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Photography by Rachel May Photography/
Middleburg Hospitality

A Sweetheart Table

This tablescape comes with an unforgettably romantic setting you can recreate at home.



opposite | A Juxtaposition. Matilda set her sweetheart table in the courtyard garden beside a building that used to be a stable area for horses. She likes the craggy texture of the brick and stonework that offered an interesting juxtaposition with the softness of the table's flowers.

below | Room for the Equine. A recent addition to the courtyard, the horse head water feature pays homage to the horses that used to stay at the Inn while their riders visited the tavern or stayed in the rooms.



Make Valentine's Day even sweeter with a sweetheart table all your own. Matilda Reuter Engle, designer, and proprietor at Middleburg Hospitality, who oversees Glenstone Gardens and Red Fox Inn & Tavern, says you can have a dreamy sweetheart table just about anywhere. She created her tablescape in the courtyard garden of the Red Fox Inn, a space boasting a rich history along with unique textures, sights and sounds to demonstrate that celebrating your own individual love story can depend on thinking outside the box.

HISTORICAL ROMANCE

Like any good historical romance, there must be horses for dashing leading men and beautiful ladies to ride off on into the sunset. The courtyard garden sits beside a building that used to be a stable for horses. The riders who stayed at the Red Fox Inn kept their horses here. The oldest continuously open inn in the United States, The Red Fox Inn opened in 1728 and has been hosting horse riders (in those days, travelers exploring the region's trading route) like today's couples who've come for the equestrian sports and an escape into Virginia's countryside.

Matilda wanted to honor that history by placing her table in the courtyard garden. She placed the table near the courtyard's water feature, a recent addition that resembles a horse. Placing the table here not only acknowledges this history but also alludes to the steadfast companionship between horse and rider. Companionship, friendship, and faithfulness are all elements of the best human relationships as well, so why not have the sweetheart table near this spot? "We are very into water features," Matilda says, pointing out they have another six scattered across the property. "The trickling of water always adds a nice ambiance to a sweetheart table."



Floral Flourishes. Matilda combined dahlias, roses, ranunculus, and scabiosa flowers in traditional Valentine's shades. "But you can find beautiful heirloom carnations, which are cheaper and available this time of year to emulate the rose look," she says. "They also have a very long shelf life."

Rustic Romance. Playing with textures, Matilda blends a velvet tablecloth, wine glasses, seasonal fruits like plums, and a bounty of flowers in her tablescape to offset the scene's rustic-looking stable and walkways.



A CASCADE OF FLOWERS

To infuse the table with touches of romantic notes, Matilda played with the color scheme. For flowers she assembled dahlias, roses, ranunculus, and scabiosa, all in the typical Valentine's Day shades of red, pink, fuchsia, and maroon. These are flowers that also become available in the late fall and early winter, she says, so the flowers fit the season too. With the help from a floral designer, she combined a tall vessel with varying heights of chicken wire to create the cascade of flowers "draping like a dress" that pops in a soft, feminine charm to the scene.

The romantic hues are also replicated in the fruit selection and décor pieces. "I always pull in seasonal food elements that elevate the tablescape," she says. "Plums are very in season and available in winter." The tablecloth is made from velvet and comes in a dusty rose color, a sight for the eyes but also a tactile experience that plays with the different textures of the blooms, wine glasses and fruits.

TOUCH OF TEXTURE

Matilda selected this spot on the property because it uses so many varied materials, like stone and brick. "To recreate the look at home, opt for a backdrop out of the norm," she says. "If you love a nook on your property, you can create a real cozy corner there that offers a special memory that isn't just at the usual one-on-one dinner spot, like at the dining table."

Set your sweetheart table somewhere romantic, like in your back garden or in front of the garden shed. Look for spaces that have interesting textures. "You can even have it inside and create an interesting background," she says. "Take plywood and use chalk paint to create a unique backdrop. Or posterboard to create that texture." It all depends on how DIY savvy you are. "You can put a sweetheart table anywhere for two people for Valentine's Day," Matilda says. "You just need flowers and beautiful textual elements."

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Countryside *Sojourn*

Matilda highlights what makes the Red Fox Inn & Tavern a romantic retreat for couples this Valentine's Day. Learn more by visiting redfox.com.

It has a Secret Garden. The Inn was established in 1728 before the town of Middleburg, which is the halfway point between the Winchester to Alexander trade route. "Riders needed a halfway point to feed and rest their horses, so we were here even before the town," she says. Middleburg built up around the property, making the courtyard gardens and verdant walkways feel like a secret garden in the middle of a bustling New England town.

The Tavern Has Multi-Course Dinners. The Tavern sources fresh ingredients from Virginia's Piedmont region, like cider glazed fried rabbit for adventurous eaters or peanut crusted rack of lamb for those wanting something both regional-inspired but also closer to home flavors. Dinners always have multiple courses. For Valentine's Day this year, the Tavern will have a special five-course meal planned.

Premiere Wineries are Within Walking Distance. "People come to Middleburg to enjoy the countryside—this is horse and hunt country—and equestrian events," Matilda says. "But it's also the new wine country of the east coast." Within a 40-mile radius, there are about 50 wineries. "We have really become the new premiere wine country." Boxwood winery, one of the best wineries in the area, is within walking distance of The Inn.

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