

# **Herts Branch Flydressers Guild Novices' Fly Tying Course**

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## *Welcome to the Herts Branch FDG Novices' Fly Tying Course.*

This foundation Course assumes no prior knowledge of fly tying, and as such, begins with some very simple techniques that will allow you to tie a variety of fly patterns. Each technique will build upon the last and over the course of 7 parts, you will learn to tie; Buzzers, Lures, Nymphs and Wet Fly patterns and as each new technique is learnt, you will be able to tie a greater range of flies.

**At this juncture I'd like to point out that this booklet is not a step-by-step guide, rather an overview of the techniques that you will learn when you attend the Novices' Course.**

Following this Course will provide you with the knowledge and confidence to advance your tying skills, and although this Course is not a definitive list of techniques, you will learn enough to explore further techniques on your own, and within the Herts Branch, continue through to the Intermediate Course and eventually to the Advanced Tyers.

For those whom this is their first venture into the world of fly dressing, there are usually loan tools available for use during the tying class and enough material to go around should any tyer not have it.

Fly patterns are the recipe of materials from which the fly is constructed. In order to tie the pattern as intended, it is important to use the materials as laid down in the pattern. If you are just practicing a technique and you don't have a particular material, for instance you only have orange marabou but black is needed, feel free to use whatever material you have to hand.

It must also be remembered that there are many successful fly patterns which are variants of an original pattern but are tied using substitute materials, as you'll discover when we tie a pattern called the Baby Doll.

So, although there is no requirement to own any special tools or purchase any particular materials, ideally, you should have your own tools and some, if not most, of the materials in order to practice the patterns and techniques taught in your own time.

Many of the techniques taught during this course can be practiced without having to tie a complete fly. For instance, you can practice dubbing by simply whipping thread onto a hook shank, wind the dubbed material around the shank and once completed, simply strip off the materials with a sharp blade and begin again...

Enjoy your fly tying, don't rush a pattern, because if it all starts to go wrong, it certainly won't get any better! It's often better to stop and re-tie the bit that's gone wrong rather than get to the end and not be happy with the finished fly.

Novices will often ask about how much they should practice, the answer is simple. If you want to progress your tying skills so that you can tie more complicated patterns, then practice *is important*. But if you are happy to learn just a few patterns, then maybe lots of practice isn't so important. At the end of the day, the amount of practice that you put in will depend upon how good a tyer you want to become, how much time you have, and how much time you want to put into your tying.

There is an appreciation by all the Course Tutors at whatever level you tie, to see what you have tied in your own time, maybe your favourite pattern or a technique you've just learnt. Novices are certainly encouraged to bring along any flies they have tied whether it be for advice or just a pat on the back!

## Tools

There are a great many tools available on the market for fly tyers. Many are variations of a theme, many are not necessary in order to tie flies, and some can be cobbled together from household items.

Initially, the purchase of some reasonably priced tools will enable you to learn the basics and see if you want to continue with your fly tying. But as you progress, you will recognise that better quality tools will aid you in completing your patterns more efficiently and that cheap 'n' nasty tools can bring so much frustration that you'll want to jank it all in and take up tiger wrestling or javelin catching!

There is no need to spend a fortune on tools but when purchasing tools, there is one adage that I would always advise; buy the best you can afford, why buy your tools twice?

Novices may not be able to recognise tools that are worth investing in, but any of the Tying Class Tutors at the Herts Branch are more than willing to give sound advice to help you make the right choices.

A poor quality vice will, after a while, not hold the hook securely, its jaws will wear over a short period of time exacerbating the problem and often the jaws are so large as to be almost impossible to use except for the largest of flies. A reasonably quality beginners vice could cost as little as £25.

Cheap scissors will not have a clean cutting action at the tip - exactly where it is needed, and will blunt quickly resulting in poor finishing of the fly with ragged tags of thread and material that not only look unsightly but you also risk having the fly fall to pieces... A good pair of scissors costs from £10 and a cheap pair for general cutting from £4.

