Blue Ridge NC Trout Unlimited

October 2026 Newsletter

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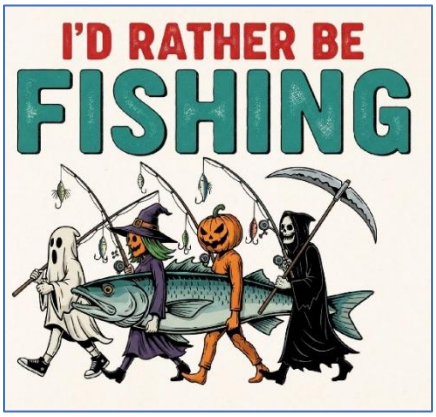


The summer is over when much of the best fishing is in the high mountain streams for wild trout. October normally begins the delayed harvest season when most of us come down to the lower streams to fish for stocked trout. Stocked trout fresh out of the hatcheries have lived a very different lifestyle than wild trout and fishing for them can require some different techniques. We will dedicate the newsletter this month to fishing for stocked fish.

Stocking has been drastically reduced this fall by the Bobby N. Setzer hatchery renovation and the shortage of purchased fish. And just recently it was announced that there will be no stocking at all in October due to the hot summer and drought. For details see article below, so unfortunately, you'll have to remember what we teach you this month until stocking takes place in November.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BRTU is happy to welcome the **Wake Forest University 5 Rivers Trout Unlimited Club** to Winston-Salem! Founded by Luke Smelzer and Colin McGinley, the club already has an impressive 45 members.

Way to go, Luke and Colin! We look forward to working with you and your team to promote fly fishing, conservation, and a love of the outdoors among the next generation of anglers.

Our chapter board members have been working hard to find and bring you a lot of opportunities to be involved this fall.

- Yadkoberfest-October 11
- Ararat River Stream Cleanup-October 17
- October Chapter Meeting-October 20
- Balsam Lodge Trip-October 23-26
- November Chapter Meeting-November 17
- Chili Cookoff-December 17th

We are in special need for more people to sign up for the Ararat Stream Cleanup. See the details and signup for these events below in the events section and continue to check our Facebook page at BRTU Facebook and the monthly newsletter for more added events. We hope to see you at all of them.

Mark Anderson is now serving as the **BRTU Temperature Monitoring Project Manager**. Thank you, Mark, for taking on this important role!

Retrieval of the temperature-monitoring data has been pushed back to December. We look forward to sharing more information as the project progresses.

All **Trout in the Classroom** schools have received their eggs! A big thank-you to everyone who helped obtain the eggs and deliver them to the schools. Your time and effort help make this important educational program possible.

The planned trout release dates for **2027** are **April 12, 14, and 20**. Thank you to all our volunteers who help students learn about trout, stream ecosystems, and the importance of conservation.

Thank you to all our members and volunteers who continue to support BRTU through conservation projects, educational programs, chapter activities, and time spent on the water. Your involvement makes a difference, and we look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events!

Tight lines, Fred Frank

OCTOBER MEETING

WHEN: October 20th, 6:30 PM
WHERE: Little Richards BBQ
109 S. Stratford Rd, Winston-Salem
WHAT: Our guest speaker will be **Jonathan Neyman of The Fly Box**, located in Bristol, Tennessee. Jonathan will discuss the Holston River and fly-fishing trips to Chilean Patagonia. We look forward to an informative and exciting presentation!

BRTU LOGO GEAR

Our new **BRTU logo apparel** is now available on our website and at chapter meetings. Items include:

- Gray and salmon long-sleeve hooded flyfishing shirts **$40**
- BRTU hats — **$25**
- Logo gaiters (tan or green/blue) — **$15**

You are receiving this newsletter either as a member or prospective member of the Blue Ridge Chapter of Trout Unlimited. If you do not wish to receive this newsletter, please respond by email to BRNCNewsletter@gmail.com and let us know.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Weekly Fly-Tying Classes every Wednesday at the South Fork Community Center (4401 Country Club Rd, Winston-Salem): 9 AM – 12 PM & 6 PM – 8 PM Instruction by Master Fly-Tyer Rusty Berrier. Come learn to tie your favorite patterns!

Yadkin Riverkeepers' Yadktober Fest – October 11 Join us on **October 11 from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.** at Old Nick Williams Distillery for Yadkin Riverkeepers' Yadktober Fest! Yadktober Fest — Yadkin Riverkeeper BRTU will be there as a vendor, introducing visitors to Trout Unlimited and our local chapter. Stop by, say hello, and help us spread the word about our organization and its conservation efforts.

Fall Alarka Outing, October 15th – 18th, Rocky River TU has an open invitation for you to attend their fall outing. For details and to sign up: Sign Up

Balsam Fly Fishing Trip, October 23rd–26th. Balsam is currently fully booked.

Ararat River Cleanup, October 17th. Please meet at H.B. Rowe Environmental Park at **9:00 a.m.** We will work until noon, followed by lunch provided by BRTU. BRTU will supply trash bags and grabbers. Participants should bring their own waders and gloves.

