sweeter and with less regret. Come up with a tasting protocol to rank the frozen yogurt you taste—assess things like taste, color, texture,

richness, selection of flavors and toppings, et cetera. End the night at a greasy diner over a plate of loaded fries (because who says dessert has to follow dinner?). Then go home, loosen your belts, make a list of the best fro-yo dispensaries in your town, and save it for future



PINKBERRY
BOSTON, MA

DAY AT THE FAIR

Supplies Needed: Blanket, backpack
Cost: \$20

If you can find one, check out a local street or county fair or festival. Walk around together, stop at booths to browse locally produced goods and sample tasty treats, and soak up the local culture. There's always plenty to see and do at a fair or festival, whether it's a bakeoff, a

concert, a hot dog eating contest, carnival games, or a stand featuring a local microbrew. After you've seen the sights, grab some yummy barbecue or tenderloins or other delicious fair fare, find a shady spot, spread out your blanket, and relax and enjoy your food. Then, before



THE BIG E
WEST SPRINGFIELD,
MA



EASY AT-HOME
Sundaes

SET UP AN ICE CREAM BAR AT HOME

Supplies Needed: Ice cream bowls, spoons

Cost: \$10 - \$15

Head to the grocery store together and pick out two quarts of your favorite ice cream flavors and an assortment of toppings—candy, cookie dough, sprinkles, syrups, nuts, whipped cream, whatever you want! Then head back to the homestead, set out the toppings buffet-style in pretty containers, and dish out two big bowls of ice cream. Pile on the toppings (being as creative and generous as you want) and enjoy! Be sure to sample each other's creations!

hang-at-home dates

MOVIE THEME NIGHT

Supplies: A DVD from your collection, snacks, soda, blankets

Cost: Less than \$10

Pick out a movie from your DVD collection and have a themed movie night with your special someone. Raid your kitchen cabinets or swing by the grocery store for snacks that fit your theme. For example, if you're watching Lady and the Tramp, nosh on spaghetti and meatballs. Or if you're watching Wedding Crashers, have big slices of decadent cake. Silence your phones, turn the lights way down, grab a blanket, and snuggle on the couch together while you enjoy!



AT HOME SPA WITH
FLOWERS AND LIMES



SPA AT HOME

Supplies Needed: Body oil, bubble bath or bath oil, fruit, chocolates, drinks, robes

Cost: \$0

There will come a time when the two of you just need a quiet evening at home, full of pampering and indulgence. When that happens, a spa night together at home will be just the ticket! It's easy to pull off, romantic, and you'll both feel rejuvenated afterward. Choose a space in your house to set up the spa—a master bedroom with an en suite bathroom works really well, but a living room will do. Light lots of fragrant candles and put on some soft, relaxing music. Arrange pillows and blankets on the floor or bed.

Make a couple of drinks—think cool cucumber-infused water, hot herbal tea, or maybe even champagne. Set out some tasty treats, like fresh fruit and chocolates. Then take turns giving each other full-body or hand-and-foot massages, using scented body oil. After you've both been kneaded and rubbed into complete relaxation, indulge in a bubble bath together. Then put on some comfy robes and relax for the rest of the evening.

PUZZLE PIECES



WORK ON A PUZZLE TOGETHER

Supplies: Puzzle, munchies, candles, music

Cost: \$10

Working a puzzle together is the perfect activity for a quiet evening alone with your sweetie. You can talk as much or as little as you want, work together, and just enjoy each other's company. Head over to the closest toy store (many book stores also carry puzzles). Choose a puzzle together—look for one that includes at least 1,000 pieces so that it takes you a couple of hours to complete. When you get home, whip up an easy meal to munch on while you work on the puzzle (think pasta, sandwiches, chili, chopped salad, etc.).

Light some candles and put on your favorite music. Sit down at a table—make sure it's big enough—and get to work! When you're finished, consider using puzzle glue and a frame to create a cool piece of art to hang in your home.



MONOPOLY BOARD

ORGANIZE A BOARD GAME NIGHT

Supplies needed: Your favorite board games, drinks, snacks

Cost: \$0

Engage in a little friendly competition by challenging your honey to a board game night. Pick out two or three games to play together— Battleship, Monopoly, Uno, War, checkers, or Jenga are some classics. Pour a couple glasses of wine, put together a plate of snacks, and start the action. Don't focus on winning or losing (the last thing you want is to start an argument or rivalry). Just have fun. Laugh and talk, enjoy spending time with each other. To make things interesting, challenge your partner to Strip Battleship or Jenga or place a friendly wager where the loser has to do a to-be-determined-something for the winner after the games.



