
FLY OF THE MONTH

Fly Tying Reminder Sheet – Lucky Ketcham

Keep reviewing the proportions of dry flies and wet flies in your head, until they come to you naturally. Most mayflies have the same proportions:

Dry Fly:

The head of a dry fly is no more than one hook eye – but the current trend is to make them as small as possible. Thin thread and one or two three turn whip finishes. The position of a dry fly wing can vary. It can be $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the hook shank. A.K. Best says two eyes back from the eye for his quill body mayflies. Parachute posts are usually two hook eye widths back about $\frac{4}{5}$ of the hook shank. Thorax Mayflies the wing and hackle are tied mid-shank, making a pronounced large thorax. The wing length is always just a little longer than the hackle. The wing is 2 hook gaps long – measured along the body it is from behind the eye to the bend of the hook.

The hackle is $1\frac{1}{2}$ hook gaps or $\frac{3}{4}$ the length of the shank, measured from behind the eye. “Variants” are mayfly patterns that have longer hackle, two or more hook gaps. They are usually fished bouncing and skating over the surface at the tail of a pool. Learn to lock in the hackle stem with a figure 8, or a folded back locked quill style. The tails are 2X hook gap, or the length of a standard hook shank. (May be a little longer) The abdomens are thin, 8–9 segmented and slightly tapered. The amount of dubbing to put on a small dry fly abdomen should be a sparse wisp, just enough to make a “bumpy thread.” Segments are usually smaller at the rear and progress wider to the thorax. The spacing is about the hook diameter, or body diameter. Insects have yellow/green blood, Hemocyanin. Yellow thread is often used to segment the abdomen. (The red blood in mosquitoes and black flies is usually – your blood.) Thoraxes are usually 30% fatter than the abdomen.

Nymphs:

Body shapes: long and thin for slow water (Swimmers), short with broad thoraxes in fast water. (Clingers) Body/abdomens are two thirds the hook shank, can be $\frac{1}{2}$ the hook shank on fast water nymphs. Thorax is the front $\frac{1}{3}$ with space for the head. Make the thorax robust on fast water nymphs. Tails on nymphs are always short and sparse. “No bushy tailed aquatic insects.” Tail length is one hook gap or $\frac{1}{2}$ the shank length Legs are one half the shank length; to the sides and down, never up or straight down. Wing pads are usually dark just before the emergent stage. Movement is important. Charles Jardine says if he ties for himself he uses the softest materials he can find, to breathe life into the nymph; but for sale you have to use materials that hold their shape in the fly box. (He would use CDC, grouse, partridge, hen, ostrich, mallard flank.)

Streamers and Buggers

The head is usually longer and tapered, three hook eyes long as a general rule. The tail of woolly bugger is normally as long as the hook shank. Properly size or break off the marabou tail, do not cut off in a flat cut off. “There are no right angles in nature.” – Gary Hilbers used to say. Palmered hackle can be longer than hackle sized for dry flies, softer hackle for movement. Normally 5 spiral wraps of hackle are suggested for woolly buggers with even spacing about as wide as the body material. One coat of head cement will hold the fly together, but three coats will look better for sale or display.

Attach craft fur and long slippery flash fibers just off the middle and fold back to prevent pulling out and to make the rear of the fibers from being too uniform or squared off. Fold and lock in materials whenever possible. Learn to count the wraps of thread, lead, copper, hackles, chenille; you make for a particular pattern so the next one will be similar or exactly the same. (Of course not on thread bases or something

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like that)

One tier was making copper pheasant tail nymphs and he cut all the copper wire for the nymphs to exactly 8 or exactly 11 inches before he started. He used just copper wire with the pheasant tail and made a heavy ball of copper for the thorax, instead of peacock herl. – He was teaching consistency by using the same lengths of material for each fly or hook size.

In Dry flies the thread wraps are weight. Use as few wraps as possible. You do not normally tie a full thread base. Count the wraps you tie in the tail. I always remind myself of A.K. Best saying “three tight wraps” of 6/0 thread will hold almost any material. (Except squirrel tail). Count the wraps of hackle for the wing, like three behind and six in front; four up the post three down with the last two under the rest. It is okay to talk to your self when tying flies late at night.

The head of the fly is pretty important in fly tying. If you were in a contest, the head of your fly will be the first thing the judges will look at. Size, symmetry, shape, any materials showing through or sticking out the front or sides, head cement into the materials or into the hook eye are all important. When you get to tying salmon flies like Paul Woolery is learning, you would be using silk tying threads; the judges would look to see if you flattened the threads before you wrapped the head. Every wrap of the thread bobbin puts a twist into a flat thread. You have to spin the bobbin in the reverse direction, hang it over your bodkin needle to make sure it is flat, make three or four wraps and then flatten the thread again. If the threads on your salmon fly have a round appearance they would give you a deduction. Of course in the old days they did not use a bobbin. The silk would be just cut in strips and held with a wooden clothes pin or wood clamp. They would not twist on each wrap.