SignUp

Note: If your organization has an upcoming event and would like it in the newsletter, send it to HkyNCTU@gmail.org.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"My entire budget is blown because a couple bluegill bit my worm many years ago." ……..unknown

Honoring a Life of Generosity

This year's gathering will be held in honor of Bob Nanney and his lifelong legacy of generosity within the fly-fishing and fly-tying community.

Throughout his life, Bob taught and mentored countless fly fishers and fly tyers, freely sharing his knowledge, patience and enthusiasm. He also generously donated his time and talents to the Fly Fishing Museum of the Southern Appalachians in Bryson City, North Carolina.

The gathering will celebrate Bob in a way that reflects the spirit of his life: by bringing people together, passing along knowledge and using fly fishing to help others.

At the heart of the event is Tie for a Cause, an effort that collects donated flies for organizations supported by the Maggie Valley Fly Shop and the Southern Fly Tyers Guild. Participating tyers may choose the patterns they would most enjoy creating and donating. Every fly collected will be passed along to organizations that use fly fishing and fly tying to make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

NCWRC FLY FISHING CLASSES

10/21/26 Learn to Fly-fish: Equipment,10:00am - 12:00pm (Hendersonville)
10/21/26 Learn to Fly-fish: Casting ,1:00pm - 3:00pm (Hendersonville)
10/24/26 Learn to Fly-fish: Equipment, 9:00am - 12:00pm (Marion)
10/24/26 Learn to Fly-fish: Casting, 1:00pm - 4:00pm (Marion)
10/27/26 Learn to Fly-fish: Casting, 3:30pm - 6:30pm (Mills River)

DELAYED HARVEST TROUT SEASON BEGINS OCTOBER 1ST

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) will implement Delayed Harvest Trout Waters regulations on 33 trout waters beginning Oct. 1.

General Public Mountain Trout Water Rules

Fishing in Public Mountain Trout Waters

- Fishing is limited to hook and line only.
- An **artificial lure** is defined as a fishing lure that neither contains nor has been treated with any substance that attracts fish by the sense of taste or smell.
- An **artificial fly** is defined as one single hook dressed with feathers, hair, thread, tinsel, rubber, or any similar material to which no additional hook, spinner, spoon or similar device is added.
- **Natural bait** is defined as any living or dead organism (plant or animal), or parts thereof, or prepared substances designed to attract fish by the sense of taste or smell.
- A **single hook** is defined as a fish hook with only one point.
- It is unlawful to take fish bait or bait fish from Public Mountain Trout Waters.
- It is unlawful to possess natural bait while fishing Wild Trout and Catch and Release waters, and while fishing Delayed Harvest waters when Delayed Harvest rules are in effect between October 1 and the first Saturday in June.

- Dropper flies may be used when fishing any Public Mountain Trout Waters.

Additional Delayed Harvest Trout Waters Regulations

October 1 to one-half hour after sunset on the Friday before the first Saturday in June

- No trout may be harvested or possessed
- Only artificial lures having one single hook may be used
- No fishing allowed at all between one-half hour after sunset on the Friday before the first Saturday in June to 6 a.m. on the first Saturday in June

At 6 a.m. on the first Saturday in June until 12 p.m. that same day

- Only youth under the age of 18 may fish
- No bait restrictions
- No minimum length limit
- Seven (7) trout per day creel limit

From 12 p.m. on the first Saturday in June until September 30

- Waters are open for all anglers
- No bait restrictions
- No minimum length limit
- Seven (7) trout per day creel limit

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

Environmental Impacts Cause Wildlife Agency to Adjust Fall 2026 Mountain Trout Stockings

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) will wait until November to stock Delayed Harvest Trout Waters. Impacts from an unusually hot summer, coupled with the ongoing drought conditions and damage from Hurricane Helene, have caused lethally high-water temperatures flowing into the state's mountain trout hatcheries, thus reducing the number of available fish to stock. As water temperatures cool, Commission staff will be able to determine the number of trout available for stocking this fall and adjust the schedule as necessary.

"It's been a brutal summer for these cold-water fish," said NCWRC's State Fish Production Supervisor David Deaton. "The water temperatures coming into our hatchery have been at times, in the mid-to-high 70s. Trout cannot survive that temperature. They get stressed, become susceptible to disease and many die."

Staff estimate that since June they've lost around 70% of the fish at Armstrong State Fish Hatchery, which were being grown to catchable size for the upcoming Delayed Harvest trout stocking season.

Armstrong is currently the primary NCWRC state hatchery producing trout since the late-2025 closure of the Bobby N. Setzer State Fish Hatchery for major renovations. Prior to renovations beginning, NCWRC announced that only 35% of the usual number of trout would be available for stocking until the project was completed.

"That number was based on ideal conditions, and it's been anything BUT ideal," said Deaton.

In 2024, Armstrong sustained major damage from Hurricane Helene. Landslides caused the creeks that supply water to the hatchery to become wider and shallower and destroyed the tree canopies that provided shade, all of which contributed to increased water temperatures in the creeks that supply water to Armstrong.

