

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

# The Fly Tying Bench Pack

*A companion to The Fly Tying Bible · by Cal Hendricks*

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Thanks for picking up the book. This companion is the part you keep at the vise: prop it against your lamp, tape a page inside your tool box, or fold it into the lid of your travel kit. It's the starter shopping list so you don't overspend at the fly shop, a hook and thread reference so you stop guessing sizes, a ten-pattern box that catches trout across most of the country, the five core moves written out as a checklist you can tie along to, and the ten beginner mistakes with their fixes named plain. Real numbers, straight from the book, no filler.

*You're not tying a museum piece, you're tying a tool a fish has to believe. Nobody down there is grading your thread wraps. Proportion and a fish's-eye view beat pretty every time, and the fly that catches fish is simply the one that's in the water. Tie simple, tie durable, tie a lot, and go fish them. - Cal*

## The Starter Bench: What to Buy First

The tackle industry would love to sell you four hundred dollars of tools before your first fly. You don't need most of it. A real, capable bench comes in well under two hundred dollars, and most of it lasts a lifetime. Buy good jaws, a steady base, and a smooth bobbin, then put the rest of your money into hooks and materials you'll actually consume.

### The five essentials (plus the light nobody buys)

| Tool                          | What it does                                       | What to spend      | Buy-smart note                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vise (fixed or entry rotary)  | Holds the hook steady while both hands work        | \$50 - \$150       | Jaws that grip a size 22 and a size 2 alike; solid clamp or pedestal. Skip the boutique vises      |
| Bobbin (buy two)              | Holds the thread spool, feeds it under tension     | \$12 - \$25 each   | Ceramic-lined or ceramic-tipped tube; a bare-metal burr saws your thread. Load two colors          |
| Fine-tipped scissors          | Trim close, snip a single fiber                    | \$15 - \$30        | NEVER cut wire or tinsel with these; keep a cheap heavy pair for coarse work                       |
| Whip finish tool (Matarelli)  | Ties off the thread head so the fly can't unravel  | \$6 - \$12         | The Matarelli type rotates and runs smoother than the fixed-hook type                              |
| Bodkin + hackle pliers        | Apply cement, pick dubbing; grip hackle to wind it | a few dollars each | Rubber-faced pliers so they don't cut the feather. You can make a bodkin from a needle and a dowel |
| Adjustable lamp, daylight LED | Lights the hook so you can judge proportion        | \$15 - \$30        | The cheapest upgrade that helps most. Cool-white around 5000K, over your shoulder onto the hook    |

### The thread, wire and tinsel kit (under \$25 total)

| Item           | Buy this                                                        | Use it for                                                     |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thread         | 8/o (70 denier) and 6/o (140 denier), black plus one earth tone | 8/o for small dries; 6/o for bigger flies and hair work        |
| Weighting wire | Lead-free, .015 and .020                                        | Wrapped under the body to sink a nymph. Check local lead rules |
| Ribbing wire   | Small copper and small gold ultra-wire                          | Counter-wrapped over a body so trout teeth can't unravel it    |
| Flash          | One card of pearl or gold Krystal Flash                         | A few fibers in a tail. A whole card is a lifetime supply      |
| Head cement    | One small bottle of thin cement + your bodkin                   | The last locking drop on every fly. Ventilate for the fumes    |

## Hook Reference: Size, Wire, and the Habit

The hook is the one part of your fly that does a mechanical job: it has to stick a fish and hold it. Everything else is costume. Choose the hook first, on purpose. Remember the scale runs backward: the bigger the number, the smaller the hook.

### The size scale (bigger number = smaller hook)

| Hook size | Rough length | Typical use                                             |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 - 6     | Big          | Streamers, bass bugs, big stoneflies, hoppers           |
| 8 - 10    | Large        | Woolly Buggers, big attractor dries, hoppers            |
| 12 - 14   | Medium       | Adams, Elk Hair Caddis, Hare's Ear, the workhorse sizes |
| 16 - 18   | Small        | Blue-wing olives, small caddis, Pheasant Tails          |
| 20 - 22   | Tiny         | Midges, tricos, small mayfly emergers                   |

If you buy hooks in only two sizes to start, buy 14 and 16. More trout have been caught on those two than any others.

