

# FLY TIER'S BENCH

LEFTY KREH

## The Magnificent Seven

AFTER MANY YEARS OF FISHING for trout with dry flies, I've come to the conclusion that seven basic dry-fly patterns (in various sizes within each pattern) account for most of my fish in nearly all angling situations. Yes, there are brief periods on some waters when an exceptionally heavy hatch over selective fish calls for an exact imitation. But even then, I can often come pretty close to matching the natural with one of my seven and take fish. And heavy hatches occur only for brief periods, so you're going to have to play the dry-fly game all day, every day you're on the water.

Gardner Grant is a skilled and widely traveled fly fisherman with experience in both fresh and salt water. At an outdoor sports show last winter I mentioned to him that I was planning this article.

"Let me guess which seven you selected, for I agree that you only need about seven dry flies to take trout almost all the time."

"Go ahead," I answered dubiously.

To my amazement, Gardner mentioned six of the seven dry flies I had picked. Later, in Canada, Dave Whitlock and I were having dinner together. I asked Dave if he agreed with my idea, and if so, what his selection was. He concurred and named six of my seven, although not the same six Gardner had named.

Bill Hunter, designer of the HMH vise and owner of a fine fly shop in New Hampshire, was queried one night at his home. He selected five of my seven, and his other two choices were very close to mine. Whenever I talked to experienced anglers I found agreement. Although none selected my exact seven, they chose so close it was startling. And remember, their choices were made from thousands of established patterns.

How could this be? As we gain fishing experience, most of us begin to find certain flies that consistently take trout. Gradually we weed out those that don't produce well. We keep trying the latest "killer" only to find that over the long haul our old favorites continue to produce best. Some say it's because our favorites are on the water more of the time, so of course they take more fish. I'm not sure what the reason is, but before long, each angler has a few chosen flies that he uses over and over and relies on. Most carry many other patterns for insurance, but these go largely unused.

All experienced and effective dry-fly anglers eventually learn that *how* you drift a fly over a trout is more important than what you drift.

If the fly doesn't drift free of drag, no matter what you offer, it will probably be turned down.

HERE ARE THE SEVEN FLIES that take trout for me almost all the time and in nearly every situation. Bear in mind that this list must service anglers from across the country fishing on various waters, from brawling Western rivers, to clear mountain brooks, to gentle limestone spring creeks or tea-colored beaver ponds.

Everyone's first choice is the Adams. Many experienced anglers swear that if forced to use just one dry fly it would be the Adams. It has a buggy look, and its gray and ginger colors make it resemble many different naturals without exactly imitating any one fly. Its grizzly hackle-tip wings make it easy to see.

My second choice is the Light Cahill. The Adams resembles many of the darker mayflies while the cream-colored Light Cahill resembles



Top row: Humpty, Elk Hair Caddis and Deerhair Ant. Middle: Dave's Hopper. Bottom row: Light Cahill, Royal Wulff and Adams.

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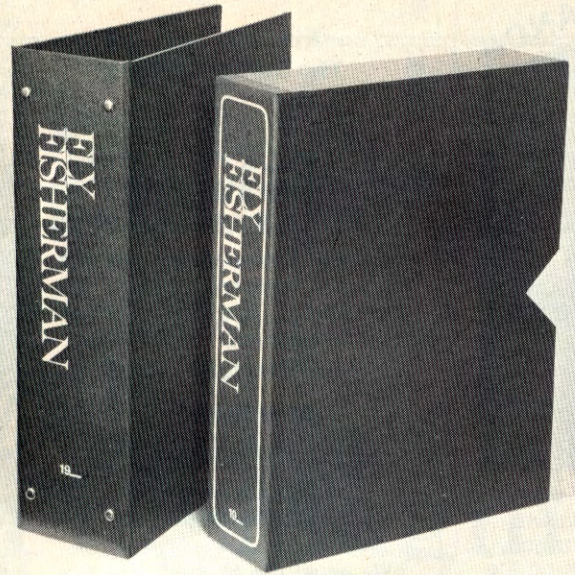
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## Seven . . .

the lighter ones. By varying size within these two patterns, you can induce most trout feeding on mayflies to take.

The Elk Hair Caddis is my third choice. This simple, nearly unsinkable pattern not only imitates the caddisfly, an important trout food on many streams, it also has the same buggy look that makes the Adams so appealing: It can double for other insects. The fur body and elk hair wing make the Elk Hair Caddis float like a life preserver. I sometimes modify the pattern by trimming the underside of the fully-palmered hackle for a better float. You can alter the pattern's color by using various tints of fur and elk hair. While the Elk Hair Caddis serves well on most caddis hatches, it is tough to tie in very small sizes. But it floats so well, even in rough water, and is so easy to see that it's one of my favorites.

Ants have been around for millions of years and there are plenty of them. Although you'll seldom find them in high concentrations, they furnish a constant food supply to trout during the warmer months. Anytime you're in doubt as to what to use and there isn't any hatch activity, try an ant.

For years a few angling friends from my Maryland mountains painted the backs of their ants with a fluorescent paint. Then, while fishing on Spruce Creek with George Harvey—one of the best anglers in the country—he told me he'd been doing the same thing for years. It sure helps you track the fly as it drifts along.

I prefer deerhair ants on #10 and #12 hooks, but in smaller sizes I use a fur-bodied pattern. The most durable and effective ant overall is the McMurray Ant (see FFM July/September 1981, page 54), made from balsa wood and monofilament. It's a superb fly.