"We knew we'd have heat issues with Helene taking away shade and reducing water depths," said Deaton. "Then we were hit with a tough heatwave during a severe drought this summer that continues to impact our hatchery today. Every effort we have made to keep our stocking numbers up has been impacted by these unforeseen environmental factors."

NCWRC supplemented the numbers of trout stocked during the spring stocking season with fish purchased from private hatcheries. However, efforts to buy additional privately grown fish for this fall to offset this summer's losses at Armstrong have proven unsuccessful.

"Most of the trout grown at private hatcheries had already been spoken for, and many of those hatcheries are also losing fish to the same environmental factors that we are dealing with," said Deaton.

Deaton does not know how many fish will be stocked in November yet, as the heat continues to impact the remaining fish at Armstrong and staff won't be able to conduct a census of the hatchery's remaining trout until sometime in October.

"November will be a better time to stock, since the water will be cooler, and it will be less stressful on the fish. It will also allow the fish we have to grow a little bigger. While we're confident that enough fish remain at Armstrong to conduct the November stocking, we won't know how subsequent stockings might be affected until the population inventory is completed."

Setzer remains on track to reopen at the end of 2027 with enhancements to improve water quality, lower temperatures and utilize a more efficient use of water. Additionally, efforts to mitigate watershed damage upstream of Armstrong hatchery are underway through the NCWRC's new Hurricane Helene Restoration Division.

"We recognize the importance of trout fishing to our anglers as well as the economy of western North Carolina," said Mountain Fisheries Supervisor Kinnon Hodges. "We appreciate everyone's patience with the interruptions that are occurring to our stockings as we work towards making our cold-

water hatcheries more resilient to climate impacts so that future generations of anglers can continue to enjoy the sport of trout fishing."

Under Delayed Harvest Trout Waters regulations, only catch-and-release fishing for trout is permissible from program waters between Oct. 1, 2026, and June 5, 2027. No natural bait may be possessed, and anglers can fish only with artificial lures with one single hook. An artificial lure is defined as a fishing lure that neither contains nor has been treated with any substance that attracts fish by the sense of taste or smell.

Under normal circumstances, NCWRC staff stock Delayed Harvest Trout Waters from fall through spring with high densities of trout to increase anglers' chances of catching trout. Delayed Harvest Trout Waters, posted with diamond-shaped, black-and-white signs, are popular fishing destinations for anglers who enjoy catch-and-release trout fishing.

Anglers should be aware that stocking locations along streams may be different than in the past due to hurricane damage impacting stocking and angler access.

For more information on trout fishing and stocking, visit ncwildlife.gov/trout.

Follow the progress of the Setzer renovation, at ncwildlife.gov/setzer.

Read updates on the 10-year Hurricane Helene wildlife habitat restoration plan.

MIKEKOMARA14

HOW TO FLY FISH FOR STOCKED TROUT

Every year across the U.S. (and much of the world), millions of trout are stocked into rivers, streams, and lakes by government agencies and private landowners. These fish, commonly referred to as "stockers", are raised in hatcheries from eggs to stocking size.

While they are still trout, they often have different genetics and a vastly different life history than their wild or native counterparts. Because of that, they behave differently, and require a different approach to consistently target and catch on the fly.

Types of Stocked Trout

There are two main types of stocked trout: fingerlings and adult stockers. Fingerlings are typically four to six inches long and around six months old. These fish are released into fisheries where they are expected to survive, hold over year after year, and grow. By the time they reach a catchable size, they tend to behave much more like wild fish because they have learned the river and how to feed naturally.

Adult stockers are usually one to three years old and measure between eight and sixteen inches when released. These are the fish most anglers are targeting, and they will be the focus of this article. They can be Brook Trout, Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, or Cutthroat Trout. While there are some differences in behavior between species, the same general techniques will work for all of them.

A "brood stock" rainbow trout about 21 inches long. These fish are utilized to produce eggs and periodically released into the rivers later in life when they are much larger than the average stocked fish.

The longer a stocked trout remains in a river, the more naturally it behaves. Some fish adapt quickly, while others take more time. After spending a full season in the river, a stocked trout is often referred to as a holdover. These fish can begin to behave very similarly to wild trout, especially if they survive multiple seasons.

The Stocked Trout Paradox

Stocked trout are often considered easy or unintelligent compared to wild fish. That may be true when they are first introduced to the river, but it can change quickly. They lack the years of experience that wild trout rely on to make consistent, survival-driven decisions. Because of that, their behavior can be unpredictable. They can be erratic, easily spooked, and at times surprisingly difficult to figure out.

When they get pressured or uncomfortable due to conditions, they can get extremely tough. I've fished some wild trout waters considered to be the hardest in the world, and have local stocked rivers that get more difficult by the end of the season.

Where to Find Stocked Trout

Stocked trout are generally easy to find. They are most often released at easy access points such as bridges, boat ramps, and areas near parking. These locations are convenient for both stocking trucks and anglers. Some rivers are float stocked, where crews distribute fish downstream by boat or raft to reach less accessible water. Even then, fish are usually released into larger, easy-to-fish pools.

