

The Deadly Dozen

(The Classic Dry Fly Box)

by Tom Deschaine



In my travels around the country I've found some very interesting flies. Not only will you find the standards for the area but you'll always find some local patterns created by shops and tiers for the nearby waters. On a recent fishing trip a to New England a shop tier introduced me to the 'Red Ibis' and their own version of a 'Doodle Bug'. For the rest of my trip I became very dependant on these two great producers. A similar experience on the Yellowstone introduced me to another local pattern. It was a variation on the 'Orange Stimulator'. Being that Michigan is my home state the same is true here. I always carry a variety of local patterns when I'm on my favorite rivers.

None the less, I must admit that in all my travels there are consistencies you'll find if you start peeking into fly boxes. I've talked with fisherman from coast to coast, and visited hundreds of fly shops. No matter where I've gone I can pretty much count on seeing some classics that have stood the test of time. I dare say that if you were to carry only these twelve patterns with you, most fishing situations would be covered. Let's take a look at them.



Adams. Designed around 1920 by Leonard Halladay. Designed to represent any of the darker mayflies. It's the most popular and versatile all-purpose dry fly in the country. It comes in many varieties including the Parachute, the Downwing, the Female, etc. Most every fisherman I've ever met has either the Adams or a variation of the Adams in their dry fly box.

Light Cahill. Created in the 1880's by Dan Cahill of New York. Designed to imitate the family of insects known as the Stenonema. This fly is as popular and as versatile as the Adams. It too has many variations, Light, Dark, Parachute, Quill, etc. It's safe to say that this fly is found in most every dry fly box also.



Quill Gordon. Another great fly that needs no introduction. Created by Theodore Gordon, from New York in the 1890's. Originally called the Gordon Quill, this fly has become an American standard. No other fly best illustrates the beauty of the traditional Catskill tie.

The Light Hendrickson. This fly truly having earned it's place among the deadly dozen. Originated by Roy Steenron, a Catskill tier, in 1916. Generally used during the Ephemerella hatches, but imitates other insects as well.





Elk Hair Caddis. In all honesty, I don't know of any dry fly fisherman who will step into the water with out several of these in their fly box. A tremendous producer of trout in most every situation imaginable. Rapid water or still, the Elk Hair Caddis (or Deer Hair) is a great floater and a great catcher of fish. This comes to us from the vice of Al Troth. Al was from Pennsylvania and first tied the Elk Hair Caddis back in the 1950's. It can be tied in every conceivable color combination. It a very high floater that can be easily modified for any situation and it can easily be popped or twitched while fishing.

Royal Coachman. This universally recognized pattern was first popularized by Mary Orvis Marbury in her book, "*Favorite Flies and Their Histories*". It was first tied by John Haily, from New York around 1885. I can't think of a fly that has more variations and cousins. Whether it's the Bucktail, the Hairwing, the Parachute, the Trude or the Renegade version (just to name a few), we all carry several styles with us.



Black Gnat. We have no idea who first created this pattern. We do know that it's extremely old, probably originating in England. It's a very versatile fly that can be used anytime from late spring through to the end of the season. It's a popular fly to use during late afternoons or early evenings, or for that matter, anytime you see black flies on the water. The parachute style is also very popular. It's a very visible fly and a good producer. The first trout I ever caught was on a black gnat, with a red tail.

Blue Wing Olive. Another extremely popular pattern of unknown origin. It's so popular because of its color combination. It imitates a multitude of insects found throughout all of North America. There are several variations of this fly that are also very popular. Tied down to size #24. We've all caught our fair share of trout with this pattern.



March Brown. Better known as the American March Brown. This fly was first originated by Preston Jennings back in the 1920's or 30's. It's a great imitator of the Stenonema's. It's very popular with fisherman because it can be fished all day and even into early evening. It's a very striking pattern that is also tied in parachute and comparadun styles.

Joe's Hopper. Also known as the Michigan Hopper. Was first created by Art Winnie of Traverse City, Michigan. The fly was later popularized by Joe Brooks --- hence the name. Joe's Hopper and it's many close relatives are used coast to coast, all summer long. It's stood the test of time having come out of the vice over 50 years ago. I wouldn't be caught with out them during the summer months. Many fisherman have caught some really big browns on this pattern.





Brown Bivisible. This heavily hackled searching or attractor pattern was introduced to us by Edward Hewitt of New York in 1926. The Bivisible gets its name from the 'white face' hackle that's tied on to make the fly more visible. This fly floats well in rough pocket waters. Some variation include being tied with a tail, or you can trim the bottom of the hackle flatter so that the fly sits

lower in the water. The original color is brown but it's also tied in olive, badger, furnace, ginger and grizzly.

Griffith's Gnat. This little beauty was developed by George Griffith, one of the founding fathers of Trout Unlimited. This is a well established emerging midge pattern used across the country. It's a very visible pattern that's a good imitation for anything in the Order Diptera. Fished in sizes from 12-28, this little pattern will seldom let you down.



Well there you have it. Twelve of the greatest classic dry flies ever produced. Today we find a growing trend toward tying and fishing with 'synthetics'. Many of these new patterns are also tremendous producers. The synthetic materials have the ability of being readily available and at a cheap cost, while many of the old natural furs and feathers are becoming more costly and harder to find.

In my travels I find most fly shops with a adequate supply of most anything you want to fish with. New patterns are always being developed and in many cases they're replacing a lot of the older patterns that just can't compete with productivity on the stream. That's OK. But in most every fly shop I've been in, these twelve, the 'deadly dozen' still persist. For now our heritage is safe. Only time will tell if they will be worthy enough to remain on the shelves. As for me --- my fly box will always have them!

See you on the water!