

Orvis Early Season Weighted Nymph Selection



The Eight Classic Nymphs and How to Fish Them



Manchester, Vermont 05254

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This article was recreated by Bob Hazlett from a very old black and white pamphlet by Orvis found at the bottom of a box of fly-tying material. The text is original; the photos are modern color renditions of those in the original.

The Eight Classic Nymphs and How to Fish Them

All trout waters, including streams, lakes and ponds contain thousands of different insects upon which trout feed. The immature forms of these insects are called nymphs. Dwelling on the bottom, they can be found year-round and are a major factor in the trout's diet.

The flies in this selection were designed to imitate the nymphal forms of the insect orders most important to the trout fisherman. These include the mayflies, the stoneflies and the caddisflies.

Weighted nymphs can provide an effective approach when conditions are uncertain or if trout are not feeding on the surface. At streamside, we are always alert for some clue to fly selection. But as so often happens throughout the season, we arrive on the stream and there are no flies hatching. In need of a starting point, many experienced hands begin to systematically probe the waters with weighted nymphs.

Which nymph to try first? One that is suggestive in size and color of the naturals in the particular water one is fishing. Naturals can be dislodged from stream bed rocks or submerged logs and examined closely.

Because we seldom observe what the trout are eating when they are taking subsurface flies, it is best to select a weighted nymph by water type. The weighted nymphs in your selection fit into three broad categories: medium-sized mayfly, stonefly, caddisfly imitations (Pheasant Tail, Hare's Ear, Zug Bug, and Olive Flashback), large stonefly imitations (Golden Stone, Giant Black Stone, and Chartreuse Montana), and large streamer/nymphs (Woolly Buggler). When using weighted nymphs we are not trying to imitate a specific nymphal form. Rather, a good artificial nymph simply hints at life and resembles possible food forms.

Although you may loft a skeptical eyebrow, the truth is that much of the time, this suggestion of life is all that is required for success.

In a sense, the trout is a non-specific opportunist. That which is available and easily obtainable is that which will be consumed.

The four medium-sized nymphs are best in all types of water, but especially in moderate riffled water and smaller, shallow streams. The three large stonefly nymphs produce best in any kind of fast water, be it deep, swift water, bouldery pocket water, or bubbling riffles. The Woolly Buggler works best when cast against deep banks, over deeper pockets in the center of a stream and at the head of a pool, and in ponds and lakes.

Let's break down these eight flies further, with some specific guidelines on where to use them:

MEDIUM-SIZED IMITATIONS

Zug Bug



An imitation of mayfly nymphs, smaller stonefly nymphs, and damselfly nymphs. In streams it is best in moderate to fast water, especially over areas of fine gravel.

Olive Flashback



A suggestion of many of the olive mayfly nymphs that live in streams with large rocks. Best fished in areas with plenty of flat rocks of dinner plate size and larger.

Hare's Ear



The most popular nymph of all times. It suggests a mayfly nymph, a cased caddisfly larva, caddis pupa, small stonefly, and freshwater shrimp. It will catch trout everywhere, from Rocky Mountain brooks to weedy spring creeks to ponds.

Pheasant Tail



This fly suggests many of the skinny mayfly nymphs that live in the slower pools of rocky streams, in clear, weedy spring creeks, and in ponds and lakes.

LARGE STONEFLY IMITATIONS

Golden Stone



An imitation of larger light-colored stonefly nymphs. These nymphs are usually found in fast water with large rocks, in both shallow and deep rivers.

Giant Black Stone



These nymphs are found locally in large Eastern Rivers, but are especially common in rivers of the Rocky Mountains and West Coast. Generally best in large, fast rivers.

Chartreuse Montana



A general stonefly imitation that catches trout in the fast-water riffles and runs of most trout streams.

LARGE STREAMER/NYMPHS

Woolly Bugger



Not quite a nymph, not quite a Streamer, not quite a Woolly Worm - but a producer of large trout wherever it is used. Unlike the other flies in this selection, you should fish the Woolly Bugger with a fast retrieve, stripping the fly with foot-long pulls. Cast it to a deep bank lined with alders or deadfalls and watch the water explode. The Woolly Bugger may suggest many of the large morsels that trout eat, like crayfish, minnows, and

leeches. It is also a good pond fly, and trout probably take it for a dragonfly or damselfly nymph.

This multiplicity of suggestion indicates this selection may be helpful in any water type and at any time of the season.

Many tend to think of weighted nymphs as strictly a specialized early season method. This thinking restricts the potential of the weighted nymph. Certainly in spring's high water, we should hope to swim our fly deep - the deeper and slower the better! But, even after water levels drop to normal, we are apt to find the more desirable trout holding deep much of the time.

