WHAT FLIES SHOULD A BEGINNER START WITH?

Start with eleven flies: five nymphs, two emergers (they imitate an insect changing from nymph to adult at or just under the surface), three dry flies and one streamer. They are the patterns Fly Findr's own reports, hatch pages and guides named most often when counted on November 21, 2026. Most of the points come from how many Fly Findr guides link a fly; it is not a ranking of what catches fish. This is a starting set, not a proven best: no controlled field study was found that tested fly pattern or fly size against trout catch.

NYMPHS

- **Zebra Midge** #18–24
- **Pheasant Tail Nymph** #14–20
- **Copper John** #14–18
- **Perdigon** #14–20
- **Pat's Rubber Legs** #8–12

EMERGERS

- **Sparkle Dun** #16–20
- **RS2** size: ask a shop

DRY FLIES

- **Elk Hair Caddis** #14–20
- **Parachute Adams** #14–22
- **Stimulator** #8–16

STREAMER

- **Woolly Bugger** #2–12

WHICH TO TIE ON FIRST

1. Tie on a small nymph first: a Pheasant Tail Nymph, Zebra Midge or Perdigon. In drift samples, midges were over 80% of all animals collected in one regulated river, and Baetis mayflies were the most prolific mayfly drifters in every month in two Colorado rivers. Studies disagree on whether trout eat what drifts most.
2. In deeper or fast water, fish it under a strike indicator.
3. In riffles and pocket water 1 to 4 ft deep, tie it below a dry fly, as in the dry-dropper guide, a summer and early-fall rig. An Elk Hair Caddis or a Stimulator floats a small brass-bead or unweighted nymph.
4. When trout rise, catch an insect and pick the closest hook inside the range on its hatch page. For blue-winged olives that might be a Parachute BWO, which is not in this box; the blue-winged olive guide fishes an RS2 dead drift just under the surface.
5. For the larger trout in deep water and near cover, swing or strip the Woolly Bugger.
6. Before you go, open your state on Fly Findr, look at what is working now, and add those flies to the box.

Hook sizes as listed on Fly Findr's fly pages. The dry-dropper and indicator guides give 14 to 20 for small nymphs as a group; Pat's Rubber Legs from the Arkansas River and Smoky Mountains guides, Sparkle Dun from the South Fork of the Snake guide; their fly pages list 14 to 16. No checked size for the RS2: ask a fly shop. The Smoky Mountains guide lists the Stimulator in 4 to 8 and 6 to 12. Illustration: Fly Findr

How the eleven were picked. One point for each published water where a report dated November 7 to 21, 2026 named the fly pattern (a name that is only an insect, such as BWO or Midge, does not count); one for each published hatch page that names the fly for that insect (general flies listed there do not count); one for each published guide that links it. Most points come from guide links. The eleven scored 7 to 13. Five more tied at 6, so the box stops at eleven. The count measures how often Fly Findr names a fly, not how many trout it catches.

What the evidence doesn't show. No controlled field study was found that tested fly pattern or fly size against trout catch. In trials by the Fly Tyers Club at Cornell University, no significant differences could be shown between the flies; in a second trial, one fly, the Black Gnat, did significantly worse than the others. No study in Fly Findr's research tested which fly a beginner should start with. Treat the box as a place to start.