



Building a Fly Selection

By Steve May

Every fly angler is looking for the fly that the fish just can't resist. The "perfect" fly will make all of their fishing dreams come true.

I hate to burst your bubble. Such a fly does not exist. Depending on the conditions you encounter the "best fly" can be any one of hundreds of possibilities.

Assembling a good fly mixture is similar to building a collection of lures for fishing with spinning tackle. You start with a basic selection of proven offerings and fine-tune them through time. With spinning gear you may have added a plug recommended at a tackle shop, borrowed a spinner that was dynamite for a friend, or bought some funky plastic bait because it caught your eye on the Internet. Buying, collecting, trading or eventually tying your own flies is a fun activity that is a part of the overall fly-fishing experience.

A solid approach to developing your initial assortment is to visit a fly shop, surf the Internet, read books and magazines or join up with a fly fishing club. These people and resources can help you develop a basic mixture of proven patterns that catch fish consistently in your area. Then it is up to you to fill your fly box with personal additions that meet your local fishing conditions. Expect your fly collection to grow and adapt through time.

A good starter mixture should contain contain dry flies, wet flies, nymphs and streamers. A couple of dozen flies should get you started, but expect to add more flies to your collection over time.

Dry flies float on the surface and imitate floating insects. Wet flies and nymphs that imitate aquatic insects and other food sources under the surface. Streamers imitate minnows, leeches, crayfish and other bigger food items. If you are armed with a few flies in each of these categories you should be ready for just about anything a river brings your way.

Always be on the lookout for flies that will act like the organisms you are trying to imitate. Dry flies should float. Nymphs should look buggy while streamers should be built with materials that flow in the water. Consider that patterns that look very realistic to you in the store may not act like fish food when in the water. On the other hand, flies that resemble nothing in nature might come alive under water. Remember the good old twister grub you were skeptical of until you saw it in the water? Well a "Woolly Bugger" can out wiggle one of these plastic baits.

Your personal observations on the river will help you build confidence in the flies you select. If you can find out what the fish are eating there is a good chance that flies designed to imitate that food will work for you on future visits to the river. If you continue to add different sizes and colors of flies based on your own observations you will soon have an enviable fly assortment.



Is this the perfect fly? Well, for picky trout rising to yellowish colored mayflies it just might be!

What is my favorite fly? Well, to get started you can't go wrong with having a few sizes and colors of woolly buggers, hare's ear nymphs and hackled dry flies. Don't stop there. The fish will eventually let you know what other flies should be in your fly box.

Remember, flies are only part of the fish-catching equation. You need to combine an appropriate fly with a good presentation to hook up consistently. But, it can be a lot of fun to collect and talk about various fly patterns with other anglers and to try them out with the fish in your local river.



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