

*Fly* TYING



Proven flies for the  
Pacific Northwest

**DON HAAHEIM**



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## *Chapter 2:*

# THE ONE-HAND HALF HITCH & THE HAND TIED WHIP FINISH

The advantage of learning the one-hand half hitch (where a finger on the other hand is used to hold the knot in place while the operating hand pulls the knot tight) is that, anywhere or any time in the fly construction, you can make a quick half hitch, thus providing durability and strength

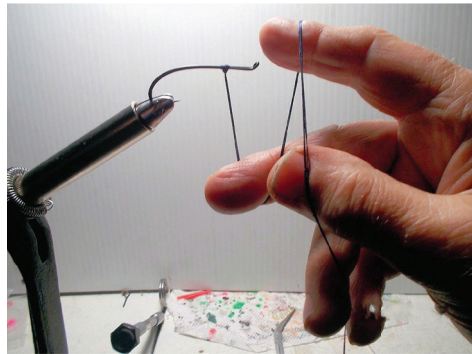


Figure 1: Secure Thread to Hook, Then Over, Under, Under the Thread

to the finished fly. A key is the tying thread must be under tension; in other words, weight must be provided by the thread spool/bobbin hanging a foot or two below the hook.

Let us start by assuming you are right-handed and you place the hook in your vise with the hook bend facing left, the hook eye to your right. With tension on the tying thread, there are three steps to make a half hitch: the first two are with your right hand, and the

last step uses a left-hand finger to keep the knot in place while you pull tight with the right hand. Sound confusing? Not really; once you get the process down, it becomes automatic and extremely fast!

The first step in Figure 1 is to secure the tying thread firmly to the hook shank. With a couple of feet of length to the spool/bobbin, and a left-hand grip on the loose end, make a few wraps with your right hand, the last ones covering the initial wraps, then half hitch firmly at least twice, or simply hold the wraps tight with a left finger. Now, with your right-hand fingers spread, as in Figure 1, place your second or longest finger over the thread, fairly near to the hook shank; next, put your index finger under the thread and lift up; now allow the thread to flow over your thumb and down over your third finger to the spool/bobbin. If you are doing this for the first time, do not be tempted to guide the thread with your left hand; do it all with right-hand finger movement. Do note that there must be tension (weight) on the thread, otherwise this process is difficult to accomplish with only one hand!

Once the thread is in place as shown, step 2 is simply a wrist turn to move the thread running between your index finger and thumb behind the hook shank, at the point where it is attached. See Figure 2 for a visual of this step.

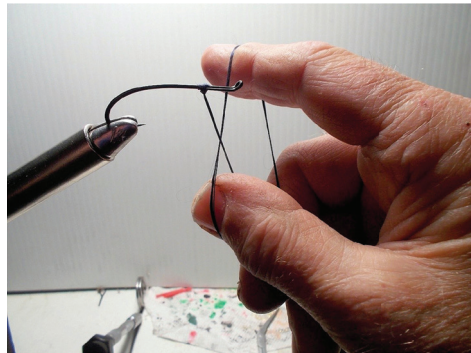


Figure 2: Twist Wrist to Move Thread Behind the Hook Shank

Then quickly move your left index finger and press down here. Finally, roll your wrist again to the left and complete the half hitch by pulling the thread tight with your right hand. After a while, the process becomes so automatic that you can complete a half hitch in about a second! See Figure 3 for this final step.

The thread in both figures shown is far thicker than normal tying thread for better visibility. Tying threads are available in a vast assortment of colors and sizes. However, while working in Prince George, a wonderful tip came my way from

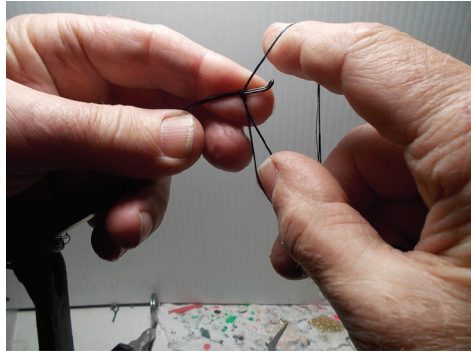


Figure 3: Left finger in Place, Pull Thread with Right Hand to Complete

fellow Polar Coachmen Fly Club members. It was to use invisible thread, widely used in the clothing industry. This is for a couple of excellent reasons. First, it is strong, and second, you can back wrap on your body material or a palmered hackle with very little distortion or color change to the fly, but at the same time, you are greatly strengthening the fly! I use invisible thread for 90% of my fly tying, although I have recently found that mending or invisible thread purchased at sewing shops is getting so weak that it breaks far too easily! My solution of late is to buy .006 diameter or even ultra fine monofilament, available in sewing type spools at specialized fly shops such as Trout Water Fly and Tackle.

Fly shop retailers love to sell you on whip finishers to complete a fly. Many people teach fly tying using only two steps of close bobbin wraps and a whip finish using a whip finisher tool. My argument is that flies constructed in this manner will unravel too easily! Therefore, I let my bobbin swing below the vise, primarily for tension, and use the hand method to make frequent half hitches all throughout the fly construction. I do admit that a whip finish tool will accomplish a neat fly head finish for you, but you can also do the same thing using a two-finger operation—index and second finger of your right hand—although the left hand is needed to hold the bobbin end of the thread tight.

Start by placing the thread near the hook eye over your right-hand index and second fingers, with the palm facing you, as shown in the first picture in Table 1 below. Picture 2 shows a counter-clockwise twist with a spread and raise of the second finger, placing the bobbin end thread under the thread from the hook eye. Picture 3 guides the bobbin end of the thread tight against the hook eye, where you want the whip finish. Picture 4 shows a lift of both fingers above the hook eye with a counter-clockwise twist. Picture 5 repeats the finger twist under, then behind the hook eye each time. The last picture shows, after 4 or 5 twists, the left hand pulling the loop made by the right-hand fingers tight! Ensure you do not lose the loop as you pull your right-hand fingers free and switch a finger to hold the loop in place!

