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Sports

Midge mighty fine It's the most effective trout fly  
Bob Saile Outdoors

The most effective trout fly you can use right now, on most rivers, is one so small you couldn't see it if you dropped it on a dark-colored carpet.

If you haven't used it this winter, you probably haven't caught many trout. Or at least, you haven't caught them consistently.

There are a lot of names and colors for this fly, but generically, it's just a midge. Technically, it's the imitation of a midge pupa, or the about-to-emerge stage of the two-winged Chironomids. Most people just call them midges, gnats or "snowflies," and the pattern I like best is simply the Black Midge.

How small is it? Well, a No. 20, for which most older anglers need a magnifying lens to tie it onto their leader, is a large one. More likely, you'll need a smaller, size 22, 24 or even, tired old eyes forbid, a No. 26. You will have to affix it to a 6X leader testing 3 pounds or less.

That's the bad news. The good news is that this tiny, nymph-type imitation will hook you as many large-size trout as any other pattern in your fly box. When the water is cold, as it is now, it will catch more. On my most recent excursion to a stream, it accounted for two trout in the 6- to 8-pound class. (That's another story, coming your way Wednesday on The Post's Western Outdoors page.)

The body of the fly is either black thread, black fur dubbing or dark-green peacock herl, ribbed with fine wire of silver, copper or

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gold color to give the body some sparkle. The head end, or thorax, is usually dubbed black fur, or a winding of short, black hackle or of more peacock herl.

Not that the body of a midge fly has to be black. It can be olive, green, gray, cream or even red. But black is the starting point for a midge nymph.

Rim Chung's famous South Platte River pattern, the RS-2, is basically a midge-emerger imitation when fished in sizes 22 or smaller. It's all he carries, though when used in larger sizes, it passes for the nymph of a mayfly or other insect.

One of the beauties of the Black Midge, RS-2, Biot Midge, Green Machine or other midge imitations is that they can be fished top-to-bottom in the stream, depending on how the trout are feeding. If they're taking the emerging midges at the surface, the pattern is fished almost the same as a dry fly, except that the fly is flush in the surface film, or just barely underneath it. No weight is attached to the leader.

But if you're not seeing surface splashes or sipping action, the most effective way to fish a midge nymph is to drift it deep, with weight about a foot to 18 inches above the fly to sink it down to bottom and a strike indicator higher up on the leader.

Pat Dorsey, a professional fly tyer and guide, originally showed me a slick way to fish a deeply drifted midge. It's a two-fly rig, but the two flies are so markedly different that the combination seems to be a contradiction. The trout don't mind, though.

Dorsey ties a tan, beige or pink San Juan Worm (on a relatively small hook) to the end of 5X leader (the weight is above this fly). To the eye of the San Juan Worm he ties 2 feet of 6X leader, and to the end of that he ties in a Black Midge.

This gives the trout two morsels to consider, at slightly different depths. Sometimes, the number of trout hooked will be about evenly divided between the worm pattern and the tiny midge, but in cold water - 36 to 44 degrees - the midge will be taken the bulk of the time.

"I think the trout is attracted by the San Juan Worm, but makes

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up it's mind to take the midge because that's what it has been feeding on," Dorsey said.

Both of us this winter have caught trout that were gorging on midges. Anglers tend to puzzle over why a trout, particularly a large one, is feeding on the smallest food item in the stream. The reason is simple: In many streams, midges are the most numerous insect and the easiest to catch. Some experts theorize that midges are becoming even more dominant in our streams because of changes in water temperature or quality that are adversely affecting larger insects such as mayflies and caddis flies.

You probably have your own theories. But if you don't have midge patterns in your arsenal, you're under-gunned.

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Caption: PHOTO: The Denver Post MIDGE CONECTION: Tiny midge nymphs, left, can lead to nice trout like rainbow, right.

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