ROMANTIC NIGHTTIME
PICNIC IN THE BACKYARD

HAVE A NIGHTTIME PICNIC IN YOUR BACKYARD

Supplies: Food and drink, plates, napkins, flatware, lanterns or candles, bug spray, a blanket, and a flashlight

Cost: \$0

Who doesn't love a picnic? Enjoying a meal outside can make even the simplest menu seem romantic and exciting, and there's no need to pack up and head to a park or beach to do so. It's just as fun to have a picnic in your own backyard! Plan a simple and easy-to-pack menu that you can put together from things you already have in your cupboards. Be sure that the items you choose are easy to eat while sitting on the ground. Some great options: baguette slices with dip, fresh fruit, a cheese platter, sandwiches, and a bottle of your favorite wine. Pack up everything in a basket (don't forget plates, napkins, flatware, and condiments). Also pack a blanket, lanterns or candles, a corkscrew, a flashlight, bug spray, and a trash bag. Then head outside, set up your picnic area, and enjoy your meal together, relaxing and focusing on the simplicity and romance of the evening.

FONDUE IT!

Supplies Needed: Fondue pot or saucepan

Cost: \$20
for groceries

Love fondue but don't want to pay the big bucks for a dinner at the Melting Pot? No problem! Just stay in tonight and heat things up with some yummy DIY cheese fondue and sweet melted chocolate. With a little prep work, you'll soon be enjoying a fondue night in the comfort

of your own home and for a fraction of the cost of a pricey restaurant. A three-course fondue meal usually includes an appetizer course of cheese-based fondue, with bread and apple pieces to dip, a main course of broth-based fondue with meat, seafood, and veggies to dip,

and a dessert course with chocolate fondue and fruit, marshmallows, cake pieces, and pretzels to dip. No fondue pot? That's OK, just melt the fondue in a saucepan on the stove. Here are the recipes:

CHEESE FONDUE



CHEESE FONDUE RECIPE

12 ounces beer
8 ounces Swiss cheese, shredded
4 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
1/4 cup flour
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/4 teaspoon mustard powder
1/4 teaspoon pepper

In a medium sized bowl, mix cheeses with flour. Meanwhile, heat beer in fondue pot until steaming. Add Worcestershire, garlic, mustard and pepper; mix well. Add cheese and stir until melted.

BROTH RECIPE – COQ AU VIN FONDUE

3 1/2 cups vegetable stock
1/2 cup Burgundy wine
1/2 cup sliced mushrooms
1 tbsp garlic, minced
2 green onions, sliced

Heat the vegetable stock in fondue pot until it begins to simmer. Add all other ingredients and bring to simmer. Place individual pieces of desired meat or veggies on fondue fork and put in pot until correct temperature has been reached.

CHOCOLATE AND FRUIT FONDUE

CHOCOLATE FONDUE RECIPE

DARK CHOCOLATE RASPBERRY FONDUE
12 ounces dark chocolate, finely chopped
1/4 cup heavy cream
3 tbsp raspberry liqueur

Combine the chocolate and cream in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water. Heat until the chocolate is melted, stirring constantly. Be careful not to let the chocolate burn. Pour into a warm fondue pot. Drizzle with the liqueur. Keep fondue warm over low heat. Enjoy your relaxing fondue night!



CHALLENGE EACH OTHER TO A WII OR KINECT TOURNAMENT

Supplies Needed: Video game system

Cost: \$0

Owning a Wii or Xbox Kinect video game system? Then you've got an inexpensive, fun, and easy at-home date night waiting for you. Challenge your partner to a video game tournament—it could be a virtual bowling tournament, racing, tennis, a series of them, whatever. Pour a

couple of beers and talk affectionately smack to each other as you play. Add some spice to the competition with some friendly wagering—after the tournament, the loser has to prepare the meal of the winner's choosing!

WII AND KINECT GAME CONTROLLERS



CHAMPAGNE AND CANDLES FOR A ROMANTIC NIGHT



SEX, SEX, SEX

Supplies Needed: ;)

Cost: \$0

Now THIS is a date night. Set aside a night to focus completely on each other. Turn off your phones and televisions. Ignore your emails. If you have kids, send them to stay with family members or a baby sitter (or have the baby sitter come to your house and book a night in a local hotel). And then spend the entire evening together in a way you haven't done since your honeymoon. Do whatever makes both of you feel sexy. Limit your conversation to romance-related topics—stay away from the subjects of work, bills, agendas, and

the like. Light some candles and pour some champagne. Tell your partner how sexy he or she is to you. Read or watch some erotica to get you in the mood. Massage each other. Use body paint. Use handcuffs. Use toys. Spend the entire evening in bed... or on the couch... or in backseat of car... whatever turns both of you on!