### Wire weight (the thing most beginners learn the hard way)

| Wire                  | Metal         | Use it for                                                     | Watch out                                                     |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Light (fine) wire     | Thin, light   | Dry flies, so the fly floats and a fine wire penetrates easily | Bends under load. Never hang a big nymph or a hard fish on it |
| Standard wire         | Middle weight | General all-purpose patterns                                   | The safe default when unsure                                  |
| Heavy (2X heavy) wire | Thick, strong | Nymphs, streamers, anything that sinks or takes a beating      | Heavier, helps sink; won't straighten on the fish of the trip |

The three-question habit before every pattern: What size is the natural I'm imitating (sets the hook size)? Does the fly float or sink (float means light wire, sink means heavy)? What shape does the body need (long-shank for slim nymphs, curved for scuds, streamer hook for a big profile, wide-gap for foam poppers)? Answer those and the right hook picks itself. Crush the barb flat with smooth-jaw pliers before the fly ever goes in the vise, gently, so you don't snap the point.

## Ten Essential Patterns to Start

This is the starter box from the book, drawn from the 50-plus pattern library: two dozen flies tied three or four each will catch trout across most of the country in most conditions. The bolded size is where I'd start. Tie the ones that match your water first.

| Pattern                  | Hook + size         | What it imitates                    | When to fish it                                                                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Adams                    | Dry, 12-18 (14)     | General mayfly dun, all-rounder     | A rise you can't identify; searching a riffle. The one dry to own                  |
| Parachute Adams          | Dry, 12-20 (16)     | Mayfly dun riding flush in the film | Picky risers and flat water; easy to see, sits low and natural                     |
| Elk Hair Caddis          | Dry, 12-18 (14)     | Adult caddis, tent-wing             | Evening caddis; skitter or dead-drift over broken water                            |
| Blue-Wing Olive (BWO)    | Dry, 16-22 (18)     | Small olive mayfly dun              | Cool overcast days, spring and fall; classic hatch fly                             |
| Pheasant Tail (beadhead) | Nymph, 14-18 (16)   | Slim mayfly nymph                   | Year-round subsurface prospecting; a dropper under a dry                           |
| Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear   | Nymph, 12-16 (14)   | Buggy general nymph and emerger     | The all-purpose searching nymph when nothing's hatching                            |
| Copper John              | Nymph, 14-18 (16)   | Weighted attractor / stonefly nymph | Fast, deep water; the heavy anchor fly on a two-nymph rig                          |
| Woolly Bugger            | Streamer, 6-12 (10) | Baitfish, leech, crayfish           | Prospecting anytime; strip it or swing it. Black and olive. The best fly ever made |
| Partridge and Orange     | Wet, 12-16 (14)     | Emerging caddis or mayfly           | Swung across and down the current; the oldest trick that still works               |
| Foam Hopper              | 2X, 8-12 (10)       | Grasshopper                         | Late summer along grassy banks; slap it down near the edge                         |

Add a Clouser Minnow (streamer, 6) if you fish bigger water, a Zebra Midge (18) for tailwaters and winter, and a San Juan Worm (14) for high or off-color water. From there, let your own netted bugs tell you what else to tie.

## The Five Core Moves: A Wrap-Along Checklist

Here's the secret nobody tells beginners plainly: there are only about five core moves, and every fly in the book is those five in a different order with different materials. Put a bare size 12 or 14 in the vise, barb crushed, and run this checklist until your hands own it.

