

The Small Fly Manifesto

Our Small Fly Manifesto aims to introduce you to one of the most productive fly fishing styles for the warmer summer months - with low flows an even lower water levels fly fishing can be tricky. Do not be put off by using small flies, often a small fly will succeed where a larger one will fail and spook fish.

The main reason most anglers shy away from using small flies is that they cannot see them when they are on the water. If you try anything this year, please give small flies a go, you will be pleasantly surprised!

Some rivers are not as full of nutrients as others, it's these rivers which tend to fish better using smaller flies, due in part to the fact the river cannot sustain the production of the larger species. In these rivers trout can still flourish, they just alter the way they feed. Instead of selectively taking insects as and when they please (as insects are in abundance on the more nutrient rich rivers), the trout in less rich rivers are opportunistic feeders. This is where the small, imitative fly is king.

- **Rods:** Fishing with small flies generally happens at close range, choose a rod you are comfortable with using very short casts – sometimes a softer rod is much more accurate and sensitive on short casts. Softer rods are also much better for playing fish on lighter tippets – something which most rod manufacturers don't explain, they are more than willing to tell you how far you can cast with one, but not how well it plays a fish! If you've never tried a glass rod, they have an ideal action for fishing small flies.
- **Reels:** For small flies you will generally be using lighter tackle (1wt to 4wt lines), so the reel will only really be used to hold the line and balance the rod. I prefer to play all of my fish off the reel (unless I'm on a Stillwater where the fish can be pretty feisty), due to this I use a click reel – with no drag, using the bend in the rod to protect the lighter tippets.
- **Fly Lines:** Floating is a given, but should you choose a 'double taper', 'weight forward' or 'triangle taper'? Read through any discussion forums and you will see pages of discussion on which fly line to use for 'small fly' fishing. In truth, any fly line will do so long as it gets the best out of the rod it's used on, but in my experience, here's what I choose based on the weather conditions:
 - Weight Forward: When it's really windy and you have to punch short casts into the wind.
 - Double Taper: When it's a calm day and you want a nice gentle presentation at a longer range.
 - Triangle Taper: A 'do-it-all' line for small flies – an ideal compromise of taper which is perfect for targeting fish in the low waters and low flows of summer.
- **Leader:** The standard formula for a tapered leader 60:20:20 – that's 60% heavier butt material, 20% stepped down slightly thinner material and 20% tippet. Usually, you have 2 choices for leaders:
 - Make Your Own: Take a look below for some leader configurations you can make yourself and experiment!
 - Buy a 'ready-made' knotless tapered leader: New ranges of Front Heavy Tapers (FHT) are now available which make ideal leaders for casting small flies.
 - However you decide to create your leader, the one thing above anything else which will increase your catch rate is the length! When fishing small flies, on low rivers you need to make your leader as long as you can possibly get away with. This is what has given rise to the new style Front-Heavy Tapered leaders in the longer lengths – 11ft to 16ft. It is not uncommon for hardly any fly line to be outside of the rod tip and just the leader is cast.



9ft: Standard

	Butt Section	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Length	27cm	110cm	110cm	27cm
Size	01X	1X	4X	6X

9ft: Ultra Light

	Butt Section	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5	Section 6	Section 7
Length	26cm	44cm	44cm	26cm	30cm	39cm	65cm
Size	03X	01X	0X	2X	3X	4X	6X

12ft: Standard

	Butt Section	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Length	37cm	146cm	146cm	37cm
Size	01X	1X	4X	6X

12ft: Delicate

	Butt Section	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5	Section 6	Section 7	Section 8
Length	26cm	52cm	52cm	52cm	31cm	31cm	46cm	77cm
Size	05X	03X	01X	0X	2X	4X	5X	6X

15ft: Standard

	Butt Section	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5
Length	152cm	151cm	30cm	91cm	30cm
Size	05X	01X	1X	4X	6X

15ft: Steep Taper

	Butt Section	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5
Length	213cm	30cm	91cm	91cm	30cm
Size	05X	0X	2X	4X	6X

- **Tippet:** Small flies generally require thin diameter tippets, therefore you will be using 7X, 8X or even 9X tippets. These will range in diameter from 0.1mm to 0.07mm – pretty thin and delicate! This is one of the reasons why a softer rod is a must, as the action of the rod will give the much needed protection to the tippet and allow you to land much larger fish on even the lightest of tippets. When dry fly fishing you really need a tippet which will float (but you also may want to sink the last few inches to the fly to make it less visible), in this case you would opt for a nylon (or copolymer) tippet material. I have a personal preference for either Varivas Master Spec or Orvis Super Strong Plus, tippet is a 'confidence thing' choose the one you have the most confidence in when knotted.
 - **TOP TIP:** When trying to thread your tippet to a small fly, try cutting the tippet at a 45-degree angle, it makes it a little easier to get the tippet into the eye of the hook.
- **Flies:** The most important part of the chain. - It is the one piece of tackle that the fish sees and makes their decision on to eat or not. The most important part of a fly is without doubt the hook, even more so when we are using very small hooks. It is important when choosing small flies to look at the gape of the hook (i.e., the distance between the hook point and the body of the hook), make sure that the tied fly still has plenty of room between the body and the hook point, if there is hardly any room between the body of the fly and the point it will make it very difficult to hook a fish. Generally, the hooks which are sized at 18 and smaller all are 'wide gape'.

Often, the reason small flies are dismissed by anglers is that they have trouble seeing them, there are a few remedies for this:

- For most dry fly angling it is not a necessity to actually see the fly, generally you will have a rough idea of where the fly is, if you see a rise, just lift into it – 9 times out of 10 it will be to your fly!
- If you do want to know where your fly is, either use a small fly with a sighter post, or use the 'Double Dry' technique, where you use a visible dry fly and then tie a smaller dry fly from the eye of the hook on a long dropper – just like the klink n dink method, but using 2 dry flies.

If you are struggling to tie tippet to really small flies, pre-tie the flies to long lengths of tippet at home, then when you're on the water all you need to do is attach the tippet to your leader.

I hope the above has given you a little insight into fishing with small flies and that you will give it a try this summer.