BLANKET FORT WITH
PILLOWS, LIGHTS AND
MUSIC

BUILD A BLANKET FORT

Supplies Needed: Several blankets or sheets, clips, flameless candles, a bottle of wine, snacks, an iPod or laptop

Cost: **None**

We all loved building blanket forts as kids. There was something exciting and adventurous, and yet cozy and secure, about it. You can re-create this feeling as adults by getting out your supply of blankets and sheets and building you and your sweetie your own cozy blanket fort. Choose an open space in your house that's large enough to fit both of you lying down. Set up the "braces" of your fort—things like chairs, tables, couches, and stools to drape your blankets over. Try to scrounge up some clips or other devices to help attach the sheets and blankets to the braces. Throw your blankets and sheets over the supports to make a sort of tent. Spread a soft blanket or comforter on the floor for the two of you to lie on. For an added dose of romance, bring some flameless candles or a small lamp into the blanket fort, along with a bottle of wine, some wine glasses, some fruit or cheese to munch on, and your iPod or laptop to listen to music or watch movies together. Now you're all set to enjoy some adult cuddle time in your throwback-to-childhood blanket fort!

sporty dates



CHEER ON YOUR TEAM

Supplies Needed: A blanket, snacks, soda, beer

Cost: \$20

From football and soccer in the fall to basketball in the winter to baseball in the spring and summer—there's always some fun sporting event going on. Find a local game—be it minor league, high school, or college—and get a pair of tickets to cheer on your team together. For minor league games, look for tickets that are on the lawn or towards the back of the stadium, and you should be able to score two seats for well under \$ 20. High school games, even less. College games can be pricey, depending on the school and the team (think Big 10 school versus tiny private university). Bring your own refreshments, if the venue allows it. Typical game day refreshments that

are easy to prepare, pack, and clean up include soda or beer, sandwiches, popcorn, and chips. If the venue doesn't allow you to bring your own food, pack a simple picnic and tailgate in the parking lot before the game. If the game is outdoors, be sure to wear or bring a few extra layers of clothing or a blanket to combat the fall or spring evening chill! Be sure to plan ahead for parking. Usually, the closer you get to the stadium or field, the more expensive parking is, so arrive early, park further away, and walk



HIT THE BOWLING LANES

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$20

A trip to the local bowling alley is a great, old school, fun, and laid-back date idea! Even the smallest towns usually have bowling alleys, and it's the perfect environment for the two of you to enjoy a beer and a slice of pizza while engaging in some friendly competition. Don't be embarrassed if you're a terrible bowler—sometimes your (let's be honest, amusing) lack of skill makes the evening even more enjoyable. Just don't take yourself too seriously, and you'll both have a great time. Call the bowling alley ahead of time to find out when its least busy night is or when it has special events scheduled (for example, cosmic bowling or 80's theme night). Also, don't forget to wear or bring socks, so you don't have to put your bare feet in rented shoes. Promise each other a kiss for every strike. Program silly nicknames into the scoreboard. Tease your partner about his or her silly bowling shoes. Get a \$ 5 pitcher. Pick a cheesy love song on the jukebox. Your date will be bowled over!

ROLL AROUND AT THE ROLLER RINK

Supplies Needed: Skates (or you can rent them at the rink)

Cost: < \$10

Another fun, old school date idea: head over to the nearest roller rink. This date is very inexpensive—skate rentals are usually just a few bucks—and you can stay as long as you want and get plenty of exercise. Pretend you're fourteen again and you're at the rink with your school

crush. Enjoy the adrenaline rush as you skate, maybe for the first time in years. Laugh at each other's awkwardness. Try not to run over the small children. Do the chicken dance. And be sure to hold hands during those couple skates!



HIT THE GYM TOGETHER

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: None

Did you know that exercise has been proven to increase sexual appetite and enhance sexual pleasure? That's why, believe it or not, going to the gym together is a great date idea. Take a jog on some side-by-side treadmills. Laugh at each other as you both struggle to lift weights

(but please don't hurt yourself!). Try out a new class together. Tell jokes about the insane workout buffs frequenting nearby machines. By the end of the date, your bodies will be invigorated and your minds will be clear and happy. Don't belong to a gym? No problem. You might

consider joining one (a YMCA membership is very inexpensive). Also, most facilities offer a free trial membership or a free day pass. Check GymTicket.com for more info. P.S. When you get home, be sure to take full advantage of those exercise-induced endorphins!