Many fly tying instruction books and videos teach a bobbin wrap very close to the fly under construction and a whip finish with a Matarelli, Thompson or other similar whip finishing tools. The advantage of this method is speed, and it is most often used by commercial fly tiers. However, I prefer the Earl Anderson approach of tight finger-guided wraps, with the thread under a bit of weight tension and frequent right-hand half hitches throughout the construction process. I believe, while this takes a bit longer to do, the fly will not unravel as easily when in use. I will leave it to you to decide on your preferred method!



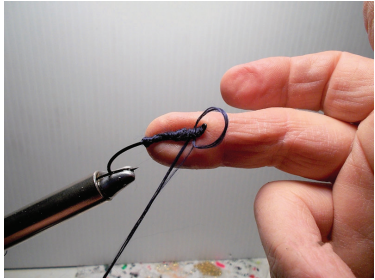
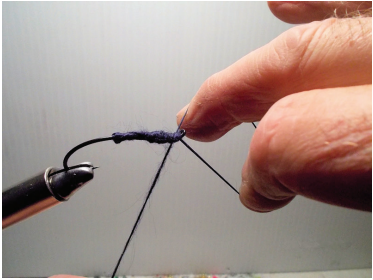
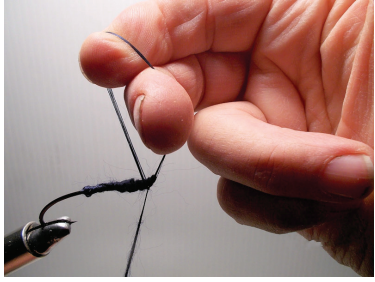
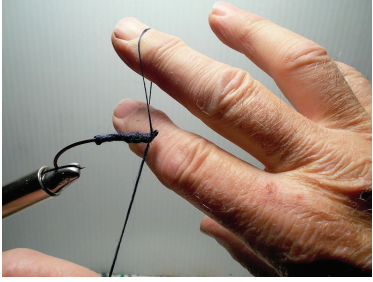


Table 1: Pictures Showing How to Make a Whip Finish by Hand



## Fly 27: The Near Classic Egg and I

Late April can be the start of a magical time on Shuswap Lake. Salmon fry, some years in their millions, begin the long and dangerous trek to the Pacific Ocean. Here is where the classic “Egg



and I” fly can come into its own. Large, marauding rainbow trout love to feed on the racing fry and will sometimes strike a well-placed “Egg and I” fly. The Classic fly is tied with a grey tail and silver body, but I have found equal success using a yellowish tail and a hint of blue in the body. It certainly won’t hurt to have both versions in your fly box, so we will have a look at how I tie my “Egg and I” fly.

### Materials

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- Hook—Medium to long shank size 2 to 8
- Tail – Yellow wood duck
- Body – Underlay blue tinsel, overlay silver clear flashabou, front gold tinsel
- Hackle – Radiant red yarn or chenille as a throat hackle
- Head – Red tying thread
- Wing – Mallard flank feather, optional overlay a few strands of clear crystal hair
- Thread—Fine monofilament and change to red for the head

## Instructions

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Start with a short yellow or gold-dyed wood duck feather for the tail. Next, form the body in three stages, beginning with a wrap of blue tinsel. Overwrap this with clear flashabou, allowing the blue to show underneath. The third step is to make just a few wraps of gold or copper tinsel near the hook eye, so that only a tiny amount is visible in the finished fly. Now tie in a short piece of radiant red yarn or chenille for a short throat hackle. Add a mallard flank feather wing with a flat profile, flowing back just past the tail. You can then add a few strands of clear flashabou or crystal flash as an option. The final step is to create a neat head. I prefer red tying thread, although the classic “Egg and I” usually features a black head. By the way, you should have several of these flies, because if you find a place where those giant rainbows are actively feeding, you will likely need more than one fly!



Trolling on Shuswap Lake; Copper Island distant left

## Fly 30: The Vinson Emerger

A trap shooter acquaintance, Mark Gilbert, has taken many large trout from Vinson Lake, which is located in the high country several kilometers south on the Buck Lake logging road south off the Okanagan



Connector. His favorite method is to wait for a late evening sedge hatch to connect with the large cruising rainbows using a dry fly. On more than one occasion, before the sedges started rising in earnest, Mark noticed another fly fisherman hitting fish after fish just under the surface! Of course, curiosity soon moved Mark to ask, "What are you using?" The successful fisherman did share his secret, and Mark has been good enough to allow me to pass on this information to you! The fly was a small emerger fished slowly just under the surface; a fly that the very large Vinson rainbows gulped with wild abandon! It is also surprisingly easy to tie, as follows.

### Materials

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- Hook – Mustad 3399A size 10
- Tail – None
- Body – Dark green or brown chenille
- Ribbing – Fine silver wire
- Thorax – None
- Hackle – Short blue pheasant rump feather
- Head – Black tying thread
- Wing – None
- Thread – Black

## Instructions

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Attach both the dark chenille and fine silver wire at the hook bend. Wind the chenille to the hook eye and tie off. Follow this with about five turns of the wire, also to the hook eye. Next, create a beard hackle using a short blue pheasant feather with the tips extending back to the hook barb. Complete this very simple but effective fly by forming a head with your black tying thread. Cement, tie off, and you have finished an excellent Vinson Lake Emerger fly!



Vinson Lake, looking southeast