Grasshoppers provide a lot of protein in one gulp and big fish think nothing of rising from the bottom to take one. A good hopper pattern should be on your list of basic dries. I prefer Dave's Hopper, but I think it's most important that your hopper pattern have legs that penetrate the surface of the water. I've found that such patterns best imitate the action of hoppers struggling in the water. It's also important to give your hopper three small twitches as soon as it hits the water. Then let it drift free of drag.

The last two flies I wouldn't do without are perfect for rough waters. Rough water can be a brook-trout stream in Potter County, Pennsylvania, where the fly drifts through short pools and is swept into riffles where most patterns will drown. Or it can be big, heavy Western water where rapids try to sink your fly. What you need in such waters is a fly that looks buggy, is generally appealing to trout and floats like a cork. The Royal Wulff and the Humpy fill the bill. These "attractor" patterns are easy to see, even in very riffly water; they cast well, float well and, best of all, consistently take trout. Most people fish them in #12-#16, but a #18 Royal Wulff or Humpy can be

deadly. Such attractor flies don't imitate anything in nature, but through size and color, get the attention of trout.

There you have it. Seven dry flies that will work most of the time on most waters under almost all conditions. Just vary pattern sizes and make sure you get a good float.

## Adams

HOOK: Mustad 94840, #10-#20 (turned-down eye, extra fine wire).

THREAD: Gray.

BODY: Dubbed muskrat fur with guard hairs removed.

TAIL: Grizzly and brown hackle fibers mixed.

WINGS: Grizzly hackle tips tied upright and divided.

HACKLE: Brown and grizzly mixed.

## Light Cahill

HOOK: Mustad 94840, #10-#20 (turned-down eye, extra fine wire).

THREAD: Tan.

BODY: Dubbed creamy badger underfur or synthetic fur.

TAIL: Light ginger hackle fibers.

WINGS: Barred lemon wood duck tied upright and divided.

HACKLE: Light ginger.

## Elk Hair Caddis

HOOK: Mustad 94840, #10-#18 (turned-down eye, extra fine wire).

THREAD: Tan.

BODY: Dubbed hare's ear fur.

RIBBING: Gold wire.

WING: Tannish cream elk hair.

HACKLE: Furnace.

## Deerhair Ant

HOOK: Mustad 94831 (turned-down eye, two extra long shank, extra fine wire).

THREAD: Black or red.

BODY: Black or red deerhair.

COMMENTS: Apply one or two coats of vinyl cement to the top of the body. Let dry. Then apply drop of fluorescent orange or yellow paint to top of the body.



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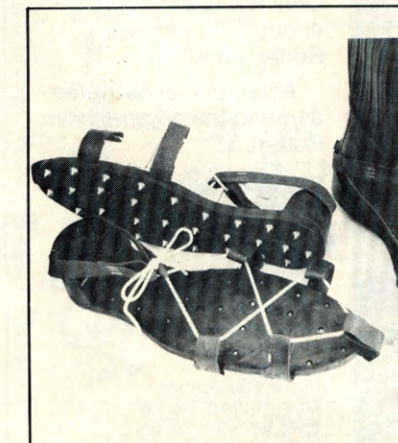
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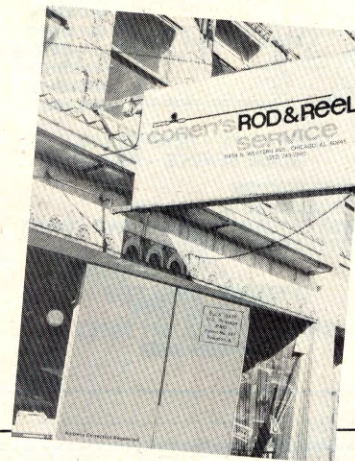


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### Dave's Hopper

HOOK: Mustad 94831 or 9671, #2-#16  
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THREAD: Prewaxed 6/0, color to match  
wing and head, or white.

TAIL: Red or blue short stiff natural deerhair.

BODY: Cream or yellow Orlon or polypropylene  
yarn.

RIB: Light-brown or grizzly hackle.

UNDERWING: Light-yellow or gray deer body  
hair.

WING: Speckled turkey or peacock wing quill  
sprayed with Tuffilm (Microweb wing material  
colored appropriately is a good substitute  
for natural feather).

LEGS: Golden pheasant tail feather or similar  
marked long-fiber feather.

COLLAR: Well-grizzled short mule or whitetail  
deerhair.

HEAD: Coarse mule or whitetail deer body  
hair.

CEMENT: Tuffilm spray, Pliobond and rod  
varnish.

### Royal Wulff

HOOK: Mustad 7957B, #8-#14 (turned-down  
eye, long shank).

THREAD: Brown.

BODY: Royal Coachman style with peacock  
herl with red floss center band. Reverse  
wrap the body with fine gold wire.

TAIL: Deer body hair.

WINGS: White bucktail tied upright and  
divided.

HACKLE: Brown.

COMMENTS: White calf tail is generally used  
for wings on the Western dressing of this  
pattern.

### Humpy

HOOK: Mustad 7957B, #8-#10 (turned-down  
eye, long shank).

THREAD: 3/0 mono for sizes 10 to 14, 6/0  
mono for sizes 16 to 17; any color you  
want for the underbelly of the fly; single  
strand fluorescent floss.

TAIL: Stiff moose body hair.

BODY and WINGS: Mule deer or elk body  
hair.

HACKLE: Grizzly and brown, saddles first  
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