

Fly of the Month Guide's Choice Parachute Adams



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GUIDE'S CHOICE PARACHUTE ADAMS



Most of the flies we feature are something we've created or, in the very least, have been regional in nature. This month's fly is among the most common patterns in all of fly fishing, yet one we rely on it most of the year to catch trout.

Fly tyers will find this month's installment interesting because my version is a bit different than the common garden variety Parachute Adams found in the fly bins of most fly shops. Several anglers I've taken fishing over the years have been shocked when I tell them I tie well over a dozen Parachute Adams in an hour. My typical production is about 18 - 20 flies per hour. One of the main reasons I'm able to crank so many out is the method I use to tie the pattern.

The Parachute Adams is a great pattern because it has a very clear, buggy profile, yet also retains a touch of ambiguity. Its realistic mayfly profile allows the pattern to fool trout in slower currents. On the other hand, its somewhat generic color scheme allows it to act like a chameleon, mimicking whatever a fish has on it's mind at the moment.

I certainly use a variety of flies over the course of a fishing season, but if



A Parachute Adams provides an excellent profile for trout to see easily

I could only have one fly pattern for the Smoky Mountains it would be the Parachute Adams. We use this pattern in every month of the year, but March through November are the best to use it..

Many anglers have a tendency to use yellow fly patterns in the Smokies from late spring through the summer. Most of the aquatic insects that hatch during that time frame are yellow so that rationale has a firm base, but I still prefer the Parachute Adams in most situations when there are only a few or no bugs on the water.

Trout are most selective when there is an abundance of food on the water. This is a somewhat uncommon occurrence in the Smokies. Even during the spring when we have excellent hatches they only occur for a few hours of the day. Yellow insects are that color so they will be less visible to trout. A light colored insect is tough to see for a trout looking up at the light.

On the other hand, a darker pattern like a Parachute Adams has a much clearer profile for a trout to see. I've been on the water a number of times when a Parachute Adams fished just as well or even better than a light fly pattern during a hatch of light yellow Light Cahills late in the evening.



Streams in the Smokies are perfectly suited to the Guide's Choice Parachute Adams

FISHING THE PARACHUTE ADAMS

We fish the Parachute Adams so much that we don't think much about "special considerations" to fish it. We fish this pattern in a wide array of situations, so let's talk about a few rigs for different types of water.

If we're fishing smaller streams high in the Smokies we'll usually fish this fly on a 7'6" leader tapered to 5X with a size #14 or maybe #16. Don't treat this as a hard and fast rule, though. It's not unusual for us to fish a leader that's only 6' long or even shorter for the smallest, brush choked streams. We don't hesitate to use 4X on small streams and might even use 3X if we know we'll get hung up in branches. Trout in streams like this are never leader shy.

Whenever we fish larger streams like Little River, the Oconaluftee River, or Hazel Creek we use 9' leaders tapered to 5x if we'll be fishing long riffles and runs. On the other hand, if we're focusing most of our efforts on pocket water we'll probably go with a 7'6" leader only because it's easier to cast with more precision at a short distance.



A fine Smokey Mountain brown trout realizes his mistake

We'll fish a #12 early in the spring or any time when the water is high and clear. The larger size floats better in turbulent waters and is also easier for fish to see. If we're going to drop a nymph under a Parachute Adams it's almost always under a size #12. The extra size and hackle keeps the fly floating better when a weighted nymph is tied to it. Try to keep the nymph around #16 so it doesn't have any effect on the dry fly. If your nymph is heavy enough to continually sink your dry fly it makes you less apt to set the hook when a fish pulls the fly under.

Every year we fish the hi visibility version of the Parachute Adams more and more. The orange parachute post really stands out on the water and is always popular with fly fishers we guide. We'll often use the Hi-Vis Parachute Adams as a strike indicator on our tailwaters like the Clinch and Holston when we're fishing small midge patterns like a Zebra Midge. The fly is highly visible yet less noticeable than a traditional indicator to the fish. We're still surprised how many "selective" midging trout eat a Parachute Adams!



*The Parachute Adams is a great choice in many locations beyond the Smokies.
It's one of our favorites on the Snake River in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.*

HOW TO TIE THE GUIDE'S CHOICE PARACHUTE ADAMS

Hook: #12 - 16 Standard dry fly hook

Thread: 6/0 Gray

Wing: Turkey Flats, White or Fluorescent Orange for a Hi Vis Parachute

Tail: Coq De Leon hackle fibers, Medium or Dark Pardo

Body: Adams Gray Superfine Dubbing

Hackle: Whiting dry fly saddle hackle, 1 grizzly and 1 brown hackle

I'm excited about the fly tying segment of this month's installment because I've probably tied more Parachute Adams than any other fly. Years ago in a fly tying demo someone asked if they could watch me tie another. What I didn't know was that they asked to see how fast I tied the fly while being timed on a stop watch. After I completed the fly they let me know I tied the fly in exactly three minutes. I'm certainly more comfortable tying this fly than any other and every tweak of the pattern I've made is to streamline the tying process and help the fly float better.

