



SIX FLIES FOR TIGHT LINES

Ask six anglers what their favorite fly is for summer trout fishing in Montana and you will probably get six different answers. With literally tens of thousands of miles of trout streams and thousands of lakes and ponds in the many diverse areas of the state, the food trout feed on – and the flies used to imitate that diverse menu- vary widely. Nevertheless, there are certain flies that just seem to produce, whether on a small mountain stream teeming with cutthroat, a spring creek snaking through a meadow, or a tailwater full of fat rainbow.

When I first started fly fishing, I had one fly box that held an embarrassingly small assortment. Perhaps it is selective memory, but looking back on those early days, it doesn't seem like I caught fewer or smaller trout than I do today, despite the four full fly boxes that I now carry. Through the years, a few of those flies that I first carried are still with me today and I have learned to cherish several others that have proven themselves on streams big and small. Paring down what is currently a grotesque assortment of flies to six that I absolutely have to have for all conditions, everywhere, might not be a task I could accomplish, so I'll make it easy(er) on myself – what follows are the six flies that I would take to any river in Montana between June and August. There may be a specific hatch when I won't have the perfect match, but with the following in my vest, I have confidence, and confidence on the stream is more valuable than any fly.

Stimulator

I'll admit that I first bought this fly for the name; it was catchy. But it didn't take long for me to realize it as a favorite, for me and thousands of anglers throughout the West. Created by Randall Kaufmann, this fly is a good representation of a stonefly. In a size 8, yellow bodied, this fly will catch trout as soon as runoff begins to go down and will continue to get rises throughout the summer. With the golden stonefly hatch starting in June, this fly excels and it looks enough like a hopper for trout to continue to rise to it through August.

The elk hair wing and generous hackle allow this fly to float in some of the roughest water that trout hold in, as well as suspend a nymph dropper. There are more realistic stonefly and hopper patterns out there, but this is one fly that fills both of those niches.

Parachute Adams.

Developed on the Boardman River in northern Michigan to imitate a caddis, this fly was modified by Ed Schroeder by using a white post and wrapping the hackle horizontally around the post instead of vertically around the body of the fly. The result is a fly that flat out catches fish. An angler could do a lot worse than fish a size 14 parachute Adams day in, day out for an entire summer. In general form, it looks more like a mayfly than a caddis and the low profile presented by a parachute pattern will get looks from trout during hatches of several different mayfly species. If I had to fish with one fly for the rest of my days, this would be it

X-Caddis

Craig Mathews and John Juracek teamed up to create this simple, yet versatile fly. It is designed to imitate a caddis fly that is having a tough time emerging from its pupal case and is stuck on the surface of the water. This "crippled" caddis isn't going anywhere so trout focus on them as they are easy pickings. The beauty of this fly is that it can also be fished to imitate emerging mayflies. Pulling double duty for two of the most common insects trout feed on in the summer makes this fly a favorite pattern when fishing slower, less turbulent streams. Rivers with rougher water will sink this hackleless fly, but on softer, glassy runs and spring creeks this fly will produce throughout the summer.

The incredible, edible Ant

Summertime is terrestrial time and when it comes to terrestrials, an ant is hard to beat. Sometimes trout just seem to be a bit pickier about larger hopper patterns and will oftentimes lose their caution for an ant pattern drifted along a seam.

These small, low riding flies can be a challenge to see, so don't be afraid to trail them off the back of a larger, more visible fly, such as a Stimulator and don't worry if your ant doesn't float so well – the real thing doesn't either. If you have never fished ant patterns,

you are in for a treat. Don't let a lack of risers or ants on the water dissuade you from fishing an ant; when it comes to terrestrial insects, trout are opportunistic.

Hare's Ear

Anglers know that most of the time trout feed below the surface on nymphs, but many of us - myself included - love to see a trout rise to our offerings. Nevertheless, there are times when fishing a nymph is simply the only way to go. The hot, bright weather makes mid-summer one of those times when going under the surface for trout can be necessary. The Hare's Ear excels because it doesn't necessarily represent one, specific specie of aquatic insect; it just looks like food. Fished on a dead drift through long runs it could be a mayfly nymph tumbling in the current. Fished on a swing it could be a caddis swimming to the surface, dropped below a stimulator it could be who-knows-what; it is eaten twice as often as the dry fly.

Woolly Bugger

Perhaps the most widely known fly in the world, the Woolly Bugger has caught trout from Alaska to Argentina. The woolly bugger's simplicity in construction also makes it a pattern that is often the first attempt for budding fly tiers. This combination of trout catch-ability and ease of tying has made for many proud moments on the stream when an angler catches the first trout on a fly they tied themselves.

A smaller, size 6 or 8 black Woolly Bugger fished on a dead drift through pools and twitched back along the eddy line, can be an effective tactic when nothing else seems to be working. Admittedly, I have no idea why a small black Woolly Bugger will catch trout when nothing else is drawing strikes, but that mystery is part of the draw of fly fishing. Perhaps the flowing marabou tail on this fly looks like a leach writhing in the current, or maybe it simply looks "buggy", but whatever the reason, this fly catches trout and deserves to be on your short list of flies when you take to the stream this summer.

Some Runners Up

A dozen more flies, in no particular order, well worth taking to the water this summer should include some familiar flies that are traditional standbys to many fly fishers.

Elk Hair Caddis: For many anglers, this is their go-to fly in the summer, and for good reason. On the waters I fish, I prefer the X-caddis, but this fly is renowned for a reason.

San Juan Worm: Like it, love it, or hate it, this fly will catch trout.

Royal Wulff: A classic developed by Lee Wulff, this fly looks like nothing in particular, but as an attractor pattern it excels at drawing up trout when there are no hatches occurring.

Sparkle Pupa: This fly that originated in Montana and was developed by the authority on caddis flies, Gary LaFontaine. This caddis pattern is considered indispensable by those who regularly fish caddis hatches.

Partridge and Peacock: This wet fly fished on a swing or tight lined will keep your rod bent.

Trico spinner: If you find yourself on the Missouri River August 14 around 9:17 AM, you'll be glad to have a few of these miniscule mayfly patterns.

Rouge Foam Golden Stone: Trout love golden stoneflies and will continue to rise to this fly throughout the summer.

Renegade: Another fly that doesn't look like anything specific, but the versatility of being able to fish this fly wet or dry makes it a good one to have on hand. Try fishing this fly on a swing before a caddis hatch.

Copper John: Another nymph pattern that is a stand-by. The wire body and bead head gets this fly deep.

Scuds: These small crustaceans are responsible for a lot of trout caught out of spring creeks and tailwaters alike. If you plan on fishing these kinds of waters, move the scud way up on your list.

Price nymph: Another generalist, this nymph incorporates trout-catching peacock into a fly that will consistently draw strikes.

Slumpbuster: When the going gets tough, the tough throw streamers. This scuplin pattern is a great one to fish on overcast days and can result in jolting strikes when twitched along undercut banks.

The enjoyment of Montana's remarkable fisheries, arctic grayling, rainbow trout, cutthroat, brook, brown and bull trout is not determined by the number of flies in your box or vest but being familiar with a few reliable's helps to produce some memorable experiences. Hold on to those flies like old friends.