

Five Things to Do During Black Fly Season & Chocolate Chip Cupcakes

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You expect to find lists of activities and boredom busters for rainy days. Fortunately, except for that time with the ark, rain doesn't stick around for forty days and nights. Unfortunately, that's just what the black flies do. They arrive in time for Mothers' Day and disappear around Fathers' Day. Forty days with a few extra for good measure.

After all those April showers, we're past due for some May flowers and sunshine. If you're like me you'd like nothing better than to head outside. As

bad luck would have it, before you can start the lawnmower or settle into the hammock, a swarm of flies are buzzing around your head and nipping at your ankles.

So what can you do about it? Well, you could ...

1. Pout,
2. Stamp your foot,
3. Complain,
4. Mope,
5. Flee the State.

As tempting as it sounds, forty days of sulking could get old pretty fast and a long trip may not be in your budget. Before you sink into the doldrums or book a flight you can't afford, here are a few ideas to help you stay sane if not happy during black fly season:

1. Go to the movies. Get your best pals together and make an afternoon of it. Add lunch before or an early dinner or drinks afterwards. Think of it as a field trip without the field. Alternatively, you could host a movie party at home. Most of this year's Oscar winners are out on DVD so you can catch any you missed while hibernating during the long winter.
2. Bake cupcakes. It's hard to be unhappy when you're making cupcakes, particularly the decorating part. Top your little gems with creamy icing tinted in a variety of sweet pastel colors. They'll be a huge hit when you ...
3. Host a game marathon. Whether it's Scrabble, Mah Jongg or ~~Monotony~~ Monopoly, enjoy a rousing competition. If it's warm and sunny, hold the party in the screened-in porch. That's assuming you have one. If you don't have a screened-in porch, think about adding one.
4. If you aren't feeling social, grab the latest book by your favorite author and relax in that same screened-in porch. Ignore the weeds that are sprouting in the garden and the grass which is almost a foot high. Fathers' Day will be here in a few weeks.
5. If you are really desperate, do all the stuff you postponed for the past three or four months. This one doesn't exactly qualify as fun. Let's face it, if any of the stuff on your To-Do list was fun, you'd have done it already. However, checking items off your list will give you a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

Clean the closets, basement or garage. Sort out your computer files, delete what you don't need and backup what you do. Organize five generations of family photos and make scrapbooks for everyone. Stain the trim on the screened-in porch. The list is endless and now is as good a time as any to make a dent in it.

Better yet, come to my house. I'd be happy to have you do any of the above for me. I promise to reward you with a nice dinner or at least a cupcake when you're done.

Have fun and bon appétit!

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or just look like one!

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Chocolate Chip Cupcakes

Who can resist a sweet little cupcake? Enjoy!

Makes about 16 regular cupcakes or 40 minis



3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) softened butter
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
3/4 cup milk
1 3/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon all purpose flour
2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
Grated peel of 1 orange
1/3 cup mini chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line regular or mini muffin tins with paper liners.

With an electric mixer, cream together the butter and sugar. Add the egg and vanilla and beat on high speed until smooth.

Sift 1 3/4 cup flour, the baking powder and salt together, whisk in the grated orange peel.

With the mixer on low, add the dry ingredients to the mixer bowl in 2 parts, alternating with the milk and scraping down the sides of bowl with each addition. Mix until incorporated but do not overbeat.

Toss the chocolate chips in the remaining tablespoon of flour and fold into batter. Fill the paper liners 2/3 full with batter. Bake at 400 degrees for 18-20 minutes for regular cupcakes and 10-12 minutes for minis. Let cool completely before frosting.

Cream Cheese Frosting

6 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
3 tablespoons butter, at room temperature
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
About 3 cups confectioners' sugar
Food coloring

Put the cream cheese and butter in a large bowl; beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth, add the vanilla and combine.

Slowly add the confectioners' sugar and mix until well blended. Increase mixer speed and continue beating for 2 to 3 minutes, until the frosting is light and fluffy.

One drop at a time, whisk in food coloring until you reach the desired tint. If you like, divide the frosting into a few bowls and tint each with a different color for a rainbow of cupcakes.