When you tie some of the very small thread midges you will use floss or mono-cord that will be flattened to wrap the ultra thin body to the bend and then twist the thread tightly and wrap the ribbing. The little round ribbing shows up on those little midges, quite distinctly. One of my favorite fly tiers, A.K. Best always says the time to fix a fly is when it is in the vise. If you are not happy with the set of a wing, cut it off and tie in a new one. Clean the head cement out of the eye of the hook in the vise, not on the water. The same applies to a head that is too lumpy.

The reason that the lumps appeared on Bob’s clump dubbed leech head is that we put that last clump of dubbing on in a hurry. I put it on and spread evenly to the sides, but when we pulled the front dubbing back I did not take the time to spread it out evenly around the hook. There was more dubbing on one side, when covered by the thin thread it caused the head to be lumpy.

Now how to fix it.

1. You can always get out your trusty razor blade, lance or scalpel and cut off the thread head and last clump of dubbing. You have to be careful, and hold your left hand index finger on top of the remaining materials while you retie the thread and wrap over the ends, or —it might come unraveled. A little super glue might hold the ends while you are making the repairs to a fly. I would attach new thread and perhaps that last clump of dubbing.

2. Another method is to cover the lumps with another material. Covering mistakes is a long tradition in fly tying. I’m sure many flies were invented by covering up a mistake or two. An Egg Sucking Leech is always a good pattern. You could attach a red or pink thread, and then attach some medium, pink, orange, red or light green chenille. Make two to three wraps of chenille to create a little egg ball, then whip finish behind the gold bead.

3. Another method to cover it up would be to add some peacock herl. Peacock herl is cocaine for trout; add

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it to any fly and it will probably be a better pattern.

4. Another idea would be to attach one of those nice soft hackles, or collar wrap a mallard flank feather. A soft hackle collar would give more movement to the fly.

What ever you choose, I just wanted to let you know it is okay to be picky about your flies. It is one reason we learn to tie our own. No commercial tier can afford to spend the time that we can spend on one fly, at least and sell it for \$1.50. You can buy a Dave Whitlock Sculpin for \$50. If you want to pay for his time. I have a box of them and they cost me \$0.25 each. Don't be afraid to use the razor. A "lance" used to be on the list of standard fly tier's tools. Today we would say Exacto knife or scalpel.

Wash your hands frequently, especially when working with light colored materials and/or silk threads. Oils will discolor the silk threads and floss. When attaching lead or wire always try to keep the long parallel strips on the bottom of the hook shank, not the top or sides. Begin and end lead and wire wraps on the bottom of the fly for a better appearance. Cut thicker lead at a 45 degree angle with nail clippers or nipper pliers, for a better transition and to avoid that 90 degree cut. Cover the lead with a cocoon of thread and coat with head cement to avoid oxidation and a white powder showing through your dubbing. Always practice cutting light materials and hackles on the top of the hook shank, leaving the thread and bobbin hanging to the bottom. You will reduce the number of times you accidentally cut your thread.

Practice breaking your thread a few times when you change sizes and/or brands. It is important to know just how much tension you can put on a thread. You should make your tight material holding wraps almost to the breaking strength of that thread. A. K. Best says if you are not breaking your thread once in a while, you are not tying your flies tight enough. The name of the game is thread control. Pinch down on the thread spool with your pinky and ring fingers while holding the bobbin. Learn to spin the bobbin to make the thread behave.

Learn to make those two soft pinch wraps to start the attachment of most tails and body materials. Then adjust the lengths, pull materials under the thread, or move to proper position, before making those "three tight wraps."

This was supposed to be a short list of hints and reminders to help new fly tiers. For more tying tips look on the internet: <http://flyanglersonline.com/> Tying Tips and Archive of Tying Tips. Try to Google - "Fly Tying Tips"



FREE CASTING LESSONS EVERY SUNDAY 9 AM--NOON

Join the San Diego Fly Fishers at Lake Murray to cast or improve your skills. Free instruction is available. Bring your own equipment or use the club equipment, available from one of the instructors.

DIRECTIONS--Take Interstate 8 to Lake Murray Boulevard. Go north on Lake Murray Boulevard to Kiowa Drive. Turn left and look for people casting just as you enter the park. That's our bunch.

