



Tiffany Skinner started her career doing hair and managing a hair salon for 10 years.

When she and her husband started thinking about having kids, she decided she wanted a job with better hours and benefits.

Tiffany saw a job posting for a customer associate position in Brookings, S.D., applied and was hired. That was six years ago, and Tiffany has been enjoying the job ever since.

As a customer associate, Tiffany works in the walk-in office in Brookings, serving the local customers.

“I love the customer interaction,” Tiffany said.

Tiffany and her coworkers have a lot of regular customers that they look forward to seeing every month when they pay their bill.

“Some people like to come in and see us,” she said. “We have some customers if we don’t see them for a couple months, we get a little nervous and try to check up on them.”

In addition to her customers, Tiffany enjoys all of her coworkers, so much that she frequently makes baked goods for birthdays and other occasions.

“I love baking,” Tiffany said. “I bring baked goods to work quite often.”

Tiffany’s strawberry muffin recipe came about after a coworker requested strawberry muffins for his birthday. Tiffany had never made them before, but did some research and came up with this recipe.

“The sugar on the top really makes them,” Tiffany said. “That crushed sugar, crunchy layer is so good.”



Tiffany’s strawberry muffins

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
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| 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus 2 teaspoons more for tossing with strawberries | 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract |
| 2 teaspoons baking powder | ¼ teaspoon almond extract |
| ¾ teaspoon salt | ½ cup milk |
| 1 stick (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened | 2 ¼ cups diced strawberries |
| 1 cup granulated sugar | 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar, for topping |
| 2 large eggs | |

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line a 12-cup muffin tin with paper liners, spray the liners and the pan with nonstick cooking spray.
- In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt.
- In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat the butter and granulated sugar for about 2 minutes. Add the eggs one and a time, scraping down the sides of the bowl and beating well after each addition. Beat in the vanilla extract and almond extract. (The batter may look a little grainy — that’s OK.)
- With the mixer on low, add the flour mixture in three separate additions, alternating with the milk and ending with the flour.
- Toss the strawberries with 2 teaspoons of flour (this will keep them from sinking to the bottom). Add strawberries to the batter and fold in with spatula until evenly distributed. Do not overmix.
- Scoop batter into muffin tins, they will be very full. Sprinkle turbinado sugar over the center of each muffin, keep sugar away from edges to prevent sticking.
- Bake for 30 minutes until lightly golden. Allow to cool before eating.

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Estamos orgullosos de la diversidad en las comunidades que servimos. Para satisfacer mejor las necesidades de algunos de nuestros clientes, traducimos información importante del cliente a dos idiomas: español y karen.

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LOOK INSIDE FOR INFORMATION ON:

- Osprey and baling twine
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Clean up baling twine to protect osprey from this ‘unnatural mortality risk’



Photos from top to bottom:

Lineman Shane F. trims baling twine from an osprey nest in Helena.

An osprey was found in a baling twine-filled nest. The bird was found alive and not entangled in twine. It went on to fledge normally. Most birds found in similar nests aren't as lucky.

The Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society, based in Billings, opened a twine collection and recycling site near Laurel.

Twine, which is made of polypropylene, is recycled into small pellets that can be used to make No. 5 plastic products.

Osprey are incredibly adaptable birds.

Before power poles dotted the landscape, osprey typically built their nests in the top of snags – standing dead trees. However, as power poles became prevalent, the birds saw the structures as a better alternative for their nests.

Having osprey nests on top of power poles is problematic. It can cause power outages and even fires, and their proximity to energized equipment puts the birds at risk of electrocution. NorthWestern Energy has installed hundreds of nest platforms near its power lines to give the birds a safer alternative for nesting and to prevent outages on the electrical grid.

“They’re going to build a nest somewhere,” said NorthWestern Energy biologist Marco Restani. “If we give them alternative structures near our poles, they nest there instead.”

Our osprey platform program has been very successful at reducing outages and keeping the birds safe.

“We respond quickly to reports by the public of ospreys attempting to nest on power poles and have very few nests in troublesome locations,” Marco said.

While osprey are a common sight around most of Montana, 50 years ago, they were nearly extinct. The synthetic insecticide DDT had essentially wiped out osprey and many other raptors worldwide. The chemical caused the birds’ eggs to be very thin and unable to withstand an adult bird’s weight during incubation. As a result, many adults inadvertently broke their eggs, which resulted in limited annual production of young and significant population declines.

After DDT was banned in 1972, osprey populations recovered.

“Osprey have become part of the fabric of western Montana and central Montana,” Marco said. “It’s an environmental and management success story.”

While osprey populations continue to grow, the birds are facing a new threat. Baling twine is showing up frequently in osprey nests and can be deadly to hatchlings and adults who become entangled in it.

Baling twine is fairly common on the landscape. It’s used on to make hay bales of all sizes, from small

squares to large rounds. Once bales are used, the twine can accumulate in fields or along roadways, making it available to ospreys.

So why do the birds like baling twine?

“That’s the million dollar question,” Marco said. “They may see it as something soft to line their nests or to signal that a nest is occupied by a breeding pair, thereby reducing strife among osprey pairs.”

Whatever the reason, baling twine poses an unnatural mortality risk to the birds. NorthWestern is working to address the issue by removing twine from nests.

“If we see problem nests, we try to address them in the off season,” Marco said.

The utility will send a bucket truck and a lineman to remove the baling twine in the fall after the birds migrate south or in the spring before they return.

“It takes a lot of work to stay ahead of this,” Marco said. “Osprey bring a lot of baling twine to their nests when it’s available in the landscape.”

While NorthWestern will continue to remove twine from nests, a more sustainable solution is to keep baling twine out of ospreys’ reach. NorthWestern Energy, along with Audubon chapters across the state and other organizations, has worked to educate the public about the importance of picking up baling twine and containing it in buildings or in garbage cans with secure lids.

Last summer, the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society, based in Billings, opened a twine collection and recycling site.

“A collection and recycling site was very much needed,” said Deb Regele, a volunteer with the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society.

People can drop off used, clean twine at the site, located 2 ½ miles north of Laurel. The twine is collected inside a storage shed. Once a full semi load’s worth of twine is collected, it will be sent to Minnesota to be recycled.

So far, the group has collected about 9,000 pounds of twine. A full semi load is 38,000 pounds. The recycling facility in Minnesota processes the twine, which is made of polypropylene, into small pellets, about the size of coffee beans. Those pellets are then used to make No.

5 plastic products, such as outdoor pots and tubs, and margarine and yogurt containers.

The Minnesota facility will pay for the twine, based on weight, which covers the cost of transporting it some 800 miles.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society’s twine collection and recycling site is run completely by volunteers.

“We do depend on grant money and donations,” Deb said.

Before osprey return this spring, here are some things to do to help protect them:

- Pick up all used baling twine in fields, barnyards or on fence posts.
- Store used twine in buildings, drums or garbage cans with secure lids.
- Drop off baling twine at Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society’s twine collection and recycling site in Laurel.
 - Hours are:
 - May - October, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. the second and fourth Friday and Saturday of each month, weather permitting.
 - November - March, please call for an appointment. Leave a message at 406-591-8606.
 - For more information, visit yvaudubon.org/baling-twine-recycling/

Everyone counts in the 2020 Census

In March 2020, every household in America will receive a notice to complete the Census online, by phone or by mail. In May, the U.S. Census Bureau will begin following up in person with households that have yet to respond.

It takes just 10 minutes to answer 9 simple questions that will shape investments in your community for the next 10 years.

For more information, visit census.mt.gov.