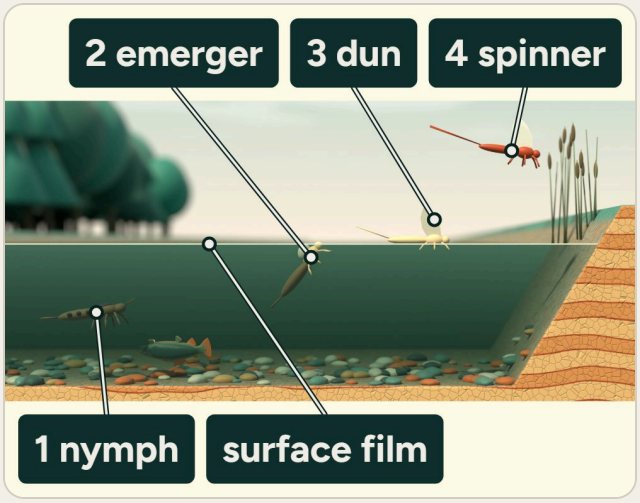
WHAT IS A HATCH AND HOW DO I MATCH IT?

A hatch is a period when water insects turn into winged adults in large numbers, at the surface, or for stoneflies on rocks at the bank. Matching it means tying on a fly close to the size, shape and color of the insect, at the stage the trout can reach.



Mayfly stages in the water. Insects drawn many times life size. Illustration: Fly Findr

GROUP	STAGES	TELL IT BY	FLIES
Mayfly	Egg, nymph, dun, spinner (emerger: nymph turning into dun)	Upright sail wings; 2 or 3 tails	Nymph, emerger, dun, spinner
Caddis	Egg, larva, pupa, adult	Tent-shaped wings; no tails	Larva, pupa, adult dry
Stonefly	Egg, nymph, adult (crawls out on rocks to hatch)	Four wings flat on the back; big	Big nymph; adult dry by the banks
Midge	Egg, larva, pupa, adult	Two flat wings; no tails; tiny	Larva, pupa, small dry or cluster

MATCH IT IN SIX STEPS

1 Look
Watch the surface, the air and the brush. Nothing hatching? Turn over a few stones in a riffle.

2 Name the group
Mayfly, caddis, stonefly or midge, from the wings and tails.

3 Find the stage
No rises: fish under the surface. Rises: emerger, dun or spinner.

4 Size
Hold an insect next to your fly box; pick inside the hatch page's hook range.

5 Pattern
In the hatch page's group for that stage, take a fly named for the insect.

6 Fish it there
Nymph near the bottom, emerger in the film, dun on top, spinner flush in the film. No drag.

READ A FLY FINDR HATCH PAGE

1 Size
Hook range for the insect. Pick the size closest to the bugs you see.

2 When
The season. It follows water temperature, so dates move by river.

3 Stage
The lifecycle: each stage and where it is in the water.

4 Pattern
Flies grouped by type. In your stage's group, take one named for the insect.

5 Where
Waters whose hatch chart lists it, with months; in season first.

WHAT THE STUDIES SAY

- The season follows water temperature: warmer water brought hatches earlier; colder, higher places hatched later. The hour differs by species.
- Cold-release tailwaters: hatches came 2 to 4 weeks later and lasted longer in two Montana rivers.
- Trout did not show a consistent switch from nymphs to adults; none of the studies read tracked trout through a hatch hour by hour. Keep the nymph in mind.

What the studies don't settle. No study found tested *Baetis* hatches against cloud, or trout-stream hatches against rain, the moon or rising water. No study found tested fly size against catch, and two small trials found little difference between patterns. The steps are a way to choose a fly, not a promise.