

## A FLYBOX FOR THE WARMWATER POND

Millions of ponds dot the American landscape. Many are associated with agricultural needs on private property, but city water supply reservoirs, subdivision ponds, reclaimed strip mine pits, municipal, county, and state park ponds are widely available to the public. Very often these warmwater ponds offer excellent fishing opportunities to bank-bound, wading, and float-tubing anglers as well as those with light, portable boats. Usually, largemouth bass and bluegill are the dominant species in these small reservoirs, so with an eye toward flies that appeal to both, we'll assemble a practical and effective fly box and discuss the uses of each imitation. Recommending specific fly patterns for bluegill and bass is a bit like proclaiming an entertainer to be "the best." It's certain to offend everyone whose favorite is excluded. If celebrating autumn by stringing up a long rod and selecting a few flies for pond prospecting is your objective, read on.

Any fly selection should cover the water column efficiently from the surface to the bottom. Since both target species relate to structure primarily we must be able to fish our flies over, through, and beside weeds, moss, grass, brush piles, downed trees, standing timber, docks, and rocks. We need to carry each fly in a variety of sizes and colors to be prepared for changes in light penetration, prevailing weather conditions, water clarity, and fish preferences. With apologies to those whose favorite flies aren't included and with encouragement to substitute those that have already gained your confidence, here's the fly selection and use rationale for each that has produced the best pond results for us.



Poppers, sponge spiders, and diving frogs effectively address the surface portion of the water column. Since the action is most often visible to the angler these presentations stimulate the dry fly spirits of most fly fishers. Poppers made from deer hair, cork, balsa, or closed cell foam are designed to make an audible "pop" or gurgling sound when the fly line is stripped or the rod tip is moved laterally. The commotion attracts the attention of nearby gamefish and alerts them that some vulnerable prey is struggling on the surface.

Deer hair poppers sit in, rather than on, the surface and when activated make a gurgling sound that's often preferred by traditionalists. Light-colored poppers in white or chartreuse are most easily visible to the angler, but dark-colored ones work well early and late in the day. Poppers designed to attract bluegills should be tied in sizes 8 through 12. Those for largemouth bass can be hook sizes 8 through 2/0, while a size 6 might be a good choice for bass poppers in addition to appealing to jumbo bluegills. It's best to start with subtle activation of the popper. Try imparting a wiggling action followed by periods of inactivity. If this fails to attract hits, gradually increase the speed of the retrieve and intersperse gentle "plops" with rests that allow the rings around the fly to settle.

Closed-cell foam spiders utilizing small rubber legs, tied in smaller sizes (12 through 16), can be cast beside weedbeds and shallow brush piles to entice platter-sized bluegills into plucking the tasty-looking morsels from the surface film. White, yellow, and light green produce great results. Black-and-white banded legs offer the illusion of movement that can charm cautious bluegills.

Modified Dahlberg divers designed to imitate the action of miniature frogs are standard pond fare. These floater/divers are great fun to fish because the design of the clipped deer hair head enables the fly to dive a few inches under the surface when a strip is imparted, then float seductively back to the top when tension on the line is released. The fly appears to be making a desperate attempt to escape, then gives up the effort only to try again. Its vulnerable appearance is irresistible to the instincts of predatory largemouth bass.

Flies designed to swim through the mid-depths from just beneath the surface to just above the bottom include the popular, versatile bead-head Woolly Bugger, the Clouser Minnow, and Whit's Dragon Fly Nymph. They adequately imitate the critters that swim about underwater. They're easy to cast, and they offer opportunities to experiment with different retrieves.



The bead-head Woolly Bugger is effective in a wide variety of colors, weights, and sizes. We prefer size 8s that utilize bead heads in varying weights to appeal to largemouths and larger bluegills. Woolly Buggers comprised of white chenille bodies, palmered hackles, and marabou tails are especially effective in early spring. After the spawn, peacock herl bodies with brown palmered hackles, black marabou tails, and

gold bead heads generate consistent success. Palmered hackles can be soft and webby and sized to match the hooks or composed of dry fly-quality hackles and reduced a full hook size for a spikier appearance. Whether the bass and bluegills mistake woolly buggers for minnows, leeches, nymphs, or small crayfish may depend upon how and where they are fished. If the fly is retrieved in short strips along the edge of a weedline, it might be mistaken for a darting minnow, while a fly that is slowly retrieved to produce a steady, undulating motion could represent a small leech. If the fly is allowed to tumble through the branches of a deadfall, occasional short lifts of the rod tip to impart action imitates an aquatic insect.

Clouser Minnows can be weighted differently by adjusting the size of the barbell eyes. By tying in the eye slightly farther back along the hook shank than the original, the fly takes on a more realistic action. Yellow barbell eyes with black pupils and red thread to represent gills add to their effectiveness. Barbell eyes tied along the top of the hook shank cause the fly to ride hook-point up which helps keep it from hanging up too frequently. Tiemco 5262 hooks in size 8 are taken by bass and bigger bluegills. All white or chartreuse over white Clousers are productive as minnow imitators. Adding Easy-Shape Sparkle Body or epoxy to the head enhances the durability of the fly. When rocks, stumps or brush is the targeted structure, the tough materials help protect the bucktail head. If the water is very clear, sparsely tied flies are superior to the fully dressed flies that work best in stained water.

Dragonfly nymphs are common residents of fresh water. Some species burrow in sand bottoms, others occupy silted areas, while some cling to vegetation. These heavy-bodied nymphs are colored in many shades of olive, brown, and gray, and imitations for fly fishing ponds should be heavily weighted. Many different imitations can be found in pattern books, but our favorite is a recipe originated by Dave Whitlock. Tying the flies on size-8 TMC 5262 hooks enables both bass and bluegills to target this familiar stillwater resident.

Consideration should also be given to using flies with independent action so that they are attractive to bass and bluegills as they fall freely through the water column. Employing a vertical drop allows the fly to enter the fish's lair in a natural manner. While some flies have the action necessary for vertical-drop fishing, our own Bully's Bluegill Spider is a simple pattern created especially with this presentation in mind. Bully is tied on a Mustad 94840 hook in sizes 8 through 12. Five wraps of .020 lead wire (three in the back third of the hook shank) are covered with chenille. Four medium round rubber hackle "legs" tied in just behind the head wiggle seductively as the fly descends at a 45-degree angle hook bend first. Chartreuse, black, yellow, and olive are essential colors in our part of the world. Brown and olive are popular up north; chartreuse and hot pink perform well in the South. Short, erratic strips can be imparted when the fly has reached the desired depth.



Flies designed to maintain contact with the bottom can be especially effective for structure-hugging largemouths. Whitlock's Hare Worm (rabbit strip tail with wrapped strips around the hook's shank and around the barbell eyes) tied on a TMC 8089 wide gap size 6 hook utilizing a single-strand monofilament weed guard makes an action-packed fly for fishing in weeds and brush. Black, purple, chartreuse, blue, and red Hare Worms have all provided good results when matched to prevailing light penetration conditions. Bright sunlight and clear water demands reflective colors, such as chartreuse, blue or red, while black and purple tend to fare better under dark skies and stained water.

Ponds provide outstanding, even classic, fly-fishing opportunities within an easy drive of most long-rodgers. Fly fishers can be consistently successful by selecting flies designed for fishing over, near or in the pond's structure. In ponds with an abundance of weed growth or stickups, weedguards might be necessary. Be sure that your warmwater pond fly box has flies in a variety of colors and sizes to provide plenty of action in all seasons of the year.

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