Stockers tend to stay close to where they are released, at least initially. They gravitate toward water that resembles the hatchery raceways they came from. Look for inside bends, pools, large pockets, glides, soft bank water next to heavier current, and deeper runs near access points. Because they are used to living in tight quarters, they often pod up. If you find one fish, there are usually more nearby. They also relate to structure that mimics raceway walls, such as straight banks, flat ledges, or hard corners.

Deep, slow areas near structure like the one pictured here are prime areas to find stocked fish. Even better, it is near a popular access and in an easy to stock location

As they acclimate to the river, they begin to spread out and take on more typical trout holding positions, though they still favor larger, deeper water. With increased angling pressure, they disperse even further. This is when they often move out of obvious pools and runs and into riffles and pocket water.

After a few weeks of seeing constant pressure, stocked trout begin to seek out quieter, less obvious areas. At this stage, it pays to fish water that most anglers overlook. Unusual or less "ideal" holding water like back channels or skinny riffles can become productive simply because the fish are trying to avoid being harassed.

Stocked Trout Flies

Stocked trout can be either the least discerning fish in the river or incredibly picky. When they are freshly stocked, they are driven by curiosity. They are suddenly in a completely foreign

environment without the only food they have ever known, hatchery pellets. They tend to test things with their mouths to see what's edible and are attracted to a wide range of offerings. "Junk" flies like mops, eggs, and worms that catch the eye and look like they contain a bunch of calories are hard to beat for fresh fish.

They also begin to recognize natural food sources fairly quickly, so more imitative patterns can work right away. Size 16 pheasant tails and Walt's worms are reliable options for fish that are not responding to junk flies. Stonefly patterns such as a Pat's Rubber Legs are also excellent for bridging the gap between natural and attractor styles. They offer size and movement without being as gaudy as something like a mop.

After a few weeks, and after seeing constant pressure from anglers, stocked trout often become more selective. At that point, matching the size and profile of natural food sources becomes increasingly important. Even then, they rarely lose their curiosity entirely, and brighter or more attention-grabbing flies will continue to produce at least a portion of the fish.

In general, stocked trout are more aggressive than wild fish and are more willing to chase a moving target. Streamer fishing is an excellent way to locate fish in featureless water and to trigger reactions from fish holding in pods. The added movement can convince fish to eat when they would otherwise ignore a nymph or attractor pattern. Small Woolly Bugger patterns in olive, white, or black, typically in sizes 10 to 14, are consistent producers. Tying them with a hot orange or chartreuse bead can help draw additional attention.

Jig streamers, like the one this angler is tying on or the ones on his fly patch are great options for stocked fish

Stocked Trout Tactics

There are a million and one ways to catch stocked trout, but at the end of the day, it's best to keep things simple. Euro nymphing or jig streamer fishing will usually be the most productive approaches, though indicator nymphing can also be very effective.

When fish are freshly stocked, they're much more forgiving. You don't need a perfectly drag-free drift to catch them. However, after they've seen a lot of sloppy presentations, and felt a few hooks, they quickly become wary of even slight drag.

The most important factor is getting your flies in front of fish, not just in the right location, but at the right depth. Freshly stocked trout tend to pod up and hold in the lower third to middle of the water column. Fishing heavy flies right on the bottom will catch some fish, but it can also put your fly below much of the pod. Adjust your depth constantly to keep your flies in front of as many fish as possible.

When covering water, it's best to move more quickly than you would for wild trout. Fresh stockers (within the first month) will either be there or they won't. Fish efficiently until you find one, then slow down and start working the area more thoroughly. Because they pod up, finding one fish usually means there are more nearby.

Once you locate fish, cycling through a mix of classic "junk flies" and a few natural patterns is key to catching as many fish as possible. Each fish has its own personality- while many may prefer a mop or an egg, others might only respond to a worm or a more natural imitation. Stocked trout also tend to lack the caution of wild fish, so if you miss one on a fly, it will often come back and eat something different.

It's important to remember that freshly stocked trout operate more on curiosity than selectivity. Because of that, fly changes should be drastic. Switching from a pheasant tail to a perdigon often won't make much difference. Instead, change profile, color, or size in a meaningful way, like going from a pheasant tail to a stonefly or a worm.

The primary adjustments when targeting stocked fish are location, depth, and fly selection. If you're getting a decent drift, dialing in those three variables will lead to consistent success. While there are times to get technical, it's usually better not to overcomplicate things.

If all else fails, try adding movement to your presentation. Subtle jigging, lifting, swinging, or even slight pulls can trigger otherwise inactive fish to eat.

As stocked trout spend more time in the river, they become increasingly selective. They never completely lose their hatchery tendencies, but they can become surprisingly difficult to catch. There are too many variables to cover every situation, but one rule always applies: never underestimate a stocker.

Final Thoughts

Stocked trout are often overlooked or written off as easy fish, but that mindset will cost you opportunities. At times they can be incredibly cooperative, but they can also become just as frustrating as any wild trout once they've been pressured and forced to adapt. The anglers who consistently do well are the ones who recognize how quickly these fish change and adjust their approach accordingly.

