



Valentine's Safety Tips & Fire Prevention

It is a romantic Valentine's Day evening. You are all bundled up in a warm blanket, you're sitting in front of a fire watching it glow and beside you is your dream man; strong, handsome, and attentive to your needs. Too bad the blanket was given to you by the Red Cross, the fire you are watching is your house, the dream man is a firefighter and the romantic evening you had planned is now a nightmare.

If you are planning a romantic evening with just the two of you, here are some tips on how to keep your special evening fire safe.

In 2011 fifty percent of all home fires were caused by unattended cooking. Unfortunately, unattended cooking had been the leading cause of home fires for more than a decade. We are a busy and distracted culture. We are the multi-tasking generation of preoccupied, side tracked, and to-do-list people racing to get things done. Combine all these things with a pan cooking on a stovetop and you have the recipe for a house fire.

Most kitchen fires start on the stovetop and a staggering number of these fires are grease fires. The way to prevent a grease fire is as simple as staying in the kitchen and watching what you heat.

Many people are severely injured or suffer fatal burns every year from trying to put out a grease fire by using water or taking the burning pot of grease off of the stove to bring it to the sink or throw it outside. If you are ever faced with a fire on your stovetop **DO NOT TOUCH THE PAN**. First, take three breaths to calm yourself down. Studies have shown that when people panic they make irrational decisions. In the case of grease fires many people panic and resort back to what has been ingrained in their heads their whole life, "See fire - add water." If water is used to put out a grease fire it will explode and catch you and your kitchen on fire. It is a good practice to keep the lids for the pots you are cooking with close. If a grease fire occurs you can pick up the lid and slowly slide it onto the pan. If you can't find the lid, use a pie tin, cookie sheet or pizza pan to slide over the pan. Turn the burner off and leave the pan on the stove for at least 20 minutes.

Any time you are trying a new recipe or using a new ingredient you should read the instructions and information completely. Not all cooking oils are the same. Some oils used for cooking have lower ignition temperatures than the ones we grew up with. Certain oils, like peanut oil, cannot be cooked on high without catching on fire. Read the directions on the labels and pay attention to any warnings.

Be a sweetheart and if your valentine loves the flavor of deep fried food buy him or her a deep fryer. They come in all sizes and price ranges. Some have built in features such as safety, energy saving and preset frying selections. They make clean-up easy and the area around the stove does not get covered with grease splatter.

Open flames (candles) are the second leading cause of house fires in Minnesota. Candles should be treated with care. Think of a candle as you would a toddler. Would you leave one in a room alone? Place candles on sturdy noncombustible candle holders and protect the flame with a glass globe or noncombustible container. Candles should never be placed directly on a combustible surface. Keep candles away from windows and shower curtains. Do not place them under cabinets or lamp shades. Do not put them in places they can tip over such as night stands, high traffic areas or on/near stair cases. Children and pets should be taught to keep a distance from candles. Candles need space just like other open flames. There is always the option of using battery operated candles.

A fireplace needs regular maintainace and upkeep just like other parts of your home. Before lighting that next fire have your chimney cleaned and inspected. Creosote builds up in the chimney and can cause a fire sending hot embers onto your roof. If there are any cracks in your chimney, heat from a regular fire or a chimney fire can get through the cracks and start the attic or the walls around the chimney on fire. The opening of your fireplace should always be covered by a screen. The screen should cover the opening on the sides and at the top of your hearth. Gas fireplaces should be checked along with other gas fueled appliances annually to prevent carbon monoxide leaks.

Cooking dinner for your valentine can make the evening extra special. Lighting candles adds to the romantic atmosphere of the evening and nothing says romance as much as you and your valentine sipping wine and sharing dessert gazing at the fire in the fireplace. Keep safety in mind and prevent your romantic evening from going up in smoke.

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