

FFF Fly of the Month

Handy Dandy Emerger



By Bob Bates

March and April, for those of us in the northern states and provinces, are ice-out-time on our lakes and ponds. If legal, it is also a time when we can start going after rising fish. Chironomids (midges) will hatch anytime of the year if there is open water, and if fish are working on the surface they are probably feeding on chironomid pupa. The pupa slowly rises to the surface and then hangs in the surface film before splitting the pupal skin. I have had times when fish would hit a fly hanging in the surface film but would ignore the fly if it sunk. This pattern is useful for imitating deep, rising and floating chironomid pupa.

The original Handy Dandy was developed about 1991 by the late Barry Handy a tier at the Morning Hatch in Tacoma, WA. Morning Hatch people wanted a chironomid pattern that had the sparkle of a natural when it is getting ready to hatch; this was Barry's solution. Handy Dandy flies in different sizes and colors caught fish all over the northwest U.S. and British Columbia. Fly fishers used standard chironomid techniques: a full sinking line with a slow (SLOW) hand twist retrieve or a floating line and letting it hang under a strike indicator.

Whenever a fly works great somebody has to improve it. In this case it was Jim Shearer, a professional tier from Kennewick, Washington. He wanted something that would hang in the surface film like the natural. In 1996, members of six or seven FFF fly clubs had a work party to improve the trail into Merry and Bobby lakes in the Crab Creek Wildlife Area near Beverly, Washington. During a break Jim Shearer showed us the Handy Dandy Emerger, and gave me the fly pictured above. (Jim is scheduled to be a demonstration tier at the FFF 2002 show.)

To fish this pattern use a floating line and cast the fly to working fish. On the windy days make shorter casts so you can see the white gills (foam) in the waves. I try to cast slightly up wind and watch the fly as it floats by. Usually there is no question about the

hit. As always match the fly to the size and color of chironomids hatching in your area.

Materials:

Hook: Daiichi 1140, Tiemco TMC 200, Tiemco TMC 2457 or similar hooks, 10-20

Thread: White or same color as body, 3/0 - 8/0

Rib: Pearlescent Krystal Flash

Body: V-Rib or Body Glass, red, black, green, tan, olive, bright green, amber

Wingcase: Pheasant tail fibers

Thorax: Peacock herl

Gills: White closed cell foam

Tying Steps:

Gary Sanstrom, owner of the Morning Hatch, cautioned: "Be sure to use white thread in tying patterns with lighter color V-Rib; black shows through and makes the fly too dark."

1. Smash barb before tying fly. Attach thread under thorax area and secure two strands of Krystal Flash on top of hook. Wrap thread smoothly rearward over the Krystal Flash to a point around the bend.
2. Trim V-Rib to a fine point and tie it in. Trimming keeps an unsightly bump from developing on the first couple of turns and also keeps the body slimmer than tying V-Rib down from front to back.
3. Wind thread forward to thorax area. Spiral V-Rib so the Krystal Flash will fit inside of the gap, secure and trim excess V-Rib.
4. Spiral the two strands of Krystal Flash forward, secure and trim.
5. Attach four or five pheasant tail fibers at front of body with most of their length pointing to rear.
6. Attach two or three peacock herls by their tips and wind thread forward to within two eye widths of eye. Wrap herl forward, secure and trim.
7. Attach white foam across hook using a figure eight wrap.
8. Bring pheasant tail fibers forward over thorax and foam, attach in front of foam, trim excess fibers and whip finish head. Add a small drop of head cement.
9. Pull up foam and trim. Test your flies to make sure there is enough foam to float the pattern.

Before the hatch shows up on the surface there are lots of chironomids down near the bottom. So some of the original Handy Dandy patterns can be useful. Replace the foam

with white Antron gills about twice as wide as the thorax. Let the fly hang under a strike indicator; fluorocarbon leader helps sink the fly. Originally the Handy Dandy was tied on a Tiemco 2457 hook, but many tiers choose to put chironomid patterns on longer shank hooks so they imitate the slim-body naturals. Remember to release all those fish carefully so they can fight another day.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.
You can direct any questions or comments to flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org