The biggest mistake you can make is overcomplicating things early, or refusing to simplify when the situation calls for it. Fresh fish reward efficiency. Cover water, vary your depth, and rotate through bold, distinct fly choices until you find what works. As those same fish settle in and begin to see pressure, the advantage shifts to anglers who slow down, refine their presentations, and start thinking more like they would when targeting wild trout.

If there's one constant, it's that stocked trout are driven as much by curiosity as they are by instinct. That unpredictability is what makes them both fun and challenging. Some days they will eat anything that passes in front of them, and other days they will refuse everything you throw. Being willing to experiment with location, depth, fly selection, and presentation will always put you in the best position to succeed.

At the end of the day, stocked trout are still trout. The more time they spend in the river, the more they behave like the fish we all enjoy chasing. If you approach them with an open mind and adjust as conditions change, you can get the best of both worlds: high catch rates and legitimately challenging fishing.

Tight Lines, Mike Komara

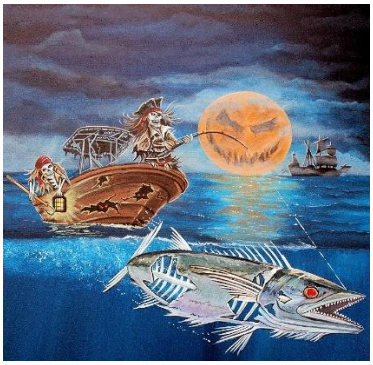
RIVERGIRL FISHING COMPANY-TODD, NC

Have you heard of the RiverGirl Fishing Company on the New River in Todd? When they became very active in restoring the river after the devastating floods from Hurricane Helene, they started getting a great deal of press. The company was founded by biologist Kelly McCoy. They provide fly fishing guiding, rent kayaks, and tubes on the river and also do biking and ecotours. But that aside they have also become very musical.

Recently they have begun producing songs related to the river and videos to go along with the music. These are available on YouTube. If you love bluegrass and country music and love being on the river you will love these songs. Just visit YouTube and search for "RiverGirl" and a lot of songs will appear for you to listen to and watch.

My favorite among their list is *The River Wakes First*, if you flyfish you'll also love *The Pink Wooly Bugger*. You can purchase and download that full album at Gumroad for $7. In addition they have produced two other albums: *Listening to Spring* and *Listening to Summer*. You can buy these on Amazon. It appears they might also bring out albums about autumn, but I'm not sure if they will include winter.(and after I wrote this, *Listening to Fall* came out!)

So if you have a love for flyfishing, mountain rivers, and the Appalachian mountains, bring up the *RiverGirl Music Series* on YouTube and watch the videos. You'll be absorbed by both the music and the videos.



ADVICE FROM THE VISE

Finally getting to write this without the AC or the heater running in the shop. Now the water can begin to cool down and by the end of the month, we will see some DH stocking begin. It's been a rough summer for the trout.

This month's fly is a simple pattern that I consider a guide pattern. That means quick to tie a dozen that puts fish in the net. My fall and winter boxes are full of these and apart from changing colors, it will take fish all season long.

I learned this pattern fishing on the River Gade in England with my old friend and fly-tying mentor, John Batchelor. He would tie several up in assorted colors, and we would walk down a path to the river in the evening to see which colors worked the best. At streamside he would ask which one "did I fancy". The pattern never had a name, it was just the utility fly of the day. I have called it Batche's Fancy for years, recalling that fond memory. Like many fly patterns, this is one that can have a thousand tweaks to the 3 base components: thread, body and hackle. For this version, I'm keeping it on the darker end of the spectrum with black thread, variegated olive body and partridge hackle.

The thread matters because it will be used to form a head; the body is wrapped with wool yarn (in any color you fancy). For the fall and winter- I prefer a more natural color range. Hackle can also vary. Hen saddle, or any game bird- partridge on these, but grouse, woodcock, pheasant or quail all lend their unique patterns to your wet fly.

The original pattern was just plain old wool sweater yarn. I started using SemperFli's product called Dirty Bug Yarn. It has a mottled buggy look. I think the wool fibers that keep the fly from hitting rock bottom and staying in the feeding column, especially at the end of the drift as it rises up and spurs the take. It comes in a pretty broad selection of colors. The hook is a standard wet/nymph-these are Saluda Beads in #14. #14 is my go-to as a searcher, #16 or #12 work just fine as well.

Dress the hook to the bend to ensure a solid foundation, return the thread to the head, pinch wrap the yarn in just behind the eye and take thread wraps to the bend, and then back to - just a tad- behind the eye.

Take touching turns of the wool to the thread and secure the wool; trim the tag and tidy the head.

To prepare the hackle, take two closely sized feathers, and strip the fuzz out of the stems and marry them up. I tie these in by the tips, so use your hackle pliers to grip the tip of the stem and stroke the fibers back to form a triangle shape that will be the tie in point.

Pinch wrap the hackle tips in and trim out the tag end. Wrap the hackle, stroking the fibers rearward as you wrap. Don't worry if you have some wild fibers, they will get fixed when wrapping the head. Secure in the hackle and trim the tags and make some tidying wraps to sweep the hackle back.