There are bobbin holders and then there are bobbin holders. My advice again, is spend wisely and you will not suffer from continual thread breaks that a poorly manufactured bobbin holder tube will cause. There are 3 distinct types available; the cheap brass tube type, the brass tube with a bead that is either glass or plastic glued into the end to help avoid the fraying of thread and the last, and in my opinion, the best. The ceramic tube style. Although a ceramic tube can break if dropped onto a hard surface, they rarely if ever cause threads to break and if you do have such a problem, check your thread first. Brass tube bobbin holders can be purchased for as little as £3, with better quality models from £6 whilst ceramic tube models can be purchased from as little as £7.

## Basic Tools

Your basic list of tools should include the following:

Vice - buy the best you can afford, avoid cheap vices with overly large jaws.

2 or 3 pairs of scissors - One pair with fine tips, another with serrated blades and maybe a cheap pair for general purpose cutting

2 Bobbin Holders - one will do, but having two avoids having to continually change threads

Hackle Pliers - some are better than others, there are models available that can be more-forgiving if you're heavy handed

Dubbing Needle - a sewing needle glued into the end of an old pen will suffice

Further tools can include an anglepoise-style lamp to provide good lighting, a Whip Finish Tool (indispensable if you have brick-layer's hands!), Bobbin Threader and a Dubbing Brush which can be made from a piece of velcro glued to a narrow lolly stick or similar.

## Materials

The Novices' Course uses only a few easily obtainable materials. Fly tying material can be sourced from many tackle shops, online shops and fly fishing lodges. The better the quality of the material, the better your flies will look and the easier they will be to tie.

We will discuss material quality so that as you develop your tying skills, you will recognise good quality material so if you find that what you have been sold is not of a reasonable quality, return it politely explaining why. Most dealers are more than happy to exchange material that does not reach your expectations.

### **The following materials will be required:**

Thread - size 6/0 in colours *Black, Brown, White, Orange and/or Red.*

Chenille - *Black, Olive, Yellow, Bright Green*

Marabou - *Black, Olive*

Cock Hackle or inexpensive Cape\* - *Black, Red Game (reddish brown), Olive*

Black Hen Hackle or inexpensive Cape\*

Orange Goose Biots

Cock Pheasant Centre Tail - *the longer the feather fibres, the better. Ask someone who shoots for a late season bird.*

Peacock Herl

Wool - *White and/or Peach Wool, Fluorescent Green, Red*

Seals Fur Substitute Dubbing - *Red*

Golden Pheasant Tippetts

Tinsel - *Fine Blue, Pearl*

Fine/Medium Oval Wire - *Silver, Gold*

Medium Gauge Copper Wire

Chain Bead or Gold Bead 3mm

Lead Wire

Dubbing Wax - either as a very soft version in a twist tube or a hard version in a small cake. The cake version performs better if kept warm in a pocket.

Varnish - you can buy "fly tying" varnish but clear nail varnish works just as well. Sally Hanson's "*Hard as Nails*" is extremely good.

Superglue

Hooks: Kamasan B160, B110, B200, B83, B400/405, B175 or similar styles from other manufacturers eg: Tiemco

*\*It is certainly not necessary to purchase expensive "Genetic" capes for this course.*

The above list will enable you to tie all the patterns in the Course as well as a wide variety of other patterns.

## Part 1: Thread Control

Thread control is the number one technique that you will need to learn so that;

**1.** your flies hold together and, **2.** a neatly tied fly not only looks better, you'll fish it with confidence.

In this class you will tie some basic buzzer patterns. Buzzers are the pupa of midges or chironomids (non-biting mosquito) and are prolific in most waters whether it be rivers or stillwaters and are an important part of a trout's diet.

Buzzers are typically tied onto "Grub" hooks such as the Kamasan B110. These hooks have a continual curve from just past the eye down to the barb. If you wish, you can tie buzzers onto a straight-shank hook, but you'll typically only need to tie onto the first half of the hook for aesthetic reasons. Buzzers can be tied in any combination of colours to suit the colour of the buzzers where you fish.

Tying on a straight-shank hook is much easier than tying onto a grub hook, so a little practice on a straight hook may be the order of the day.