PLANET FITNESS
PLYMOUTH, MA



McGOLF
DEDHAM, MA



WORK ON YOUR STROKE AT THE DRIVING RANGE

Supplies Needed: Two sets of golf clubs

Cost: \$20

Even if both of you are golf novices, the driving range can be a great, inexpensive way to spend a date night. If you don't have clubs, borrow a set (you should know at least one person who has some to lend) or even just a couple of irons and, when you get to the range, buy a bucket of balls to share. If you don't know how to hit a golf ball, ask a range employee or one of the other patrons to show you. It's harder than it looks—you have to line up your feet a certain way, line up your thumbs a certain way, hold your head a

certain way, swing the club a certain way—but the challenge will make for a good time for you and your date. Check your pride at the parking lot; everyone looks dumb when they're learning to golf. Afterwards, grab a drink and a snack at the range's lounge and take turns massaging each other's sore arms!

**ISLAND COVE
MINI GOLF
MARTHA'S VINEYARD**



GO PUTT-PUTTING

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$15-\$20

If you're not into actual golfing (to the extent, of course, that going to a driving range IS actual golfing), try your hand at mini golf instead. Eighteen holes of miniature golf at an inexpensive course will run you around \$ 15 and will provide the two of you with a good hour-and-a-half of fun! Cheer each other on, bond, and laugh together as you struggle to put your ball through the churning windmill blades and past those dastardly corners.

Take silly photos of each other posing with cheesy course decorations. After you make it through the course, congratulate each other, and then go home and enjoy a couple of big bowls of ice cream!

outdoorsy dates



TAKE A HIKE

Supplies Needed: Hiking boots or comfy sneakers, two big bottles of water, healthy snacks

Cost: \$0 to \$10

Did you know that studies have shown that being in nature relieves stress? And what better way to enjoy nature than to whisk your date off on a hike through it. Even if you live in the city, odds are good that you're within a half hour drive of a decent wooded area or hiking trail. Some trails are free and some are located in parks that charge small admission fees. Pack up your hiking boots or some sturdy sneakers and throw a couple of water bottles, some snacks (trail mix and fruit are great options), and a camera into your backpacks. Then hit the trails! (You can locate nearby trails by visiting www.trails.com.) When you choose a place to hike, be sure to consider both your and your

date's fitness levels. For example, you don't want to plan a ten-mile hike through mountainous terrain for someone who has little hiking experience. Bond as you admire the beauty of nature, watch the sunset, and point out wildlife that you spot along the way. About halfway through your hike, find a good place to sit down, relax for a few minutes, and enjoy your snacks. What a great opportunity to have uninterrupted alone time, outdoors time, and exercise time all at once!