The method I use to tie a Parachute Adams is very similar to the way I tie other parachute patterns. For the wing I use turkey flats, feathers from



Coq de Leon hackle

a turkey's shoulder. They have the same natural appearance as calf hair, but are far easier to use. Turkey flats tie in with less bulk than calf hair and don't require any stacking. This makes the whole process of tying the fly easier and requires less time.

The standard pattern for the Parachute Adams calls for a mix of grizzly and brown hackle fibers for the tail. Coq de Leon hackles (shown above) are excellent for tailing fibers and their natural speckled appearance has a similar look to the blend of grizzly and brown fibers. Using only one feather instead of two saves a bit of time, especially if you're tying a dozen or more.

Don't worry if you don't have any Coq de Leon hackle and can't find any. For years I tied a Parachute Adams with either brown or grizzly hackle instead of both simply to save time on my own flies. Feel free to use both, but it is quicker to simply use just one color and the fish have never seemed to care. I always prefer a trim body for a number of reasons. First of all, it is more realistic than a fat body. A slender body weighs less and can be dubbed very tightly. Both of these points make for a fly that is more water resistant.

Whiting saddle hackles are easily the best for tying dry flies. They are quite long and a single feather can tie several flies. The number of fibers on one of these feathers is more dense than a typical rooster neck hackle so the hackle on the fly will help float the fly much better. The exceptionally slim spine of a saddle hackle also makes it easier to wrap the hackle into a smaller area of the fly. This is really important with a pattern like this which requires two hackles.



Step 1. Start the thread just behind the eye of the hook, wrap back to the point of the hook, then come forward to about 1 1/2 or 2 eye lengths behind the eye of the hook. The thread provides a firm base for the parachute so it doesn't roll on the hook.



Step 2. Clip a segment of turkey flat as shown here. You should be able to get at least three parachutes from a single feather: One from the right side, one from the left side, and one from the center. Use only the segment of the feather where the fibers are even. This achieves the same effect as stacking calf hair.



Step 3. Tie the turkey flats in so the wing will be about as tall as the hook shank is long. Clip the butts at an angle and wrap over them.



Step 4. Wrap the thread in front of the parachute post. Hold the post up and make a number of thread wraps right up against it to hold it upright. Now wrap thread around the base of the post and gradually work your way up before wrapping back down. This is easily the trickiest part of tying the fly. It's easiest if you have only an inch or so of thread out of your bobbin. This reinforcement make it much easier to wrap hackle later and it makes the fly more durable.



Step 5. Take a clump of coq de leon hackle fibers and tie them in a as a tail. The tail should be about as long as the hook is long or a tad shorter. You may cut the feather fibers with a scissor, but is often a little quicker to take in a clump in your fingers and simply peel them off the feather.



Step 6. Dub the body from the tail right on up to the post so it has a definite taper. Only the smallest amount of dubbing is required; no dubbing wax is necessary. Make criss cross wraps around the post and try to leave a few wraps of dubbing on the thread to tie down the hackles.



Step 7. Take an appropriately sized grizzly and brown saddle hackle. I place the two feather together with the bottom or dull sides together. The butts should be even. Strip some hackle fibers from the stems and tie them in together directly in front of the parachute post.



Step 8. As a right handed tyer I wrap the hackles clockwise around the post. The two feathers should be together and wrapped as one. Start high and make each successive wrap lower than the previous one. I'm pretty consistent about making three wraps. Any fewer and the hackle seems a little sparse. Any more and it seems to bushy, but tailor this to your local waters.



Hi Vis Version

Step 9. Be careful to keep your thread away from the hackles when you clip them. You may also need to clip a few stray hackle fibers. I always use a quick series of three half hitches instead of a whip finish, but you're welcome to tie the fly off any way you want.



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Ian & Charity live in Townsend, Tennessee where their guide service, R&R Fly Fishing is based. Together they log hundreds of days on the water each year guiding anglers inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park and on tailwater rivers in East Tennessee. They are avid anglers who travel extensively outside of the Southern Appalachians to fly fish. They regularly host groups of fly fishers in Yellowstone Country on the legendary Henry's Fork River in Idaho and Montana's Madison River, as well as the Turneffe Atoll in Belize.

Ian & Charity keep a busy schedule speaking at fly fishing expos and groups around the country. They have appeared in New Jersey, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. Anyone can keep up with their fishing report and weblog on their website; www.RandRFlyFishing.com

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