Take several thread wraps to form a head and whip finish. I like a drop of head cement, varnish or UV resin to give it a neat appearance, and maybe a little shine. While not a specific imitator, they have great pulse motion from the hackle just look like food. These can be fished on the swing- alone or in tandem, above a heavier point nymph, or as a dropper off a dry. Spin some of these up for your box this fall and winter season. Some of these in your choice of colors, may just be all you need for an exceptional day.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at Jacobsforkflytying@gmail.com with questions or to just talk tying. Please follow along on Instagram check out some current ties @ Jacobs Fork Fly Tying.

Dave Everhart

FLY FISHING TIPS FOR STOCKED TROUT

By Louis Cahill

Fly fishing tips for stocked trout. Photo By: Louis Cahill

MY FIRST MEMORY OF BRINGING A TROUT TO HAND WITH A FLY ROD TOOK PLACE BACK IN THE SPRING OF 1990.

It was on a seasonal trout stream, located 45 minutes north of Atlanta, GA. It was a far cry from a trophy trout at 10-inches, but that freshly stocked rainbow trout, touched my eleven year old fishing soul to the core. I'll never forget the excitement I felt watching that stocker chase down and eat my olive woolly bugger at my feet. It felt really good for a change, not relying on that plastic blue can of worms to get the job done. From that day forward, I never looked back, and I've moved on to become a respectable trout guide in my area and I've fly fished for trout all over the world.

A lot of fly fisherman would laugh at me if I brought that fishing memory up in conversation. Many wouldn't be able to look past the fact that I was fly fishing for stocked trout that weren't naturally born in a stream or river. If you happen to be reading this post and you're one of those fly anglers that I'm referring to, just remember that we aren't all blessed to have easy access to wild trout. For many of us, wild trout populations are so low (because of poor conservation and land management), it's not even feasible for us to strategically target them, and if it wasn't for stocked trout, we'd have no trout at all. If you're fortunate to be blessed with wild trout populations where you live, don't forget how that special that is, and please don't make fun or belittle others who take pride in catching stocked trout. You just make yourself look ungrateful and worthy of having wild trout.

Before I get into my fly fishing tips for stocked trout, I'd like to take a moment to mention a couple of reasons I feel stocked fisheries can be good for the sport. For one, they're a great place to introduce kids and newcomers to fly fishing for trout. Timed correctly, an angler with zero experience can have great success catching trout. Secondly, put and take trout waters provide great locations for anglers who like to harvest trout, to do so without having to illegally poach on sp ecial regulation or wild trout fisheries.

FLY FISHING TIPS FOR STOCKED TROUT

TIP 1: BIG FLIES AND BRIGHT FLIES ARE GENERALLY THE BEST CHOICE FOR FRESHLY STOCKED TROUT

If I knew I was going to be targeting freshly stocked trout (within a week or less of being stocked) I should really only need three types of patterns. The first would be a big Stimulator dry fly. Since stocked fish are conditioned to eating fish food pellets on the surface in the hatcheries, anglers can regularly take them on the surface with big dry flies. A dead drifted dry works really good, but sometimes, twitching or skating it at the end of the drift will also work. If the stocked trout aren't liking your dry flies, I'd next try stripping a black or olive woolly bugger. A large profiled fly with an erratic action will really get the attention of freshly stocked trout, so much in fact, that they often will swim several feet to eat a big fly like a woolly bugger. And if the woolly bugger isn't working I'd next rig up a tandem nymph rig and tie on a bright san juan worm or egg pattern off the back. Fluorescent colored flies are very hard for stocked trout to pass up, and they're usually the ticket until most of the stocked trout have been landed on them multiple times. Try these tactics above for freshly stocked trout.

TIP 2: DON'T MOVE, CHANGE YOUR FLIES FIRST

Don't always think the fun is over after a few fish. Many anglers move on to new water when all they need to do is change out their flies to something different to continue to catch stocked trout. This works really well when you've got crowded water and equally well when you've got kids that aren't very mobile.

TIP 3: SEARCH OUT THE SLOWER MOVING WATER LIKE POOLS AND DEEPER RUNS

When trout are first stocked they often search out slower moving water. I think most of the time this is because they're trying to match the slow moving water that they grew up in at the hatcheries and it's more comfortable to them. If you know the DNR recently stocked you should first check out the pools and deeper slow moving runs and bypass the fast moving pocket water. These places you should find pods of trout hanging out and easy to catch.

TIP 4: GO NATURAL WITH FLY CHOICE AFTER THE TROUT HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR A WHILE

Eventually stocked trout will get conditioned to seeing those big woolly buggers and bright attractor nymphs, and you'll find it much harder to get them to eat them. When that happens, anglers should start fishing fly patterns that are more natural looking and less gaudy and flashy. This is the time that soft-hackles and your traditional nymph patterns (prince nymph, hares ear nymph and pheasant-tail nymphs) really shine. I often will tie on a fast sinking copper john and drop one of the traditional nymphs off the back.