GARDEN IN
THE WOODS
FRAMINGHAM, MA

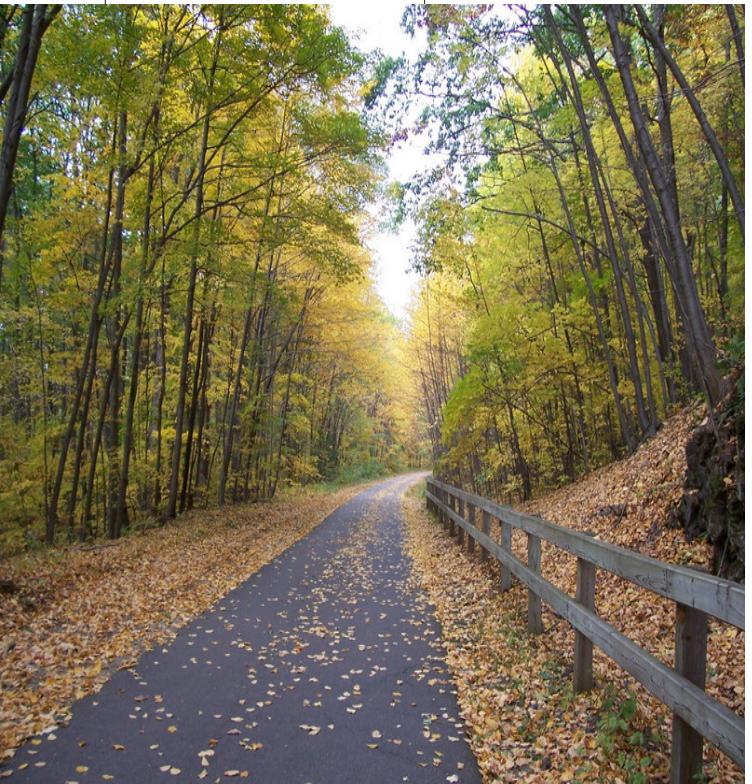
CHECK OUT A BOTANICAL GARDEN

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$0 - \$20

A stroll through a botanical garden is a wonderful way to spend the afternoon, and the best part— tickets are often free and those that aren't free are almost always less than \$ 10 per person. Obviously, this is more of a spring and summer date idea, although many gardens are still open during the fall and weather and still worth seeing the light displays, ornate statues, intricate walking paths, and beautiful artwork. Explore the gardens together. Walk hand-in-hand and take lots of photos. Bring a picnic and find a pretty spot to sit and enjoy it. Learn about different types of gardens, flowers, and plants. Enjoy the beauty and the heavenly fragrances. Let the plants inspire you to create your own garden spaces at home, even if just an arrangement of potted plants on your apartment balcony!

**RAIL TRAIL
PEPPERELL, MA**



GO BICYCLING

Supplies Needed: Two bicycles, snacks, water bottles
Cost: **None**

Go bicycling together. This is another fun, low-key, and nostalgic date option. If you don't own bicycles, borrow or rent them and go for a long ride around your neighborhood, through the park, or wherever. Bring a backpack packed with water bottles and a couple of sandwiches, or grab some food at a stand or diner along the way. Be sure to choose a route that suits both of you—don't begin a grueling bike ride through steep terrain if you're more in the mood for a leisurely cruise.

Your date will love it—a pair of lovers bicycling together is the stuff adorable romance movie scenes are made of!

BASIC KITE



GO FLY A KITE

Supplies Needed: Kite-making kit or materials
Cost: **\$5 - \$10**

Want a date where you not only have a chance to build something with your honey, but also get to have fun playing with it? Then kite flying is the perfect way to spend your evening! Head online to find some instructions on building a kite and then make a trip to the store to get supplies. (You might also check your local toy store for a kite-making kit). Decorate the kite with your date's name or hearts or something equally corny and romantic. Then trot outside, find a windy, open spot, and launch your kite! Launching a kite can

be a bit tricky. The easiest way to get going: stand with your back to the wind and hold your kite above your head so that the wind catches it. Then let your line out gradually as the wind carries your kite higher. When the wind slows, reel your line in a bit. After you get the kite (or kites) going, sit down (obviously, still hanging onto the line) and watch it dip and swoop in the wind. Talk, or don't. Enjoy the peacefulness. Or, run around like little kids, chasing and screaming and laughing. Your pick.

WATCH THE SUN RISE

Supplies Needed: Blankets, coffee, maybe some munchables

Cost: **None**

When was the last time you watched the sun rise? Not set, but rise? There's nothing quite like a gorgeous sunrise. It signifies the start of a new day, twenty-four hours of fresh opportunities and promise. And who better to enjoy it with than your special someone? Check

the time of your sunrise at www.sunrisesunset.com the night before. Then set your alarm. When it goes off, actually get up! Grab a couple of blankets, a thermos of coffee, and your partner, and head out the door. Plant yourself in your backyard or your rooftop or a nearby

park—anywhere where you have a clear view of the eastern sky. Talk softly, cuddle under the blanket, make out, and enjoy the beauty. Then, when the sun is fully up and blazing, head back inside, enjoy a yummy breakfast together, and head back to bed.

CHARLES RIVER
BOSTON, MA



TAKE FIDO TO THE DOG PARK

Supplies Needed: Your furry buddy

Cost: **None**

Nice day out? Then round up your date and your pooch and head over to a local dog park. You can check your park and recreation department's website for a list of dog parks in your area. Giggle with your date at your dog's shenanigans and the antics of the other cute pups at

the park. Frolic with your furry pal, laugh, chat with other pet parents, and have a great time together. Enjoy the opportunity to be outdoors and the insta-stress relief that comes from hanging out with animals. (Word to the wise: don't bring dog toys. Your dog will have plenty of

fun just running around with the other dogs, and there's always the chance that the presence of a favorite toy could start a fight with another dog.) Afterwards, swing by a coffee shop for an iced latte for the two of you to share and a pup cup for your dog.