You will be shown how to "whip-on" the thread, keep the thread end at around 45° to the shank and tie touching turns of thread down the shank and back up to the eye. The idea is to tie a slim pattern that imitates the natural pupa.

You will also be shown how to finish the fly with a Half-Hitch or a Whip Finish and how to use a Whip Finish Tool.

Like the half-hitch, the whip finish can be performed by hand but there are many reasons why you may have trouble doing so. Fingers that are none-too agile, rough skin and just not being able to pick up the technique number among the few, this is why the Whip Finish Tool was invented. With its springy hooks this tool looks like an arcane torture device, but in reality is quite straight-forward to use and its use will result in the finishing whip being placed exactly where you want it, nice and neat. Later you may want to learn how to perform this finish by hand, but until then, using the tool is not to be considered a "second-best" option. The models that do look like torture devices should best be avoided, and in my opinion, the models by Stone Fly or C & F are the most efficient and easy to use.

Remember that I said that each technique would build on the last... Well the next buzzer pattern you will tie will repeat the first pattern but when you reach the eye of the hook you will build a thread thorax.

After that, the following buzzer pattern will incorporate the thread being tied in touching turns and a thorax, but will add a fine wire or thread rib that is tied from the tail end of the fly up to where the thorax will be started. You will be taught how to "worry" the wire into breaking - using scissors to cut wire leaves a sharp tag that can cause thread to be cut or when material is overlaid will result in a bump. Using scissors on wire is close to a cardinal sin!

The final Novices' Buzzer pattern will again incorporate the techniques of the first 3, but will add a thorax cover and cheeks.

### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread of any colour in size 6/0. The higher the number, the thinner the thread. 6/0 is a good starting point for novices because it is thin enough to tie most trout patterns whilst being a little forgiving when it comes to the heavy-handedness that most novices have.

Fine wire (Silver or Gold)

Pearl Tinsel

Orange Goose Biots

Varnish

### Typical Basic Buzzer:

**Hook:** #10 - 20 Grub (Kamasan B110), for straight Buzzers B160

**Thread:** Colour to match your water's buzzers

**Body:** Thread

**Thorax:** Thread

**Thorax Cover:** Pearl Tinsel

**Cheeks:** Goose Biots

**Ribbing:** Fine Wire or Thread

## Part 2: Controlling Synthetic Materials and Marabou

Moving on from part 1, you will learn to handle Chenille and Marabou. Chenille is a velvety cord and comes in a variety of finishes from suede to flashy antron and in a range of thicknesses. Obviously, the thickness of the chenille used will need to be matched to the size of the fly you are tying and typically, the thinner varieties are used on most trout patterns.

Marabou can be a pain to handle, it wafts around in the lightest of breezes and sticks to every piece of clothing you're wearing as well as the carpet... The correct way to handle it isn't difficult and is surprisingly simple - you'll learn how during this part of the course.

We will be tying 2 generic lure patterns; a Black Chenille Lure and a Poodle.

Although today's patterns should be tied with black material, it's not imperative and if all you have is another colour then no matter - you may even catch more fish on it!

Our Black Chenille Lure incorporates chain bead "eyes". These add weight to the pattern and allow it to "swim" in a jerky up and down fashion during the retrieve. Many fly tying dealers will sell chain bead in short lengths, but you can use an old bath plug chain or just pop down to a DIY centre and pick one up...

In this pattern, you will be shown how to "figure of eight" to attach the chain bead securely and how to tie that chunky-looking chenille to the hook shank.

The Poodle uses 4 pieces of marabou to create a crest and you will need a keen eye to keep it looking balanced. Weight is provided by lead wire and you will be shown the techniques involved in successfully tying it in.

The techniques used in this part will be further expanded on in future lessons when the Damsel Nymph, Viva and Montanna Nymph are tied.

### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread 6/0 Black  
Black Chenille  
Black Marabou  
Chain Bead  
Lead Wire  
Varnish  
Superglue

### Black Chenille Lure:

**Hook:** 2x long Hook (Kamasan B200/830 #8)

**Thread:** Black

**Tail:** Black Marabou

**Body:** Black Chenille

**Head:** Chain Bead

### Poodle:

**Hook:** 2x long Hook (Kamasan B200/830 #8)

**Thread:** Black

**Tail:** Black Marabou

**Body:** Black Chenille

**Wing:** Black Marabou tied as a crest

### Part 3: Feather Fibre

In this part, we will be tying one of the most well known and useful patterns you will come across, The Pheasant Tail Nymph along with a pattern of my own.