TIP 5: HIT THE POCKET WATER AND RIFFLES

The longer the stocked trout have been in the stream or river, the more they will start to spread out and move around. This is when I'll leave the big pools and runs for other anglers and focus my attention fly fishing the pocket water and seams of riffles. You'll find the trout here less pressured, easier to catch and you should also be able to find some water to yourself.

TIP 6: SWING YOUR FLIES

If you're on the water and you can't get the stocked trout to eat your dead drifted flies, try repositioning yourself so you can swing your fly patterns in front of them towards the end of your drift. Sometimes, this can be the most effective way to catch stocked trout that have been in the water for a while.

TIP 7: GO TINY AND DOWNSIZE YOUR TIPPET

Over the years, I've witnessed and fly fished to stocked trout that were unbelievably difficult to catch. Some of these stocked streams get pounded daily with anglers, and eventually the trout get super spooky and selective. When I see this on the water, it makes me want to round up all those stocked trout haters that think all stockers are a joke to catch and watch each one of them get their egos checked. If you're going to be fly fishing for stocked trout late in the season after they've had lots of education, you should be ready to downsize your tippet, micro-nymph, and fish tiny dry flies if you want to consistently catch trout. Yes, I'm talking about 6x-7X tippet and fly patterns down to size 24.

That's some of my tips for fly fishing to stocked trout. Please drop me a comment if you have any to add.

Keep it Reel,

Kent Klewein

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9 FLIES EVERY ANGLER NEEDS FOR STOCKED TROUT

Written by Joshua in Fishing Advice

We all dream of fly fishing for big, wild trout from beautiful mountain streams but the reality is that most of us live closer to lakes and rivers stocked with hatchery raised trout.

Unlike my fellow fly fishing purists, I have no problem with the idea of catching stocked trout from my local lakes. It is a great way to get in some fly fishing practice and stocked trout fight every bit as hard as their wild cousins. Stocked trout also provide the perfect opportunity for getting kids interested in fly fishing.

From opening day until the end of the season, you need the right flies that stocked trout love. Here is our list of the most reliable flies for stocked trout. Some work best for freshly stocked trout and others can fool even the most wary survivors that escape the average angler.

The 9 best flies for stocked trout:

- **Crystal Woolly Bugger**
- **Roe Egg**
- **San Juan Worm**
- **Copper John**
- **Pheasant-tail Nymph**
- **Hare's Ear Nymph**
- **Soft Hackle**
- **Stimulator**
- **Elk Hair Caddis**

1. Crystal Woolly Bugger

There isn't much a newly stocked trout won't eat. In the first week after stocking, it's all about bright flashy colors. The crystal woolly bugger fits the bill and for many it's their go-to fly.

The large profile streamer combined with a tease of flash is hard to resist and hungry trout will chase it far and hit it hard. Colors like black, white and olive are my favorites. Go with a size 6 to 10.

When you need to fish deeper, weighted bead-head woolly buggers sink fast and generate super erratic movements that drive fish crazy. They are also a great option for trolling behind a boat. Add a few twitches to spark any nearby trout's interest.

When the bite cools down on the woolly bugger, try a tandem nymph rig. Tie on an eye catching San Juan worm or Roe Egg 16-24 inches behind the bugger. Many fish end up on the dinner plate with this combo.

2. Roe Egg

Whether you fish it in tandem with a woolly bugger or by itself, the Roe Egg is killer on stocked trout. Swing it down a current seam or still fish it on a lake. Either way it will easily fool early season stocked trout.

Fluorescent colors stand out to these eager trout but one trick I've learned is to match what they were fed at the hatchery. Most hatchery trout eat brown pelletized food about the size and shape of a Roe Egg. All you need to do is color the egg with a brown marker and you'll have a perfect replica.

Most egg patterns are unweighted but jig head eggs are a great approach for covering the water column. Fish it on lakes with a stimulator dry fly as an indicator or drift it in streams through deeper runs.

Once the trout wise up to fishermen's tricks, bold patterns and bright colors are less effective. It's time to start thinking more natural and the next entry on the list is the perfect transition fly.

3. San Juan Worm

It's hard to argue against the fish catching power of the San Juan worm. Just about every water body has some species of worms that can be mimicked by this fly. You can tie it in any color and with all kinds of material. The versatility of the San Juan worm is its greatest strength.

You may be able to tell that I am a fan of this fly and so are the stocked fish I catch. In particular, trout stocked in streams find hot pink or bright red worms irresistible. As I mentioned earlier, you can tone down the colors to natural variations as time goes on and the fish smarten up.

The San Juan worm is the first fly I grab when hitting the water after a fresh spring rain. A flush of run-off stirs up stream side soil and triggers a feeding frenzy on tiny worms. Worm fly patterns nicely match what the trout are gorging on. Size down if the trout seem finicky.

4. Copper John

There is no denying the popularity of the Copper John. Maybe it's because the simple pattern is easy to tie and even easier to fish. However, more than likely, the success of the Copper John lies in its ability to mimic a broad range of insects under water.