- [ ] Move 1 - Start the thread. Pinch the tag against the shank a third back from the eye, hold the thread at 45 degrees, and make five or six wraps back over itself (away from you over the top). Snip the tag. Let go: it should hang without slipping. Then lay a smooth thread base back to the bend and forward, so other materials have something to bite.
- [ ] Move 2 - The pinch wrap (tie material in). Lay the material on top of the shank, pinch it between thumb and forefinger right at the tie-in point. Bring the thread straight UP over the top and straight DOWN the other side (a vertical loop, not around the side). Pull straight down. The straight-down pull is what keeps material on top instead of dragging it to the far side. Two or three pinch wraps, then release.
- [ ] Move 3 - Wind a material (hackle, wire, herl). For a dry-fly collar: strip the webby base, tie the feather in by the bare stem, grip the tip with hackle pliers, and wind three to five touching turns keeping the feather ON EDGE so the fibers stand out. For a rib: spiral the wire forward in open turns, counter-wrapping the opposite way from the body for durability.
- [ ] Move 4 - Dub a body. Pull off a tiny pinch of dubbing, less than you think, match-head size. Roll it onto the thread in ONE direction only until it forms a thin tapered noodle. Wrap the dubbed thread forward in touching turns. Too fat means you used too much; pull most off and try again.
- [ ] Move 5 - Whip finish. With a Matarelli tool, catch the hanging thread into a triangle behind the eye, rotate to lay three to five wraps over the loop toward the eye, slip the loop off, and pull tight. The wraps trap the tag underneath and lock, no knot to tie. Snip close, add a tiny drop of head cement on the wraps, avoiding the eye.

Tie those five until they're boring. A simple Woolly Bugger is Move 1, two pinch wraps (Move 2), the chenille and hackle wound forward (Move 3), and a whip finish (Move 5), no dubbing even needed, and it's one of the deadliest trout flies ever made.

## The Ten Mistakes Every Tyer Makes

The same handful of errors trip up every beginner. They're predictable, and once you know the fix you stop making them almost overnight. When a fly comes out looking off, the odds are it's one of these.

| Mistake                          | What's happening                                         | The fix                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Crowded eye                      | Head jammed against the eye, can't thread tippet         | Leave a no-build zone an eye-width-and-a-half behind the eye; finish everything behind it             |
| Thread breaking                  | Snap mid-wrap, materials spring loose                    | Ease off, or use heavier thread for force. Check the bobbin tube for a burr. Mind the hook point      |
| Everything spins to the far side | Tail or wing rolls under the shank                       | A pinch-wrap problem: pin it on top, pull STRAIGHT DOWN, not around                                   |
| Too much material                | Bumblebee bodies, bottle-brush hackle                    | Less, always less. Match-head of dubbing, three turns of hackle, sparse tail. Sparse fishes better    |
| Bad proportions                  | Parts wrong-sized relative to each other                 | Tail about a shank length, body two-thirds, hackle 1.5-2 gaps. Keep a proportion figure at the bench  |
| Hackle wound wrong               | Fibers collapse flat, won't float                        | Keep the feather ON EDGE; strip the webby base; use stiff rooster, not soft hen                       |
| Deer hair won't behave           | Won't flare or pack                                      | Strong 3/0 thread, clean out the underfur, two loose wraps then pull down HARD, pack each bunch tight |
| The fly falls apart              | Unravels after two fish                                  | Whip finish and cement; counter-wound wire rib on fragile bodies; a few extra wraps at tie-ins        |
| Lumpy bodies                     | Uneven, bumpy instead of tapered                         | Build a smooth underbody: trim butts at an angle, cover with flat thread before you dub               |
| Fighting your setup              | "I can't tie" that's really bad light or a slipping vise | Fix the bench first: good light over the shoulder, a vise that grips, sharp scissors, pale background |

The real fix under all of them is reps. The tenth Adams beats the first; the fiftieth beats the tenth. Tie in batches of six and watch each one improve. And fish your ugly flies, because a crowded-eye, overdressed, lumpy-bodied fly still catches trout, and a fish eating your worst early fly is the best confidence you'll ever get.

That's the bench pack. Keep it open at the vise, tie the five moves until they're boring, then tie a box of the ten patterns for your water. When you're ready to go deeper on any fly, the full step-by-step and the 50-plus recipes are waiting in the book.

- Cal Hendricks