Tying Panfish Flies

Ronald A. Howard Jr.[1]

Objectives
Participating young people and adults will:
1. Practice basic tying skills on simple flies
2. Practice following patterns
3. Practice manipulating thread and materials
4. Gain confidence in their tying ability
5. Have fun while learning.

Youth Development Objectives
Participating young people will develop:
1. Enhanced communication skills
2. Enhanced self confidence and self concept
3. Enhanced motor skills
4. Enhanced ability to interpret and follow directions

Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders
1. Demonstrate and explain tying techniques
2. Assist participants as needed
3. Positively critique flies suggesting improvements
4. Encourage young people as they learn tying skills

Potential Parental Involvement
1. See "Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders" above.
2. Arrange for or provide teaching location
3. Arrange for or provide materials and/or equipment
4. Arrange for or provide transportation
5. Arrange for or provide refreshments.
6. Discuss personal experience in fishing

Best Time: any time, as a first or second lesson

Best Location: well lighted, comfortable setting

Time Required: 60 to 90 minutes

Equipment/Materials
tying vise
hackle pliers
tying bobbin
bobbin threader
dubbing needle
black 6/0 tying thread
head cement
wet fly hooks, sizes 8 and 10
marabou shorts (yellow, chartreuse, black)
soft hackle feathers (black, chartreuse, scarlet)
chenille (black, chartreuse, yellow, scarlet, other colors of choice)
duck or goose quills (white, black, yellow, scarlet)
white bucktail

Safety Considerations
No special considerations

References
See references in introduction

[1] Professor and Extension Specialist, State 4-H Office, 7607 Eastmark Drive, Suite 101, College Station, TX 77843-2473

Evaluation Activities/Suggestions

1. Observe progress with basic tying skills
2. Observe ability to interpret and follow directions
3. Observe personal interactions among participants
4. Note changes in the level of questions being asked

Lesson Outline

Presentation	Application
I. Panfish and learning to fly fish A. Panfish as teachers 1. Abundant in many waters 2. Generally easy to catch 3. Usually not fussy about patterns B. Simple, easily fished patterns	**INTRODUCE** panfish and panfish flies by stressing the fun and availability of the group to anglers. **NOTE** that many possible patterns and colors are used by fly fishermen seeking these fish.
II. Panfish candy A. General pattern 1. Hook: #8 or 10 wet fly 2. Thread: 6/0 3. Tail: two strands of rubber leg material 4. Body: chenille 5. Feelers: optional, rubber leg material 6. Head: lacquered thread	**PASS OUT** the materials needed for the fly being tied as the pattern is being discussed.
B. Variations 1. Simply vary chenille color 2. Proven selections - black, chartreuse, yellow, red, brown	**SHOW** several types of panfish candy in a variety of colors.
C. Tying procedure 1. Clamp hook in vise at bend 2. Attach thread at rear of shank	**DEMONSTRATE** the selected pattern while explaining the processes involved.
3. Bind tail in place a. Fold piece of rubber leg material b. Bind middle in place at rear of shank c. Fold backward and bind in place d. Split tails in a V- shape	**DEMONSTRATE** the process of tying in a strip of rubber leg material and setting it as a forked tail. **NOTE** that considerable pressure is needed to anchor the material firmly because of its flexibility.
4. Attach chenille over tail tie-down area 5. Carry thread forward to shoulder area 6. Bind in loop of rubber leg material at shoulder	**DEMONSTRATE** attaching and winding chenille body without adding feelers or forward legs, then with these attachments. **NOTE** that both versions work.
7. Split antennae with figure 8 wrap 8. Wind chenille forward and bind down at base of head 9. Wind smooth head, whip finish, lacquer	**EMPHASIZE** finding color combinations that work for your area and species.
III. Ron's bluegill bug A. Pattern	**SHOW** a variety of colors that have proven useful for panfish in your area.
1. Hook: 2x or 3x long, size 12 to 8 2. Thread: 6/0 black 3. Tail: short tuft of marabou a. Color to match or contrast with body b. Heavy, clipped to about 3/8 inch	**PASS OUT** and **DISCUSS** the materials that will be used in this pattern, reviewing alternatives and referring to the variety shown earlier.

