



Now you have a list of insects you want to imitate and put in your fly box - midges, caddis, stoneflies and BWOs. Choosing the flies to imitate these insects will take the same process as you will employ on the water. This process is based on the concept that there are four major features that the proper artificial must share with the natural you're trying to imitate: behavior, color, shape and size. These characteristics are listed in no particular order because which of them is most important varies with the hatch. These features are fairly easy to discern in the flies in your fly box but harder to see in the real insects.

Using your knowledge of entomology or your insect guide find the size and color of the insects expected to hatch. The variety of insect will dictate the shape and behavior. The shape will be appropriate for the insect order's life stages which could be nymph, larva, pupa, emerger, adult or spinner. If you are just starting out, it is probably most efficient to rely on the design of the flies you choose to impart movement rather than deviate from a dead drift. Make sure you bring several of the same pattern for each stage of the insects you're expecting to encounter. There's nothing worse than finally finding a fly that works and not being able to replace a lost one!

Here are some hints on fly/insect shapes that will help you pick your flies on and off the water:

*Mayfly and stonefly nymphs are teardrop shaped with their tails at the point of the teardrop.*

*Midge and caddis larvae are worm shaped.*

*Midge pupae will be tied with an enlarged thorax near the eye of the hook.*

*Caddis pupae are often tied with 'fuzzy' fibers to give them movement and translucency.*

*Mayfly and caddis emergers are tied with an underdeveloped wing tuft.*

*Caddis and stonefly adults are frequently tied with hair wings.*

*Conventionally hackled mayfly dries sit on top of the water and are best on broken water.*

*All other versions of mayfly dries sit more in the water and can be better on flat water.*

*Spinners are tied with wings flat and out to either side of the hook.*

These hints are not rules but guidelines for picking a fly. If you need a little help with which flies to bring, I've provided a list of a dozen "must haves" at the end of this article.

### *Observe*

Once you reach the water, be strong. Don't rig up until you've had a chance to see what's going on. Take 5 or 10 minutes to see what's crawling around in the bushes (this can tell you what's hatched recently). Check out what's flying in the air (swallows swooping low over the water can mean there's a hatch in progress, mating swarms of mayflies can mean there's a spinner fall imminent). Watch the surface of the water for bug activity or rising fish. Finally, turn over a rock or get out your seine to see what's floating or crawling around in the water. Periodically during the day repeat this process. You arrived with an idea what might happen, now you've got evidence as to what IS happening.

Keep a look out for our major characteristics while you are investigating what naturals are in and around the water. Note their size and color. Identify the insects you see and remember the relative numbers of each.

### *Select*

If the hatch is in progress and you see risers, throw a dry or emerger. Better yet, cover both bases with a dry and dropper. If you are fishing dries in broken water or if the fish are definitely taking adults, use a conventionally hackled mayfly or a buoyant attractor pattern. If the water is more flat or if the fish may not be taking adults, use a parachute, comparadun or the like. Soon you'll be able to recognize the different rise forms and use them to fine tune your dry fly choice.

If there is no surface activity, start out nymphing with a nymph, larva or pupa of what is expected to hatch or what was the most abundant insect you captured in your seine. In the summer when there are a lot of different insects swimming about double up on your rig. In the Arkansas River example you might combine a caddis larva with a mayfly nymph to try and catch fish interested in early stages of either the caddis or BWO hatches. Or maybe you'll try a caddis larva and pupa to see how far along the hatch is. With multiple flies for the fish to consider, a double nymph rig will speed your determination of which fly the fish are taking.

One thing to note when looking through your fly box is the nature of the river that you're fishing. An attractor pattern with wild colors is more effective in faster water or pocket water where the fish has to make a quick decision. In slower waters like spring creeks, your pattern choice will need to match more closely all of the four criteria. While the more naïve fish of mountain streams may be enticed by the 'bling' of flash backs and bead heads, these gaudy baubles may turn off the more sophisticated fish in heavily pressured tailwaters.

## Adapt

O.K. You've done all this and the fish aren't cooperating. What next?

Believe in your fly and give it time. If you've ever sight fished, you will have noticed that it sometimes takes several passes before the fly arrives right where it needs to be, right when the fish is ready. Remember, it's not all about the fly. The presentation of your fly is vitally important. Be as critical of the quality of your presentation as you are the choice of fly. After all, the more time you spend changing your fly, the less time any fly is in the water where the fish are!

If you've been patient and your presentation has been good, try the following:

- Try a smaller fly of the same style
- Try lighter tippet
- Try a more subdued color or less flash
- Try a lower floating fly or an emerger in place of a mayfly dry fly
- Try a different phase of the insect you're imitating
- Try another of the insects you've observed
- Sometimes the fish are not taking what seems to be most abundant

If you're getting rejections, do the same as above but sooner

If you WERE catching and now you're not:

- Try a different phase of the insect you're imitating
- Try another of the insects you've observed
- During a multiple hatch, the fish may switch their focus
- Re-check conditions to see what has changed

If you've done your re-check of conditions and something has changed:

- Start the process over with your new information.

## Enjoy

As you learn more about the bugs, you will be able to anticipate the hatch due to water temperature, time of day, weather and other factors. You will know which type of water the different insects occupy and where the fish will hold to get them. It all builds upon itself and the foundation you've now started.

You don't have to start off with a lot of different patterns. Carry a few of the old standards (they became popular for a reason) in a variety of sizes and colors. Once you understand which bugs they're best used to imitate you should be catching in no time. Here are a dozen that will get you started.

<b>Fly name</b>	<b>Insect(s) it imitates</b>	<b>Hook Size</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Pheasant Tail	Mayfly and stonefly nymphs	#18-#10	Beaded and flashback, too
Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear	Mayfly nymphs, caddis pupae	#18-#14	All around attractor fly
Adams	Mayfly dries	#18-#12	Both traditional and parachute
Stimulator	Stonefly and caddis adults	#14-#10	Hoppers, too
Griffith's Gnat	Midge dries	#20-#18	
Thread midges	Midge larva and pupa	#20-#18	Plain for larva, bead for pupa
Copper John	Mayfly and stonefly nymphs	#18-#12	Really gets down to the fish
RSII	Mayfly and midge emergers	#20-#16	
Brassie	Midge and caddis larva, pupa	#18-#14	Plain for larva, bead for pupa
Prince Nymph	Stonefly and mayfly nymph	#16-#12	All around attractor fly
Parachute dry flies	Mayflies, depends on color and size	#18-#12	
Foam Body Caddis	Caddis and smaller stonefly adults	#18-#14	Floats high and easy to see