SALEM DOG PARK
SALEM, MA





OUTDOOR MOVIE IN
THE BACKYARD

SET UP AN OUTDOOR MOVIE SCREENING

Supplies Needed: Projector and white sheet (or laptop and speakers or television and extension cord), blankets, picnic basket with popcorn, candy, and drinks, candles

Cost: **None**

Gorgeous evening? Then take this opportunity to curl up in your backyard—or in a local green space, rooftop, or balcony—for a no-car drive in movie! If you want to go all out, borrow a projector and hang a white sheet against a wall or fence. If not, just grab your laptop (and maybe some external speakers to plug into your laptop's headphones jack) or a small-ish TV with an extension cord and a good movie and head outside. Spread out a blanket or two on the ground and arrange a few pillows or cushions to ensure both of you stay comfy. Pack a basket or backpack with popcorn, candy, and cool drinks. Light some candles (carefully protected in lanterns or mason jars). Lay back with your honey, munch on your treats, and enjoy a film screening under the stars!

Artsy Dates



VISIT AN ART GALLERY

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **None**

Most art galleries are free to visit, so check your local newspaper or online for some nearby galleries. In particular, look for an opening night of a gallery exhibit or look for art shows at community centers, schools, and libraries—these make for great, fabulously inexpensive date nights. The two of you will enjoy free admission, free wine and hors d'oeuvres (often), and the romance and pleasure of examining artwork together... what could be better? Bonus: whether you've been seeing your date for two weeks or two decades, you can definitely learn a lot about that person by observing his or her taste in artwork.

A CONCERT IN THE PARK



ENJOY A FREE LOCAL CONCERT

Supplies Needed: For outdoor shows, a picnic basket and bottle of wine

Cost: **Up to \$15**
for food and drinks

Who doesn't love a good concert? And all the more better if it's free! No matter where you live, there are always local bands putting on free shows at local venues. Check your paper or online for free concert listings, or ask around among your friends. Choose a band from a genre both you and your date enjoy. If the concert is outdoors, pack a picnic and a bottle of wine. If the concert is at a bar, order a couple of beers and split an appetizer.

Let yourself get wrapped up in the music. Dance. Sing along. Then, afterwards, use the money you saved to take your sweetie out for a delicious dessert!

BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE



ATTEND A BOOK READING

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **\$10**
for snacks

Head to your local bookstore or library for a free book reading. Afterwards, roam the bookstore or library together, showing each other your favorite books and exploring new genres or subjects. If you're at a library, check out a couple of books and head to a coffee shop for lattes and quiet reading time together. If you're at a bookstore, grab a book that looks interesting, get a couple of coffees at the bookstore coffee counter, and plant yourselves at a table in the café section to browse through your finds

(most bookstores don't mind when patrons read books without purchasing, as long as they return the books to the shelves afterwards). As you read, share great quotes or interesting tidbits of information with each other.



MUSEUM OF
FINE ARTS
BOSTON, MA

VISIT A MUSEUM

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **None**

Roaming a museum with your date is a great way to spend some time together, with guaranteed interesting conversation a-flowing! Most museums offer free admission daily or on certain days of the month or week. Do a little research ahead of time and pick out some exhibits that you'd like to see. Choose a museum that is big enough to keep the two of you occupied for a while without running out of things to see or talk about. As you tour the museum, avoid the temptation to try to impress your date with your stockpile of knowledge on the subject of the exhibits and just enjoy learning new things together. When you've seen everything you want to see, walk through the gift shop and laugh at all the overpriced tokens for sale.

HIT THE THEATER ON THE CHEAP

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **\$20**

Live theater provides an exciting, sophisticated alternative to seeing a film at a movie theater. We love theater dates for the same reasons we love movie dates—they provide an opportunity to sit back and enjoy a performance of a story that enchants us. Check the paper or

online for tickets to shows featured at local colleges and high schools. You should be able to find a version of your favorite play or musical for a fraction of the cost. Scope out some reviews ahead of time—not every live show appeals to every theater-goer's taste.



SHUBERT THEATER
BOSTON, MA

GET THE STUDENT DEAL

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **None**

Odds are, you live within driving distance of a college or university, which are hotbeds for artsy activities and events. Browse the school's website to look for scheduled events, like lectures, panels, performances, concerts, or sporting events that are open to the public.

Often, these events are free or very inexpensive. Sometimes, they even feature a free reception with hors d'oeuvres and drinks.

