



52 Weeks of Creative Dates

aka: Cheap dates for cheapskates (but you'll love them anyway)

By Susan Vogt

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Although having a weekly date may seem like a no brainer, many couples' good intentions quickly slip slide into next week, when we're not so busy, or have more money. Pretty soon the kids are grown and you and your spouse have grown apart. This week make a commitment to a weekly date.

Often a couple's ideas for dates are limited to dinner and a movie. These aren't bad but dinners can get costly, movies get you sitting next to each other but not looking at each other, and routine can dull your ardor. One way to bring variety to your dates is to alternate the planning. To get started have the wife plan this week's date.

A weekly date doesn't have to always be on the same night, but it's helpful to pencil in one night each week on your calendars. You can always bump it to another night that week if a conflict comes up. Committing to one night a week, however, keeps you honest lest you keep putting it off.

Not all dates have to involve going out, but if you have young children, getting a break from the kids is a stress release in itself. Getting a babysitter, however, can be a burden. Alternate who gets the sitter. It's nice to have a pool of sitters. Watch for responsible teens who aren't hunks or gorgeous but do have siblings.

Couples with young children often don't have the energy or money for nights out. Try giving each other some nap time during the evening so you can stay up later than your kids. Then have a late dinner or play a game for two like cards, Cribbage, or Scrabble.

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January #1: On this ninth day of Christmas (Jan. 2) ladies should be dancing – but don't let her dance alone. Dance yourself silly or dance close and romantic. Neither takes great skill. For variety, consider dance lessons to learn a new form of dancing. (Contra dancing is our favorite and super easy.)

January #2: Wait for snow and give yourself permission to make snow angels or make a snowman. Don't live in a snowy climate? Go roller blading or revisit your childhood by visiting a roller skating rink.

January #3: Still have some old ice skates around? Watch for a hard freeze, bundle up and head for a pond. Of course you could rent skates and go to a rink instead. The important thing is to follow it with hot chocolate with marshmallows. Or try another winter sport if you're not so steady on blades.

January #4: Curl up for an evening of reading. Find a book you both enjoy and take turns reading to each other, or each of you can read your own book in each other's company. For fun you might want to randomly read a sentence from each of your respective books and see what bizarre combinations this makes.

January #5: Rent a classic romantic movie like *Casablanca*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Princess Bride*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Notting Hill*, etc. For more movie ideas go to: www.theromantic.com/romanticmovies.htm

February # 6: The Bible may not seem like a date book but try sharing your favorite passage with each other. Don't have a favorite passage? Explore the Song of Songs together. Share what you find physically attractive about your spouse.

February #7: (Valentine's Day) Plan a Find-My-Heart treasure hunt. Cut out some paper hearts and hide them around your home. On each heart write an endearing statement about your spouse plus a clue to the next heart. At the end enjoy a heart-felt treat together. (Cheaper and more fun than many traditional Valentine's expressions of love.)

February #8: Visit a pet store together. This is usually good for stirring up warm fuzzy feelings. Restrain yourself from buying, however, unless you're really ready for a new family member. Talk about any pets you had as a child.

February #9: Ever gone midnight bowling? It's more than just bowling. Some places have special music, lighting, and gimmicks. Even without these, it can be a ball of fun if you don't take it too seriously.

March #10: Find an empty, open church. Sit, kneel, explore, pray. Let peace and reverence seep into your being. Quietly pray for each other. If you like, discuss your deepest spiritual beliefs afterwards.

March #11: Look through old photo albums and tell each other stories of your childhood and families. If you feel really energetic, make it a time to put all those loose photos in albums or on a disc. It's a big job but your children will appreciate it one day.

March #12: Go to a fish fry. They're all over during Lent. The fish is not the point. Seeing a community work together to feed the multitudes is a miracle in itself. Are you a member of a faith community? You don't have to like fish to check it out.

March #13: Hang out at a bookstore. Browse through your favorite sections. You could separate from your spouse then "coincidentally" meet and flirt with each other as if you just met. Many bookstores have cozy reading spots or a café connected with them. Assume an erudite persona for an evening.

April #14: Waiter's Night. Pick a night to "wait" on your spouse. You get the drinks, the snacks, his/her slippers, favorite game, etc. You can even dramatize your role as servant. Just make sure that you alternate the favor sometime soon.