The trout is shy and cautious, open exposed shallows make him nervously alert. Three primary needs dominate his existence: suitable temperature (ideally for fly fishermen, 50^o-65^o), protection from possible predators (birds - animals) and a nearby food supply.

The stream bottom nurtures and protects the developing nymph and larva forms that dominate the diet of the trout. There is security from possible predators here in depth of water. Assuming the temperature and oxygen content of the stream to be suitable, we see why most of the time the desirable fly swims deep.

In "reading" trout streams, think of these primary needs and look for situations that provide the trout any combination of requirements. For example, depth of water may be found at the heads of pools, also the incoming current brings a constant supply of food forms developing upstream. Other likely spots would include waterfall bases, mixed currents broken by fallen timber or large rocks, areas where fast and slow waters converge, undercut banks, beneath overhanging trees or shrubbery, and deep beneath mainstream currents.

Ponds and lakes are more difficult to analyze readily. You lack the moving current to help spot the trout attracting areas. As you move about still waters, look for sharp drop-offs in depth, spring hole locations, weed beds and inlet and outlet streams. All are likely areas in which to swim your nymphs with confidence.

In pond fishing, unless near surface activity is apparent, start with either a sink tip taper (first 15 feet sink, balance of line floats, or a true sinking line. Allow several seconds for the nymph to reach a fishable level, and start your retrieve. Be prepared to vary the retrieve method if no results are forthcoming. For example, the fly may be twitched gently, stripped in long sweeping pulls or brought along in a hesitant strip and wait rhythm.

Often the trout may be several feet beneath the surface. To be sure of duplicating a fish catching depth, a counting sequence may be employed. Make the cast, begin slowly counting, say to a count of 15 - if this depth brings results, it is easy to repeat the count and type of retrieve that worked.

In stream fishing, it is theoretically ideal to work upstream with a floating line. Cast up and across, retrieving the slack at the pace the current washes it back

towards you. Watch carefully the point where the line penetrates the water. At any hesitation in the cadence of the drift, strike.

This method will work well in small streams or large streams that are neither too deep nor too turbulent. In deep runs or fast water, try pinching a split shot or a piece of Orvis Soft-Lead about eight inches above the fly on the tippet and an Orvis Stay-On Strike Indicator two or three feet above the fly on the leader. You'll be able to fish deeper, and the strike indicator will tell you instantly when you have a strike. It's not the easiest combination to cast - but it's deadly!

In wide, but still not particularly deep streams, cast across stream. As the nymph sinks a bit and washes downstream, follow the drift with the rod tip, alternately allow the fly to drift naturally and animate it slightly, suggestive of the struggling, dislodged natural. Be especially alert as the fly reaches the limit of its downstream extension and begins to swing across stream.

In heavy, deep fast runs use a sinking line. Cast across and well upstream. Don't be at all concerned with a build-up of slack as the fly sinks and starts to wash back towards you. If by chance a trout does hit as the fly is sinking, you will probably feel it. Trout tend to take solidly in deep, heavy water. As the fly passes you, it is probably reaching the productive bottom layer of the stream. Now, follow its continuing downstream course with the rod tip and again be alert as the fly ends its downstream journey and moves up towards the surface and swings across stream. Trout often "drift back" with a deeply sunken fly and the illusion created at the end of the drift may be that of an insect suddenly come to life, heading for the surface and escape. The predatory trout moves to snap up the escaping fly almost instinctively.

As the most general aid in fly selection, think in terms of small water -- small fly. Big water -- big fly. Also, the tonal value of the fly may relate to the stream bottom. That is, nature tends to help the defenseless immature insects through protective coloration. Overturn rocks in a stream area where the bottom is light sand and medium shaded rocks, most nymphs you will find blend well to the surroundings and will be of medium coloration. In dark mud or silt, available nymphs tend to be correspondingly dark in color.

Since this is what nature provides, this is what we should supply. The trout is less suspicious if our fly "fits" the situation.

Some final words of advice: Always match your leader's tippet diameter to the size of the fly you are using. With these weighted nymphs, a 3X or 4X tippet is the proper choice.

Don't fail to try a two-fly rig on the same leader. It will speed up your research on what the fish will take. Using different patterns, tie one fly on the tip of the

leader, and then put a slightly smaller fly on a dropper. When the fish show a preference, set up with similar patterns.

You are drifting weighted nymphs because there is no more definite guideline to fly selection. So do not cast totally at random. Be thorough in your coverage of the water.

In a boat on a trout pond, perhaps it can be a clockwise sequence of casts. Then after you've worked around the clock, the line can be lengthened and a bigger circle covered. In a stream, try short, medium then long casts for one location. Step up or downstream two or three paces and again work a short, medium, long sequence.

Weighted nymphs - swim them often and we believe that you'll enjoy the results.

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