AFTER HOURS
NORTHEASTERN



Cold Weather Dates



SPEND AN AFTERNOON SLEDDING

Supplies Needed: Two sleds (or one big one), warm clothes

Cost: **None**

Wait until you've got a decent covering of snow on the ground, then grab your sweetie and a couple of sleds (in a pinch, garbage can lids work too) and head for a local hilly spot. If you aren't sure about the best place to sled, ask around among neighbors and friends. Every town has at least one great sledding hill. Race each other down the hill. Laugh, make snow angels, and admire each other's rosy cheeks. When you're both sufficiently worn out, head home for some steaming mugs of hot cocoa with marshmallows.



PLANETARIUM
SHOWING STARS AND
SCENERY

VISIT A PLANETARIUM

Supplies Needed: Blanket, juice boxes

Cost: \$0 - \$20

Want to admire the stars without having to brave the cold? Make a trip to your local planetarium. Most planetariums feature several different types of experiences, from laser shows to screenings of the latest Hubble telescope images to presentations by astronomers. Admission to planetariums is typically very inexpensive—tickets range from free to \$ 10 per person. Pack a thin blanket and some juice boxes in a tote and snuggle as you enjoy the show.

FROG POND
BOSTON COMMON
BOSTON, MA



GO ICE SKATING

Supplies Needed: Ice skates (or budget extra money to rent them)

Cost: \$0 - \$20

A moonlit couple skate on a frozen pond on the outskirts of the city— what could be more romantic? You'll hold hands, catch each other when you stumble, and laugh at your own awkwardness. Plus, ice skating is a great way to get some extra exercise to combat that nagging surplus of holiday lbs. If there's no frozen pond near you (or if the weather isn't quite cold enough for it to be frozen solid), look for a local ice-skating rink with an adults-only night.

Admission is sometimes free and almost always less than \$ 10 per person. Enjoy the music and the romance and, if the mood strikes, re-enact the adorable ice-skating smooch scene from pretty much every winter movie ever.

**SNOWMAN BUILT OUT
OF SIMPLE MATERIALS**



BUILD A SNOWMAN

Supplies Needed: Carrot, scarf, Oreo cookies, mittens, long sticks, hat, spray bottle, shovel

Cost: None

Building a snowman together is always a charming way to spend a winter afternoon or evening. Gather your supplies ahead of time. The classics include: a carrot for the snowman's nose, Oreo cookies for its eyes, long sticks for its arms, mittens, and a hat. Bring a shovel as well, so that you can gather and pile the snow more easily. Another tip: use a spray bottle full of water to help shape and solidify the snowman.

Build one gigantic snowman together or maybe a snow couple side by side. Take turns snapping photos of each other with your creation(s) so that you have a memento when your snowman (or men) inevitably melts.

HOLIDAY LIGHT DRIVE

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **None**

Holidays coming up? Then now is the perfect time for the two of you to hop in the car and drive around town, checking out the gorgeous holiday light displays at different homes and businesses. Ask around, many areas have certain streets, neighborhoods, or homes that are

particularly well-known for their elaborate holiday decorations. As you drive around, reflect on the year ending soon and talk about your hopes for the coming year. Then, when you've seen all there is to see, head home for some hot cider!



ELABORATE HOLIDAY LIGHTS

BAKE SOME COOKIES

Supplies Needed: Cookie ingredients, mixing bowls, utensils, baking pans, wine, a music player

Cost: **\$0 - \$15**

Nasty weather gives you and your sweetie a perfect excuse to stay inside and bake cookies! Decide ahead of time which types of cookies you'd like to make (choose two or three varieties and, ideally, at least one which can be decorated), then look through your cupboards

to determine which ingredients you already have and which you'll need to buy. To make things easier on yourselves, set the ingredients, bowls, and utensils out before you begin baking. Pour a couple of glasses of wine, put on some fun music, and then get mixing. Don't be afraid

to sample cookies as you work—bakers get hungry too! After your cookies are baked and cooled, decorate them together, then pack them up in little containers and deliver them to friends and family.



FESTIVE HOLIDAY COOKIES

Miscellaneous Dates



PLAY SOME ARCADE GAMES

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **Less than \$10**

An arcade—a favorite hangout of adolescents everywhere—can provide the perfect location for a fun, carefree, inexpensive date. Most arcades today feature a variety of different types of games, from the old school classics to the cutting edge, almost-like-real-life. You can play as a team or compete against each other, and, if you earn enough tokens, you'll have a prize at the end of the night to commemorate the date. Bonus points if you both dress up in cheesy '80s or '90s gear.