April #15: (Good Friday) Do something to nurture your spiritual life. Go to Good Friday services, spend an hour in silence, do the Way of the Cross in a church or walk in a poor neighborhood to seek Christ's presence there. Color Easter eggs to remind you of the resurrection that is around the corner.

April #16: (Easter) Celebrate the Resurrection. Fly a kite. Blow bubbles. Buy some helium balloons and give them away randomly to little kids you see around town or in a park.

April #17: Watch for a warm rainy day. Decide to be impractical and walk fearlessly and carefreely in the rain without an umbrella. Of course you'll get wet. That's the idea. Remember your early days of love when you didn't care whether your hair got mussed or your clothes wet. Be silly give each other a mushy kiss.

May #18: Visit your local zoo. Spring is often an especially engaging time since you're likely to see some endearing zoo babies and glorious flowers.

May #19: Try a theme date like one around "quarters."* Think of all the things you can do that use quarters like play a juke box, wash the car, take your picture together at a photo booth, play video games at an arcade. Don't wait too long to do this, however, or the theme may have to be dollars.

May #20: Thrift Store Date*. Pick a spending limit (like \$5 each) and see what crazy gift(s) you can put together for your sweetheart. Try creating a crazy or luxurious outfit for each other and wear it home. It may be the only time you wear it (other than Halloween) before you donate it back to the store.

May #21: Commit to a "tech free" night. Turn off your cell phones, computer, the TV, and the lights. See what's left to do without electricity. Maybe push each other on swings, sing old camp songs, have a pillow fight, play strip poker, use your imagination.

May #22: Do an "Evening at the Ritz on the Cheap." Dress up and go to the lobby of an elegant hotel. Sit in the lounge as if you belonged there. Order a drink or snack if you like. People watch and fantasize, then go home to your own comfortable bed.

June #23: "Newspaper Date" Look through your local newspaper for interesting things to do – house tours, high school plays, etc. – anything except dinner and a movie.

June #24: "Weeding Date." Although you could go out to your yard and pull some weeds, that might not feel like a genuine "date." Try weeding through old collectables and reminiscing with each other about your childhood hobbies. Think trains, rocks, dolls, cassette tapes, old awards, action figures, etc.

June #25: "Get Lost Date." June 21st is the longest *day* of the year. Take advantage of the daylight to drive aimlessly somewhere in your area. Don't turn on the GPS (until it's time to get home), just wander and notice new places.

June #26: “Goodwill Date.” Go to Goodwill (or a similar place) and each of you privately pick out what you think is the most gaudy item. Reveal your choices. Don’t buy it unless it can pass as a Halloween costume but discuss how your taste in clothes, furniture, styles are alike or different.

July #27: “Go Green Date” Ecology is popular these days. Pick a playground, a local park, a beach shore that needs a clean-up and spend a few hours picking up litter. Doesn’t sound too romantic? Count the pieces you pick up and trade them for kisses or hugs later. Eat green broccoli dipped in chocolate or whipped cream as a treat to top it off.

July #28: Water and moonlight can be romantic. Is there a lake, a river, a fountain near your home? Take a walk along a body of water at night. Pause and gaze at the light shimmering on the water. Dream and imagine together.

July #29: Try an old fashioned picnic in a secluded spot. Lay out a table cloth, some snacks or a meal. Some wine might be a nice touch. Perhaps read some romantic poetry to each other. It need not be original, just something you took the effort to find.

July #30: Do something silly that reminds you of your childhood Climb a tree together, catch lightning bugs, or feed some ducks.

July #31: If you’re the responsible, conscientious type, do something risqué (but legal) together. Never been skinny dipping? Seek out a private place. If you’re already the risk taking type, do something super responsible like pick up litter around a park or volunteer at a soup kitchen together.

August #32: Go to a drive-in movie. They’re hard to find these days, but it’s worth a drive to experience a movie on a really big screen. It really doesn’t matter how good the movie is, nostalgia can carry the night.

August #33: Go to an amusement park or arcade. It doesn’t have to be one of those fancy, expensive parks. In fact it may be more fun to go without the kids and be kids again, doing those silly arcade games where you play ski ball, whack a mole, or impress your spouse with your strength or cunning. If not, you can laugh a lot at your ineptitude.

August #34: Try star gazing in your own back yard or out in the country. Just bring a blanket and gaze upwards together. If you’re the scientific type, you might get a star map and try to identify constellations, but that’s not the main point.

