



NEWS RELEASE

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Be your own best Valentine

*By Kay Blakley
DeCA home economist*

FORT LEE, Va. – Although this month’s most notable date is Valentine’s Day, you might have noticed signs, banners and special events proclaiming “Everyday is Mom’s Day” at your local commissary. The brainchild of DeCA Director and Chief Executive Officer Phil Sakowitz, the campaign is the commissary’s way of saying, “Thanks for all you do!” to a patron demographic that represents 80 percent of daily commissary shoppers.

“Moms are the heartbeat of our military communities,” Sakowitz said. “But, they often put themselves last on a long list of family obligations. Let’s see what we can do to put them first for a change.”

As with any organization, when the boss speaks, employees listen. So, commissaries around the world have sprung into action with special prices on “pamper me” type products with demos on how to use them, samplings of indulgent, but healthy treats like chocolate-dipped strawberries, giveaways of pretty posies to lend a touch of spring to your windowsill, even in the dead of winter, and the opportunity to enter a sweepstakes for an all-expense-paid trip to the spa. Activities vary from store to store, so watch for special events planned at your commissary location.

My contribution to the campaign is to come up with a few “Make it Easy on Mom” recipes, and the one that follows fills the bill perfectly. It features only two ingredients – high-quality chocolate (a requirement for Valentine’s Day) and pomegranate seeds. If you’ve never used fresh pomegranates before, you’re in for a treat. These gracefully shaped ruby globes are

filled with sweet-tart, gem-like juice sacks called arils, which are eaten whole, seeds and all. Pomegranates are bursting with good-for-you antioxidants, are high in vitamin C and potassium, and are a great source of dietary fiber – 5 grams per half cup serving. All those nutrients and great taste, for only about 80 calories per half cup is a real bargain.

Choose pomegranates with a ruby red or deep pink skin that is free of bruises or soft spots. The heavier the pomegranate, the juicier it will be. And, even though they are harvested fully ripe, some will be sweeter than others. Store them in the refrigerator in a perforated plastic bag for up to two weeks. Once removed from the pomegranate, refrigerate the arils in a tightly covered container for up to three days. Releasing the juice-filled arils without covering yourself and the kitchen counter with scarlet stains might seem like a challenge, but it's actually easy. Just follow the directions in the recipe below.

Chocolate Covered Pomegranate Arils *(makes 24 clusters)*

2 cups pomegranate arils (seed sacks) from 2 to 3 large pomegranates

8 ounces fine quality bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped

1. Use a serrated knife to slice off the blossom end of the pomegranates, including some of the white pith, but none of the seeds. Score the rind lengthwise in 4 or 5 places. Place the fruits in a large bowl of cool water, and allow to soak for about 5 minutes.
2. Keeping the pomegranate under water, gently break it apart along the scoring lines, and use your fingers to separate the arils from the membranes. The arils will sink to the bottom of the bowl, and the rind and white membranes will float to the surface.
3. Skim off and discard the rind and membranes using your hand or a sieve, then pour the arils and water through a colander.
4. Spread the arils out on a double thickness of paper towels and gently pat dry. Reserve and set aside 2 cups of the arils, and refrigerate any remaining for later use.
5. Line a cookie sheet with parchment or waxed paper.
6. Place the finely chopped chocolate in a completely dry, microwave-safe plastic bowl.
7. Microwave chocolate, uncovered, on medium power for 1½ minutes, then stir.
8. If necessary, continue microwaving at intervals of 30 seconds or less until most of the chocolate is melted.

9. Stir until the chocolate is smooth and shiny. The temperature of the chocolate should be only about 90 degrees (a little less than normal skin temperature). If it is noticeably higher, continue to stir until the chocolate has cooled somewhat, but is still liquid and runny.

10. Add the pomegranate arils and gently stir to combine.

11. Use a fork to scoop out clusters of chocolate-covered arils and drop onto the prepared cookie sheet. Work quickly, as the chocolate will harden.

12. Sprinkle each cluster with leftover arils, pressing gently into the chocolate.

13. Refrigerate clusters for 20 minutes, or until chocolate is set.

Nutrient analysis: Per piece: 63 calories; 1 gram protein; 9 grams carbohydrate; 4 grams total fat (2 grams saturated fat); 1 milligram vitamin C.

- DeCA-

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*