



## Getting Started as a Tyer

By: Tom Deschaine

Where and how to get started always seems like a difficult decision for the beginner. You've got several options. Let's take some time to explore them, and see what's best suited for you. Most

of you will probably not want to spend a lot of money to begin with. I don't blame you. Making a large investment when you're trying out something new can be risky. I know that I'd be more than a little upset if I invested several hundred of dollars only to find out that I didn't enjoy it, received bad advice on what to purchase, or that I had no real talent in the area. So, let's look at some of your options in hopes of helping you to make the right decisions.

**Find a fly tyer to teach you.** Is there a friend you know? Someone who is already fly tying? Most tyers I know would love to get you started and would be more than flattered that you even thought to ask them. You will of coarse have to tie at their convenience and should probably supply the beer or the Manhattans. Be sure to offer him or her a couple of bucks to cover any materials that you'll be using. I personally don't accept any money from students --- by the same token, I don't expect them to fill their fly boxes at



my expense either. A good tutor will help you to learn the basic techniques required so that you'll be successful in your new endeavor. They'll give you good advise on materials, tools and suppliers.

Don't be in a hurry to learn everything all at once. Some techniques, even basic ones, take a great deal of time and practice and patients to learn. Your tutor may

have you tie the same pattern several times until you get it right. A good tutor will move you along at a acceptable pace based on your aptitude for your new found hobby. After several sessions you should slowly begin to purchase your own tools and materials based on the advice that your mentor gives you.

**Buy a kit.** This is how many people get started (probably most)! There's nothing wrong with this, especially if you don't know a friend to help you get started. On the plus side, you can work at your own pace with no pressure or embarrassment. Also, there is something special about learning a new skill completely on your own. It's a great adventure!

Which kit should I select? How much should I spend? Let's look at a few basic guidelines. First off, the beginner should select a kit that includes tools. Generally, the tools will be inexpensive and basic. That's all you need to start. A basic tool kit should include a vice, hackle gauge, hackle pliers, scissors, bobbin, bodkin (dubbing needle), hair stacker, dubbing wax and head cement. Some of the better kits will include such items as dubbing spinners, whip finishers and bobbin threaders. That's ok, but they just aren't really needed when you starting out. So don't waste your money on the expensive items to start.

Start off with a general kit. Use some common sense here. If you exclusively fish for bass and you're sure that's where your true love is then buy a 'bass kit'. If you live on the beach in Florida then buy a 'salt water' kit. However, if you're a typical fly fisherman and enjoy it all, pan fish, trout, bass, salmon, etc. then I suggest you start with a standard 'all purpose kit'. One gives you experience with dry flies, streamers, nymphs and terrestrials. The basic skills you will learn here will carry over to most any specialty flies that you may choose to tie in the future.



Most of the kits I've examined have an adequate manual. Generally the pictures and the instructions are good. The supplies they furnish will be just enough to give you a good feel for what you're doing. They will take you through the basic steps and get you off to a good start. If you choose this route you will want to purchase additional basic fly tying manuals and/or some instructional CD's as well. And, don't forget to check out internet. There's a wealth of free fly tying information out there.

A word of caution should you choose this route. Be careful what you buy! Many of the kits, especially the inexpensive ones are nothing but junk. The materials and tools are substandard and for the most part are cheap imports. Purchasing a kit of this type will definitely discourage your new interest. Inferior materials and tools make it difficult to tie an acceptable fly, even under the best of circumstances. I've examined many kits. Those under \$40 aren't worth the trouble. The \$40-\$150 range is what you're looking for. Only you can decide what your budget can afford. To start off, I really don't suggest you spend any more money than what I have recommended. After you have developed some basic skills then you can decide to purchase a more advanced kit, or strike out on your own as far as purchasing additional tools and materials.

**Take a class.** This is another option that you might explore. On the upside, you'll be in a class with people of the same skill level and generally all tools and materials are supplied to you. All you have to do is pay the 'one time' fee that covers everything. Most of these classes are designed for success. Starting with simple skills and progressing through to those skills demanding a little more sophistication. Your



beginners course will probably be between 1 to 5 sessions.

If you have the competitive personality for this kind of structured setting you'll do well. Personally, I've had bad experiences with the two classes I've taken. Now, I'm not coming from out of the darkness here --- I'm a retired teacher, with 32 years experience. It has been my experience that some of these classes place you

in a situation where you know little to nothing about the instructor. You are in a competitive situation because you really know nothing about the actual skill levels of the other class members. The by-standers, all teacher assistants, wearing fishing hats and vests and smoking pipes are intimidating to say the least.

You'll get your money's worth though. Many of these classes let you keep the tools and materials as you progress. This is all covered in the fee. It's nice each night to go home with new materials for the flies that you have just learned to tie. This gives you an opportunity to practice your newly acquired skills before the next session.

**The final decision is yours.** All the options I've presented are viable. Don't feel like you have to lock yourself into just one situation. When I first started, I used a combination of all three. I started with a \$40 kit. I knew a tyer friend who got me started with it, and with in a few months I was taking my first class.

At first, when you start to tie --- you should stay with the 'traditionals'. I know that many people will disagree with me, but let me try to explain. As a beginner you are trying to develop new skills. What better way to prove that you've mastered those skills, then to hold up a fly that you have tied --- and compare it to the picture in the book! Match the masters form, style, technique. Demonstrate that you can do a quill body, a parachute, a flared tail and tent wings. Prove to yourself that you can tie most any pattern that you can find the recipe for. It's the discipline of self accomplishment that you are seeking! After all, that *is* the reason that we take the trouble to write recipes in the first place. Once you've proven to yourself that you've mastered the basic skills, then you can venture out and develop your own fly patterns and techniques. Enjoy your new craft !