The Complete Book of Fly Tying

by

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The Beginning

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Very few of us pick up an instructional or technical book and read it the way we would read a novel. Unlike novels, “how to’s” usually have very boring plots, and almost no one reads them from beginning to end, retaining and actually putting to use all the information in them. Instructional books are meant to be dipped into whenever the need for a particular piece of information arises, and so it is with this book.

There are three basic forms of flies used for fishing, so this volume has been broken into three sections. The first pertains to all the types of flies that are used on the surface of the water; the second, to those used below; and the third, to those that imitate baitfish. These sections are presented in the order preferred by most angler/tiers. However, if your own inclination is not consistent with this order, by all means go directly to the section you favor. You will be able to learn to tie the fly of your choice by using only that section. However, there are parts in each section which refer you to procedures in another section. This has been done to avoid undue repetition and keep this book a reasonable size.

As you progress through the various sections, you will see that I refer to the use of certain styles and models of hooks, threads, tools, and other materials or equipment. These will be, for the most part, the tools and materials I have on hand. They are not necessarily the only brands to use for tying.

In the case of hooks, you will find references to those manufactured by O. Mustad and Son of Norway. Mustad is not the *only* hood manufacturer in the world. However, its hooks are the most readily available through supply houses. Therefore, if you find a hook from another manufacturer which meets the specifications of the particular pattern you are working with, by all means don’t hesitate to use it. You will also find other hooks produced by the same manufacturer which can be substituted for a given pattern. For example, if you are tying a streamer fly which calls for a Mustad model 9575 hook,

you certainly can substitute a Mustad 3665A. The hooks are identical except that the 9575 has a looped eye. If you cannot locate either of these hooks, a Mustad 79580 can be used; it is also a streamer or bucktail hook, though it is not quite as long as the other two. It will make no difference to the fish which hook you use. The only minor problem you will have in the substitution is the proper proportioning of the fly you are tying, and you will learn to adjust for this after you have tied one or two patterns.

The same holds true for such items as threads and tinsels. While I prefer to use the fine Flymaster brand of thread for most of my tying, nearly any thread of an equivalent diameter will serve you for a particular pattern. All that is needed is a little common sense. If you are tying a large saltwater patter, you will, of course, require a heavier thread. On the other hand, you will get nowhere should you decide to use a size A on a size 14 Light Cahill dry fly.

With the increasing use of the synthetic Mylar, tinsels are losing popularity in the millinery and garment industries. I suppose that eventually tinsel as we know it today will all but disappear, and Mylar will become as common as the plastic fly lines that have replaced the once prevalent silk lines.

Tools and other kinds of equipment are, for the most part, matters of individual choice. Manufacturers cannot afford to make an inferior product since it will not sell well—at least not to fly tiers and fly fishermen. In that area our fraternity is a unique lot. We may be willing to pay a little more for a good product, but we rarely purchase second best. Many tools are recommended. Many more are manufactured. If they do the job they were designed for, you should have no qualms about using equipment that is not mentioned in this book.

As carefully as any other tries to write a technical book, there are still times when the reader will be confused about a certain term or the use of a particular word. For this reason I have included the section Definition of Terms (Appendix A). A brief perusal of this section now and then will answer some of your questions.

An index has also been included. It not only refers to the patterns of particular flies but also lists methods, processes, and techniques. You should be able to tie almost any pattern just by using the index, though it may refer you to many parts of this book to do so. For example, it may lead you to one chapter which illustrates the proper technique for winging a dry fly, to another which describes the method used to form a clipped deer hair body, and to yet another which instructs you in the correct process for hackling the pattern. If you wish to take shortcuts with a new pattern, consult the index. This holds true for both fresh- and saltwater species.

As you work through the various chapters, you will find lists of different types of patterns. Regardless of which pattern you tie, remember the components of each pattern are listed in the order in which they are tied to the shank of the hook. The only exceptions will be those patterns which have materials like tinsel ribs or hackles which, though tied in earlier, are would to their destination after other processes have been completed.

In this book we have tied our flies with the aid of a tool called a bobbin because it gives better control of the thread with less wear and tear (this is explained further in the text). What then of the fly tier who has already begun to learn the art without using a bobbin? There is no problem. If you have learned to tie without a bobbin and feel comfortable or just don't want to change, there is no need to. You can still tie any of the patterns here listed by using the half-hitch and button method. That's what some of the greatest tiers used to do years ago.

I do, however, recommend that you at least try tying with a bobbin. Once you get the hang of it, you won't go back to the old method for the simple reason that a bobbin can get into tighter corners than your finger and you won't be burdened by that lumpy half hitch as you tie. Just to say, "Well, that's the way my grandfather did it," is nonsense. The fact is he probably would have used a bobbin if they had been available. Years ago they also fished with fly rods made of greenheart and lancewood. Would

you give up your modern glass, graphite, or bamboo rod just to “do it the way they used to”? Common sense solves many problems.

As you work from pattern to pattern, whether a dry, a wet, or a streamer, you will notice that certain size hooks are called for. They will generally be on the large side so you can tie the fly with as little difficulty as possible. However, if you feel the hook size specified still gives you some trouble, by all means go to a larger hook. Many beginners have trouble at first gauging the proper proportion on smaller hooks. There just does not seem to be enough room on the shank to tie in all the required materials at the right places. Always tie with the hook size you are most comfortable with, and then gradually work your way to the proper size for the pattern.

Obviously no fly-tying book can also be a complete fly *pattern* book. All fly-tying books give the patterns for *some* flies, just as this one does (123 different patterns); none can give the “recipes” for *all* flies, although some give more patterns than others. For example, the late Ray Bergman in his infamous book *Trout*, which is not *specifically* a trout fly-tying book, gives recipes for 689 flies. Joseph D. Bates, Jr., gives many streamer and salmon fly patterns in his *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing* and *Atlantic Salmon Flies and Fishing*. The books starred (*) in the Selected Bibliography may be referred to for some of the thousands of flies, streamers, and bucktails that ingenious anglers have devised over the years.

Think of this book as a friend. Go over it briefly. Get familiar with it. Learn what the different chapters deal with, and then really familiarize yourself with the sections that are of most interest to you. Pick out the little tips and hints that make fly ting easier. Refer to the book now and again, even after you feel you have learned all you think there is to learn. Strangely enough, even the things I write about, which I’ve learned only from others in our fraternity, sometimes have a way of receding in my mind, and it is good to refresh an old memory. And remember to use the index; it lists fly-tying processes as well as patterns, materials, and tools.