Once stocked trout figure out how to evade the more flamboyant flies and obvious lures, it's time to break out a universal imitator like the Copper John. It has served me well drifted through fast runs and tailouts. Turbulence and current lend the fly enticing action that will catch a trout's eye.

They work equally well in lakes on a tandem nymph rig or without an indicator and retrieved ever so slowly. Size 14 and 16 are plenty small for most stocked trout but micro sized versions on ultra small tippet are the hot ticket when pressured fish get tight lipped.

5. Pheasant-Tail Nymph

The pheasant-tail nymph is definitely a runner up after the Copper John. Yet another universal imitator of aquatic insects, this fly belongs in every tackle box.

Both weighted and unweighted versions of the fly exist and all are tantalizing to stocked trout. Most anglers agree that the pheasant-tail nymph most closely mimics a mayfly larvae. For that reason, mid-spring trout fishing finds me casting this fly as the mayflies begin hatching by the tens of thousands.

I like size 14 and 16 hooks. Fish it as you would a Copper John. Unweighted versions ride more naturally in the water and are perfect for targeting trout holding tight to undercut banks in short ripple sections of streams. In lakes, cast it with a strike indicator or paired up with a large dry fly.

6. Hare's Ear Nymph

Fly tying manuals and fly fishing beginner guides always tout the hare's ear nymph as a top producing fly. If you're looking for a confidence fly for stocked trout, this is it. Experience has proven to me that this fly catches fish and I never hesitate to tie one on later in the season as stocked trout begin reverting to more natural food choices.

The hare's ear nymph is a great fly for a multitude of situations on both lakes and streams. You can match just abou▪ any hatch since it mimics caddis larvae, mayfly nymphs an scuds.

Fly fishing with a hare's ear nymph is easy and require very little skill. Size 14 serves me well and I fish it just th same as the pheasant-tail or copper john. There are also beac head versions that sink quickly when currents are fast or the fish are suspended in deeper water. Keep a good color range on hand. Light tans, orange and olive tones are all excellent.

7. Soft hackle

If you could only have one fly in your box, make it a soft hackle. This underrated fly is so easy to fish with and works in so many situations that it almost feels like cheating.

It was designed to imitate a variety of emerging insects and it is perfect for covering lots of water. Its soft hackle collar pulsates and twitches just right and trout can't leave it alone.

This simple fly pattern excels while stream fishing. Most fly fishermen avoid letting the current drag the fly unnaturally through the water. Fish soft hackles "on the swing" over tailouts and deep pockets.

On lakes, fish it like a streamer using short pulses near rising fish. It works like a charm.

8. Stimulator

No list of flies would be complete without mentioning a dry fly and the stimulator is a definite winner for freshly stocked trout. The trout are hungry and the stimulator is sure to attract their attention.

This "buggy" looking fly closely mimics a big stonefly or salmon fly. Use the stimulator to make a not-so-subtle splash on the water just as the clumsy real life counterparts would. You can usually rely on it to produce a few limits of gullible trout during the first few days after stocking.

When the trout wise up, use the stimulator as an attractor with a small nymph tied on the hook shank. This combo works wonders when there is significant fishing pressure early in the season. A stimulator in size 10 or 12 is suitable for most stocked trout.

9. Elk Hair Caddis

When the fish get wary and it's time to scale down your dry fly to match other insect hatches, look no further than the elk hair caddis. This super buoyant fly is one of the most well known dry flies and one of the easiest for beginners to fish with.

The pattern closely matches the wing profile of a caddis fly as it skitters along the surface of water. Trout eagerly rise to gulp it down. It is perfect for fishing in turbulent water where other dry flies are unable to stay afloat.

On lakes, go with smaller a smaller size 14 or 16 to mimic a variety of flying insects. When the trout are rising, make your cast and let it sit or give it a smooth pull to make it skitter along the surface. Then pause it and repeat. Nothing beats watching a trout slam an elk hair caddis on the surface.

Other words of wisdom for stocked trout

Stocked trout are easily pressured after the first week. Find out of the way spots like small coves and inlets further away from the main boat launch. Most anglers fish close to the launch and ignore the rest of the lake. You might see fewer fish but they may be more willing to eat what you have to offer.

- Don't hesitate to change out flies. Stocked trout see a lot of lures, bait and flies thrown their way. They get used to seeing similar looking bait and are more likely to strike something they have never seen. Mix it up when things slow down.
- Cover lots of water by trolling. Trolling with flies is probably not the best way to match the natural presentation of aquatic insects but it does allow you to put your fly in front of more fish. Streamers and tandem nymph rigs are great for trolling. Some flies are actually designed for trolling too. Pistol Pete's have small spinning propellers incorporated on a streamer style fly. Add a small split shot and you have yourself a top notch trolling set up.

Final thoughts

It won't cost much to have a collection of flies on hand. Flies cost anywhere from $1.50 to $3.00 each. However it won't take long for your flies to get beat up by toothy fish. A good day on the water may burn through several new flies.

Consider tying your own flies instead. Not only is it a fun activity to pass time in the off season, it can also save you a little money. Check out our comprehensive guide on **how to start tying flies** without breaking the bank.

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