Devised over 50 years ago by Frank Sawyer, the PTN imitates several types of Olive Nymph (Baetis) and works on both rivers and stillwaters. It can be tied on a hook as large as a size 10 and as small as a size 20 - it's a very versatile pattern. You'll be revisiting ribbing with wire, adding weight with lead wire and tying a thorax cover

After that we'll tie another nymph pattern, one that I devised (*there is nothing new under the sun so someone may well have thought of it before me*) and I call the Black Cock Nymph. Tying this pattern is simplicity itself using only 3 materials; Black Cock Hackle, Black Thread, Silver Wire with an option of Lead Wire for weight. Tied in a variety of sizes, both weighted and un-weighted, this pattern has caught me a lot of fish and it's one that I wouldn't hesitate to have on my leader!

So, this part's patterns will reinforce the earlier techniques of ribbing wire, creating & tying a thorax cover, adding weight with lead wire and leads onto some Spider patterns you'll be tying in the next part of this course.

#### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread 6/0 Black or Brown  
Cock Pheasant Centre Tail  
Copper Wire - Medium  
Cock Hackle  
Silver Wire - Fine  
Lead Wire  
Varnish

#### Pheasant Tail Nymph:

**Hook:** #10 - 20 Nymph Hook (Kamasan B175/400/405)

**Thread:** Black or Brown

**Tail:** Centre Cock Pheasant Tail

**Body:** Centre Cock Pheasant Tail

**Thorax:** Centre Cock Pheasant Tail

**Ribbing:** Copper Wire

#### Black Cock Nymph:

**Hook:** #10 - 20 Nymph Hook (Kamasan B175/400/405)

**Thread:** Black

**Tail:** Cock Hackle Fibres

**Body:** Black Thread or Floss

**Thorax:** Black Thread or Floss

**Ribbing:** Fine Silver Wire

## Part 4: Revisiting Feather Fibre and Ribbing

This part's patterns are Spiders and a wet fly pattern called the Black Pennell. Traditionally used on rivers - especially northern ones, they also work very well on stillwaters and reservoirs.

In their simplest form, Spiders are tied with either a Hen or Cock Hackle and a thread or floss body, and we will learn how to control one of the more delicate feather fibres, Peacock Herl. You will be introduced to adding a Hackle to the fly.

### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread 6/0 Black  
Peacock Herl  
Black Hen Hackle  
Black Cock Hackle  
Golden Pheasant Tippets  
Fine Silver Wire  
Varnish

### Black Magic Spider:

**Hook:** #14 - 18 (Kamasan B400/405)

**Thread:** Black

**Body:** Thread

**Thorax:** Peacock Herl

**Hackle:** Black Hen

### Black & Peacock Spider:

**Hook:** #8 - 12 (Kamasan B400/405)

**Thread:** Black

**Body:** Thread

**Thorax:** Peacock Herl

**Hackle:** Black Hen

### Black Pennell:

**Hook:** #8 - 12 (Kamasan B400/405)

**Thread:** Black

**Tail:** Golden Pheasant Tippets

**Body:** Black Floss

**Hackle:** Black Cock

## Part 5: Revisiting Synthetics and introducing Palmering

This part's patterns are a Damsel Nymph, Montanna and a Viva.

With these patterns we'll be revisiting Synthetics (Chenille,) Marabou, Ribbing and introducing the concept of Hackle Palmering.

You have already hackled a fly when you tied the Spider patterns, the technique of Palmering is similar but instead of touching turns, you'll wind the hackle in open turns along the fly, and which today you will be palmering through the thorax.

### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread 6/0 Black  
Marabou - Black, Olive  
Chenille - Black, Yellow or Green  
Chain Bead or Gold Bead 3mm  
Cock Hackle - Black, Olive  
Fluorescent Green Wool  
Fine Silver Wire  
Varnish

### Simple Damsel Nymph:

**Hook:** #14 - 18 (Kamasan B400/405)  
**Thread:** Black or Green  
**Tail:** Green Marabou and 2 strands of Blue Tinsel  
**Body:** Green Marabou  
**Hackle:** Green Cock Hackle  
**Rib:** Silver or Gold Wire  
**Head:** Chain Bead or Gold Bead 3mm

### Viva:

**Hook:** #8 - 10 (Kamasan B400)  
**Thread:** Black  
**Tail:** Fluorescent Green Wool  
**Body:** Black Chenille  
**Rib:** Silver Wire  
**Thorax:** Peacock Herl  
**Wing:** Black Marabou

### Montanna:

**Hook:** #8 - 10 (Kamasan B200/830)  
**Thread:** Black  
**Tail:** Black Cock Hackle  
**Body:** Black Chenille  
**Thorax:** Yellow or Green Chenille  
**Thorax Cover:** Black Chenille  
**Hackle:** Black Cock Palmered through Thorax

## Part 6: Revisiting Ribbing & Palmering and introducing Dubbing

Part 6 of this short course will revisit Ribbing and Palmering, and introduce dubbing. This part's pattern is a Soldier Palmer, a deceptively simple looking pattern that will test your skills learnt so far.

You learnt about Ribbing back in Part 1, the Soldier Palmer uses the rib to hold the palmered hackle in place, so a steady hand is needed in order to place the rib between the hackles fibres. You will be shown the common "wiggle" method and discuss an alternative method.

Dubbing is a technique where material is twisted onto the thread to form a "rope" and then wound onto the shank. The technique can be a little awkward to learn and certain materials, especially seals fur, can be difficult to dub although there are plenty of materials that are simple to use, and various techniques that allow the more awkward materials to be utilised. We will discuss the technique of using a dubbing spinner which can be effective with the more awkward materials.

### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread 6/0 Black or Red

Cock Hackle - Brown

Red Wool or Floss

Medium Gold Wire

Dubbing Wax

Varnish

### Soldier Palmer:

**Hook:** #8 - 16 (Kamasan B400/405/175)

**Thread:** Red

**Tail:** Red Wool or Floss

**Body:** Red Seals Fur Substitute

**Palmer Hackle:** Red Game (Brown) Cock Hackle

**Rib:** Gold Wire

**Head Hackle:** Red Game (Brown) Cock Hackle

## Part 7: Woolly Patterns and Preparing for the Annual Branch Outing

The final part of this short course will look at another material that can be both synthetic and natural - wool. This Part's patterns are a Baby Doll and tying some of the patterns that can be used during this month at the Annual Branch Outing.

The Baby Doll is a pattern that was devised in 1971 by Brian Kench for when he fished Ravensthorpe Reservoir. Fished deep on a sinking line, it is taken as a fish fry and thus is very effective towards the end of the season when trout are bulking up for winter on a diet of high protein fry.

You'll remember back at Part 1, we discussed using alternative materials. Although the Baby Doll was originally tied in white, it can be just as deadly at other times during the season, because when tied with peach or orange wool it is also a reasonable imitation of some species of large emerging sedge pupa. Once again, it should be fished deep with a twitching retrieve, an inch or two at a time, once every three or four seconds.

A further successful variant incorporates a bright green (fluorescent) wool back. This variant was very popular among the anglers at Grafham during the 70's and 80's and it was sometimes tied with a green tail as well as the green back.

Wool can be further utilised by substituting it for dubbing on larger Wulff, caddis and hopper patterns.

### Materials needed for this lesson:

Thread 6/0 Black

White or Peach 2-ply wool - 'Sirdar' wool was originally used by Brian Kench, this wool is soft and was typically used for baby knitware, hence the "Baby" part of the pattern's name.

Lead Wire - Optional

Varnish

### Baby Doll:

**Hook:** #8 - 16 (Kamasan B175)

**Thread:** Black

**Tail:** White or Peach Wool well 'fluffed out'

**Body:** White or Peach Wool

**Back:** White or Peach Wool