

# A GUIDE TO TYING FLIES AT SHOWS AND FAIRS

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If you read the first article of the constitution of The Fly Dressers' Guild, it states that our primary objective is 'to cultivate the art of fly dressing', or to put more succinctly, to promote fly tying. Whilst we do this very successfully internally within the confines of our branch activities and nationally as an organisation, it is vitally important to the future of the Guild, its branches, fly tying and fly fishing in general that we actively involve ourselves in shows and fairs whenever the opportunity arises. We need get ourselves noticed by a wider audience - locally, nationally and internationally.

A lot of our members consider tying in public to be a daunting prospect; the aim of this guide is to remove that 'fear factor' and demonstrate that it can be both a rewarding and pleasurable experience.

So how did I get started 25+ years ago? I was approached by a very well-known and highly respected fly tyer and asked if I had ever thought about demonstrating fly tying. My initial reaction was one that I have heard so many times from fellow fly tyers, was 'don't be so b---y daft, I'm not good enough'. Anyway he eventually managed to encourage me to have a go, it was so much fun and I have never looked back since doing my first show. It has opened so many doors for me and I have an ever increasing circle of friends all over the world. It is an immensely satisfying and enjoyable to share what I have learnt over the years and continue to learn with others.

So what qualities do you need to tie flies in public? I think that with a little preparation and planning there are only two. Firstly, the ability to tie a range (this doesn't have to be huge, or complicated) of flies competently. Secondly, to be able to explain the techniques you are using and how to fish the flies you are tying. It is as simple and straightforward as that. You don't need years of experience, or to be a great fly tyer to fulfil those criteria.

So what is the best way to go about planning and preparing for a show?

## Choice of flies to tie

- 🕒 Choose patterns and variations on patterns that you are both familiar and comfortable with tying; avoid flies that include fly tying techniques that you are inexperienced in using. They don't have to be intricate or complicated, but they need to be tied with confidence and competence; accompanied by 'your personal commentary'.
- 🕒 Make sure that the fly tying materials and hooks that are utilised in your fly selection are currently readily available, legal and that you are able to tell people where they can source them. I would always avoid recommending individual suppliers as this can raise issues of bias, but rather give the audience a range of options.
- 🕒 Try to limit your fly choices to flies that will take you less than 20 minutes to demonstrate, in that way you will keep the

attention of your audience. You also need to take into consideration that it could take between 3 and 4 times as long to demonstrate a fly properly. Whilst demonstrating you can spend a lot more time talking than you do actually tying.

👉 In your choice of flies, you might also want to take into consideration the location of the show, time of year and current fly tying/fly fishing trends. You may even think of demonstrating some of your own fly designs. But please remember that all the criteria listed above are still vitally important.

👉 I would strongly recommend that the team of fly tyers that are tying at a particular show get together, or at least liaise with each other, prior to the event to discuss what they are all tying. This will enable the team to ensure that a diverse range of flies and techniques are being demonstrated. The last thing your audience will want to see is everyone tying the same or similar flies. Try to cover as many different disciplines as possible, embracing both modern and traditional styles/ techniques.

👉 A further factor that you may want to consider in your team's choice of flies is incorporating fly tying techniques that commonly feature in the questions asked by visitors to shows. These include things such as creating small neat heads, ways of whip finishing, different dubbing techniques, parachute hackles, deer hair, use of CDC, traditional spiders (using silk), weighting flies, cloaked wings for Dabblers and Mayfly patterns etc. You could also consider demonstrating the use of specialist tools. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it covers most of the popular problems.

## Preparation for the show:

👉 In the weeks running up to the show, make a list of all the hooks, materials and tools that you need to tie your chosen flies. Ensure that you have more than enough stock for the event, and restock where needed. Don't leave this until the last minute as what you need may not be readily available from your regular suppliers and the chances are that you will not be able to beg, steal, borrow, or buy on the day. In the event of you being unable to source your requirements you may have to reconsider what you to tie.

👉 Take time to practice your chosen patterns, think about what you will say to people that are watching you, what potential questions they may ask and how best to best to answer them. Think about good demonstrations that you have seen in the past, the presentation techniques used by others and utilise the best of what you have seen.

👉 When you have your 'team meeting' to discuss your fly choices, compile a rota of who is going to tie when. Try to arrange this such that at any one time the aforementioned diversity of fly tying is maintained. Also endeavour to ensure that less experienced tyers/demonstrators always have someone more experienced on hand to support them if needed. This is also the ideal opportunity to organise a team for the erection and dismantling of your stand and may be a way of including those members who don't want to tie but still wish to help. Non-tyers may also be prepared to sell products for the branch, run raffles and perform any other non-tying tasks on the day. You never know - involving members in this way may well encourage them to have go at tying at an event in the future.

🕒 Ensure that you have all of your non-tying necessities ready for the day (some of those listed being more essential than others): plenty of non-alcoholic drinks, a cushion for your seat, wet wipes, emery board, hand cream and handouts, etc. If the show is in a marquee, you may wish to consider adding to the list items such as suitable footwear and clothing (including a change), black bin liner(s) to keep your gear dry (to avoid the curse of the leaking marquee and drying everything out after the show) and some blocks of wood to stop your chair sinking into soft ground.

### The day of the show

🕒 Ensure that whatever clothing you are wearing on the top half of your body whilst demonstrating, is of a colour that provides a suitable background for your tying. I would strongly recommend that you choose something that is pale in colouration, pale blue being the most popular choice.

🕒 Please remember that your hands are very much on show, make sure they are clean and your nails are well manicured.

🕒 Make sure you put everything in the car before leaving home.

🕒 Allow plenty of time to get to your destination, if at all possible plan to arrive early. There is nothing worse than arriving on the last minute, just before you about to start and having to rush. Far better to get ready at a nice steady pace and start tying in a nice relaxed frame of mind.

🕒 When you start tying, try to choose for your first couple of flies, two of your easiest fly choices just to ease yourself in and get the fingers going.

🕒 If you use a display stand have a few pre-tied flies so you don't start empty.

🕒 When anyone walks up to the stand, always engage them in conversation, otherwise chances are they will walk away.

🕒 Explain every process as you perform it. Remembering to include all the 'hows, whats and whys'.

🕒 If anyone asks a question that you are unable to answer or requests you to demonstrate something that is not within your ability, refer them to someone that can meet their requirements. There is usually someone at these shows that can help out.

**ABOVE ALL ENJOY YOURSELF!!!!**

I hope that this guide proves to be of some help and maybe encourages a few of you to give it a go and hopefully we will meet up at a show in the near future.

If you need further information please contact the General Secretary of The Fly Dressers' Guild on [secretary@flydressersguild.org](mailto:secretary@flydressersguild.org)