August #35: Take an early morning or evening bike ride together. Explore your neighborhood or the countryside. Stop at a quaint café for breakfast or get an ice cream cone or other treat along the way. In fact stop whenever you feel the urge. It’s not a race, just a time to discover together.

September #36: Play a game from your childhood – croquet, badminton, hide and seek, miniature golf. Reminisce and be playful together.

September #37: If tent camping is a new experience for you try it; you might like it. Borrow a tent, sleeping bags, and some advice from a veteran camper and spend a night in the woods – or at least a backyard. Snuggle, tell ghost stories, and roast marshmallows.

September #38: Take a moonlit walk in a local park with a good flashlight, clear paths, and the crazy anticipation of what you might find ahead. Join a group with a guide if it'll make you feel safer.

September #39: Go to a public place (a train station, airport lobby, downtown gathering place) and people watch. Make up stories about the people who pass you. It's OK to be fanciful and exaggerate. It's like writing a novel. If you see someone who looks sad or distressed say a prayer or lend a hand.

October #40: Pretend You're a Tourist* date. Look around your city and spend a day or evening doing the things a tourist might do – go to an overlook, a quaint neighborhood, the botanical gardens, a museum, whatever is special about your hometown. Gawk if you like, after all you're a tourist.

October #41: Build something together – ice cream Sundays, a pizza with your favorite toppings, a tower of blocks. Perhaps you will find a chuckle over the odd or weird combinations that reflect your different approaches to food, building, and life.

October #42: Plan a "Favorites Night" around your favorite food, clothes, games, sports, etc. Each spouse could choose a favorite activity which you then combine into one evening, or the wife could propose her favorite activities for one date and the husband plans the next date with his favorites.

October #43: Find a corn maze and wander through it. Night time is the most fun. Getting lost is part of the adventure. Ponder how your experience may mimic times in your life together when you felt lost, found each other, or found your way through a difficulty together. No corn Mazes in your area? Search out a labyrinth. Many retreat centers have them.

October #44: **(Halloween)** Each spouse privately creates a funny costume from what you have around the house. (No need to buy anything, just use pots, paraphernalia, jewelry, and even root through your spouse's clothes to put items together in weird or scary ways.) Then come together and reveal. Hand out treats together if you dare.

November #45: Revisit your childhoods. Try finger painting, coloring in coloring books, or do a puzzle together. Reminisce about favorite childhood pastimes.

November #46: Create a home spa for an evening. Put on some soothing music, light some scented candles, give each other a massage, take a bath or shower together, give your husband a pedicure, paint your wife's toenails if you dare.

November #47: Rake leaves together. Make a big pile and jump in them with abandon or make a leaf fort. Let go of any inhibitions about being neat and tidy. Don't have any fallen leaves? Find

someone who does and volunteer to rake theirs or save up enough bubble wrap to dance around popping all the bubbles.

November #48: In the spirit of **Thanksgiving**, volunteer somewhere together – a nursing home, a soup kitchen, clean up litter from a park or along your street. Pray a simple litany of thanks together, i.e. For our family, We thank you Lord. For a safe home, We thank you Lord. For our health, We thank you Lord...

December #49: Traditionally, parents fill their children’s shoes with treats on Dec. 5, St. Nick’s eve. Try walking in your spouse’s shoes for an evening – this may be more of a challenge for the husband. The treat is to try to understand life from your spouse’s perspective. Even if you don’t exchange shoes, at least change roles for the evening.

December #50: Ride a city bus for the whole route. Reflect on the sights you see and the lives of the people who are your fellow passengers. Debrief your insights afterwards.

December #51 As we approach the **Winter Solstice** (Dec. 21), make some light together. Build a fire in the fireplace. Don’t have a fireplace? Light a whole bunch of candles in a grouping. Lay out a blanket and have an indoor picnic – or at least some popcorn.

December #52: On the second day of **Christmas** (Dec. 26) become each other’s “turtle doves.” Read Shakespeare’s love sonnets to each other. This is a time for cuddling cooing, and hot chocolate. Don’t worry about being too sentimental. By definition Christmas is a time for honoring our human nature as Christ became one of us.

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*The starred dates were inspired by “Cheap Dates You’ll Adore” in Co-op America’s January/February 2008 newsletter. www.coopamerica.org

I wrote many of these dates for the www.ForYourMarriage.org website. Check it out for many other ways to enrich your marriage.