LAUGH IT UP AT AN AMATEUR COMEDY SHOW

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **\$20**

Call your local comedy club and find out when they host an open mic night. Tickets are much cheaper when amateurs are taking the stage, and, even if their acts are terrible, you and your date can bond as you cringe together at their awful jokes. Beware of two-drink minimums—

those pricey cocktails can do some major damage to your budget. Instead, sip on sodas or coffee. Enjoy some laughs together and share with each other your own funny anecdotes during the breaks between performers.

LAUGH BOSTON
BOSTON, MA



GO TO A CARNIVAL

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **\$10 - \$20**

Rounds of ski ball, elephant ears, rides—there's so much to do together at a carnival, and appealing to your inner child never gets old. If the season is right, check out your local paper or go online to find some nearby carnivals. Sometimes

schools also host carnivals as fund-raisers, so ask around about that option as well. When you go, be sure to embrace the full carnival experience, minus any pretensions—eat some cotton candy, win a prize for your date (or let him or her win

one for you), enjoy the live music, ride the rides, take fun photos, and, at the end of the night, be sure to take a romantic spin in the Ferris wheel!

LAWRENCE SPRING
CARNIVAL
LAWRENCE, MA



DAKIN HUMANE
SOCIETY
SPRINGFIELD, MA



VOLUNTEER TOGETHER

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: **None**

Volunteering together is a purposeful and important way for you and your date to connect with each other and with your community on a deeper level. Find a cause, charity, or non-profit organization that is meaningful to the two of you and choose a day to serve as volunteers. There are dozens of options to choose from—you could walk dogs at an animal shelter, serve food at a homeless shelter, lend a hand at a fundraiser for your favorite charitable organization, visit with elderly people at a nursing home, help out at school

or library, or volunteer your time in any other way that is significant to you. Volunteering makes for a great date because it gives you an opportunity to spend quality time with your partner, while also giving the two of you a common goal and filling you with gratitude.



TAKE A STAY-CATION

Supplies Needed: Camera, tourist brochures

Cost: **\$20**

No money or time to get away for the weekend? No problem! Take a day or two and enjoy a stay-cation in your own city (or the closest large city) with your honey. Even if you've lived in the city your whole life, there are probably tons of attractions you've never visited or even heard about. Use your smartphone to check your city's website for local attractions and to find travel guides to your city.

Make a little itinerary. Get to know your area on a deeper level. Sightsee. Pretend to be tourists and view the area with new eyes. Have lunch at a hole-in-the-wall place you've never tried. Be sure to take plenty of photos along the way!

TAKE ON TRIVIA NIGHT

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$20

Are you one of those people who has an encyclopedia's worth of useless knowledge stored in your head? Then flaunt it by hitting a trivia night! Many bars hold trivia competitions themed on a certain genre, sports, TV series, or general pop culture. Sometimes, the winner even receives a cash prize. Do some

research ahead of time to find out which local bars host trivia nights, and then grab your date and go (this also makes for a great double date or group date)! Take advantage of drink specials while you're there, share an appetizer, and impress your date with your random knowledge!



THE GALLEY GRILLE
WESTPORT, MA

SEE A MATINEE MOVIE

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$15

Movie dates are classic for a reason—they're low-key and enjoyable—but movie tickets (not to mention movie theater popcorn and drinks) are notoriously expensive. Score tickets at a far cheaper price tag by taking your date to a matinee. Matinee tickets are

generally available for show times in the late morning to early afternoon (think 11 a.m. through 4 or 5 p.m.) and will typically run you around \$7 or \$8 per person. While you're at it, skip the crazy-expensive movie theater snack bar and swing by the dollar store before the movie to

pick up a couple of inexpensive boxes of candy or snacks. Bonus: matinee screenings are typically far less crowded than the evening shows. Enjoy!



AMC FRAMINGHAM
FRAMINGHAM, MA



SHOES AND CLOTHES
AT A FLEA MARKET

BROWSE A FLEA MARKET

Supplies Needed: None

Cost: \$20

Browsing a flea market is a great way to spend a lazy weekend afternoon with your honey—you can wander around aimlessly, discover nostalgic toys, vintage decorative pieces, or even valuable antiques for a steal. Let the items you come across spark memories and conversation for you—this is a great opportunity for the two of you to learn a lot about each other! For a fun challenge, set a spending limit for both of you—say \$ 10—and see what interesting items you can both find for that amount. Famished from your treasure hunting? No problem! Many flea markets also feature booths where you can buy tasty snacks or fresh coffee or juice to sip on as you browse.

