

DINING FOR TWO

By Julia Jane

Jack cheese fritters from Nava



Dinner dates are the spice of life; they're fun, get us out of the house and, best of all, revolve around food. Ah, yes, food. That certain something we just can't resist.

Food tends to take center stage in most social situations – birthday parties, family gatherings, business meetings and, of course, dating. With plenty of exceptional restaurants to choose from, going out to dinner is easy. Anyone with a credit card or cash can do it. But planning the perfect date is something else. It can be challenging, so here are some sure-to-please suggestions.

First Date

High five! You scored a date with the girl/guy of your dreams. Now it's time to sweep her/him off her feet. You can do so by planning an evening full of distractions. Confused? Let me explain.

On a first date, most people think they should go somewhere quiet where they can talk and get to know one another. I say pick a restaurant with scenery, entertainment and eye candy; that way the pressure of titillating conversation is alleviated, and you can just have fun.

A perfect place for this is *Nava* on Peachtree in the heart of Buckhead. This Southwestern-style restaurant features a romantic fountain on the patio, live music and impressive cuisine. It's also considered one of Atlanta's hottest cocktail spots on Wednesday nights, which will provide some eye candy.

Relax. Your date's not going anywhere. If anything, watching singles mingle will make the two of you appre-

ciate each other even more. After all, you accomplished what everyone else is trying to do – meet, greet and date.

Tempt their taste buds with Veuve Clicquot, then begin the meal with some mixed baby greens and Sonoma Jack cheese fritters, followed by the red chile seared scallops, smoked tomato grits and pico de gallo. Cap the evening off by sharing the raspberry crème brulee, a natural aphrodisiac.

I promise, this will be a night they won't soon forget.

Married with Children

The laugh of a child warms the heart, so take your wife on a date that includes the whole family. Choose a restaurant that's conducive to spills and giggles. It will make the night a lot more fun than sitting up straight and minding your manners.

My No. 1 recommendation is *Pappasito's Cantina* in Marietta. This Tex-Mex restaurant not only boasts a great menu, but it also offers a packed house, which means it's loud – the perfect setting for letting your guard down while your little darlings bounce and play.

Calm the troops with some chile con queso dip and chips, then order a family-style platter (the Plato Fiesta is ideal if you want leftovers), margaritas for mom and dad, and sopapilla for dessert. If you have finicky eaters among you, keep it simple with chicken tacos or cheese quesadillas followed by everybody's favorite: Haagen-Dazs ice cream.

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Buckhead Coalition's Sam Massell and Regional Manager Ronen Nissenbaum at "Pooches on Peachtree".

Puppy Love

Are you single and in need of companionship? Then I have the perfect plan for you. Take your beloved pup out on a dinner date somewhere that caters to the canine persuasion. Pick a spot where you can indulge in good food and fine wine while spending time with your best friend. This is hands-down the best way to meet a like-minded person who loves pets. I can't think of a better pick-up line than, "Your dog is adorable. Do you mind if I pet him?" Who can say no to that?

Finding an upscale restaurant that welcomes pets isn't the easiest thing to do, but luckily *Au Pied de Cochon* at the Intercontinental Hotel remedied that with "Pooches on Peachtree." Every Thursday beginning at 5 p.m. the terrace is open for a pet-friendly cocktail and dinner event. Both pet and owner will be pampered with special martini drinks and doggie treats.

The scene is absolutely adorable. Red bowls are filled with water and placed beside each table, all-you-can-eat treats are served, and mug shots are taken by the restaurant paparazzi. There's even a "celebrity" board posted at the terrace entrance showcasing pictures of pups that have graced previous events with their presence. It's too cute to pass up.

Bon appétit!

Julia Jane is a best-selling author, columnist and relationship coach. Her mission is to help you find happiness in life, love and everything in between. Write to Julia Jane at dearjula@julajane.com or visit her website, www.julajane.com. Also watch for her new book, "On the Couch with Julia Jane – Secrets to Date By", in stores this fall.