

Zoo to You column for Garden City Telegram

By Kristi Newland, Zoo Director

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Topic: Valentine's Day Zoo Style

Are you scratching your head over finding an extra special Valentine's Day gift for your loved one? Are you looking for something a little different, something with more impact or meaning than a regular box of chocolates or a flower arrangement, or an arrangement of metric wrenches? We've got a few thoughts for your consideration.

Candy has become closely associated with Valentine's Day over the years. Did you know that many candies include palm oil and if that palm oil is not harvested in a sustainable manner, it contributes to the destruction of the rainforest? Not quite the impact we want when we think of celebrating our love for others. Palm oil comes from the oil palm tree which is an introduced agricultural crop that is often planted in cleared areas of the rainforest. The plants in the rainforest, the ones that were cleared for the oil palm trees, are the basis for many medications used today, and probably many more to come since many of the plants have yet to be researched. The rainforest also recycles water for the world and regulates the level of carbon dioxide in the air through photosynthesis. Rainforests are also homes to many wondrous species such as orangutans, tigers, elephants, siamang, and lorises.

It doesn't have to be an either or situation. There are ways to produce palm oil in a sustainable manner without having the drastic effect on the rainforest. Many companies that use palm oil in their products have pledged to support those methods. Candy made by companies that are members of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) will satisfy your sweetheart's sweet tooth and show your support for the rainforests. Some of the companies who are members of the RSPO are: Hershey's, Mars, Wrigley, KRAFT, Lindt, Ghirardelli, Endangered Species Chocolate, Nestle, and Wonka. You can check the packaging of a product for the RSPO symbol. Interested in making all your shopping more palm oil friendly? Download and use the shopping guide app created by Cheyenne Mountain Zoo (visit cmzoo.org/palmoil for a link).

If candy isn't part of your Valentine's Day plans and you have yet to become a member of the Friends of Lee Richardson Zoo (FOLRZ), a membership makes a special gift for a loved one. Any membership purchased on or before Feb 14 is 14% off if you use the promo code ZOOLOVE. FOLRZ is also joining with Wharton's For Every Bloomin' Thing to offer a zoo adoption and flower package. The floral

arrangement includes lilies, roses, carnations and larkspur with two white doves (not real ones, those stay at the zoo). Along with the flowers you get to select a zoo animal to adopt for one year. There's no muss and no fuss because those adopted animals also stay at the zoo but you get the special heart-warming feeling of knowing that your gift helps support the zoo in all the work it does. The adoption/flower package must be ordered through FOLRZ by 5 p.m. on February 10th so it can be delivered in a timely fashion for the holiday. Any purchases through FOLRZ benefit the zoo. Currently FOLRZ is raising funds to build an improved habitat for the spider monkeys and endangered red ruffed lemurs at Lee Richardson Zoo. The new habitat will be larger and more naturalistic as well as offer an improved year-round visitor experience. Call FOLRZ at 620-276-6243 or visit their website at www.FOLRZ.org, or check out their Facebook page.