4. Body: chenille as desired
a. Single color or divided into thirds
b. Color choices unlimited but red, yellow, black, chartreuse, fluorescent pink, fluorescent red, orange, white, brown or variegated all useful
5. Legs: rubber leg material
a. Two back and two forward
b. Color as desired
c. Rear legs about to tail
d. Front legs about 1/2 inch long
6. Head: tying thread, lacquered

B. Tying procedure (chartreuse/black)
1. Clamp hook in vise
2. Attach thread near rear of shank
3. Bind down black marabou clump tail
4. Trim tail to a short brush-like clump
5. Bind in chartreuse chenille over tail area
6. Carry thread about body length
7. Wind rear third of body and bind down
8. Bind in black chenille
9. Attach white rubber leg material
a. Rear pieces reaching to about tail tip
b. Front stretched forward and bound in about - body length forward
c. Front pieces trimmed about head long
10. Wind black chenille forward
a. One turn behind rear legs
b. Second turn over leg tie down area
c. Third turn in front of front legs
11. Bind down black chenille
12. Bind in chartreuse chenille
13. Wind forward to head , bind down and trim
14. Form head, whip finish and lacquer
15. Position legs
a. Gently stretch material to place it
b. Rear legs down and back
c. Front legs to side - horizontal or slightly pitched upward

DEMONSTRATE tying a chartreuse and black pattern with a black marabou tail and round, white rubber legs.

NOTE that a single marabou short can be used for up to about 4 flies since the tails are trimmed to length and kept quite short.

STRESS the challenge of setting up proportions to keep about equal thirds in each band of chenille.

ILLUSTRATE the use of a loop of leg material to attach all four legs at one time. **REINFORCE** the need to stretch the materials slightly to keep them bound in place under tension.

NOTE that winding the mid-section in this manner helps to position the legs for a nicely proportioned fly.

DEMONSTRATE stretching the legs **gently** into place. **NOTE** that excessive pressure can result in broken legs that cannot be repaired at this stage of construction.

IV. Chenille spider
A. Pattern
1. Hook: wet fly, size 12 to 8
2. Thread: 6/0
3. Tail: long, soft hackle fibers
4. Body: chenille (colors as above)
5. Hackle: long, soft (colors as above)
6. Head: tying thread, lacquered

B. Tying procedure (scarlet/black)
1. Attach thread near rear of shank
2. Attach scarlet hackle fiber tail
a. Shank-length or longer
b. Soft hackle fibers

3. Attach black chenille over tail tie down

DISPLAY a few chenille spiders while discussing the basic elements of the pattern.

DEMONSTRATE tying a scarlet and black chenille spider, leaving it in the vise as a model for later comparison.
BIND a small bunch of long, soft scarlet hackle fibers in place as a tail. **EMPHASIZE** keeping the natural points to the rear and keeping things neat.

EMPHASIZE the need to cover the tail tie-down area with the chenille body material.

4. Wind chenille body to shoulder
5. Bind down and trim body material
6. Attach scarlet hackle
   a. Soft (wet fly) hackle
   b. Shiny side toward tier, tip rearward
   c. Fibers about 2-3 times gap width
   d. Two - 3 turns of hackle
7. Bind hackle tip down and trim
8. Sweep hackles backward slightly
   a. Pull fibers backward gently with fingers
   b. Wrap bases with thread to hold angle
9. Form head, whip finish and lacquer

If necessary, **ASSIST** youth in selecting and applying this hackle to their flies. **NOTE** that the hackles used here are extra long and slightly heavy for the pattern's size.

DEMONSTRATE the process of pulling the hackle fibers back at an angle and binding them in place with thread wraps before tying the head.

V. Chenille gnat

COMPARE a completed gnat to the completed spider. **NOTE** that the major difference is the presence of a wing with slightly shorter tail and hackles.

A. Like spider above with wing

B. Pattern
1. Hook: wet fly
2. Thread: 6/0
3. Tail: hackle fibers
4. Body: chenille (colors of choice)
5. Hackle: long, soft (colors of choice)
6. Wing: bucktail (colors of choice)

NOTE that wing quill slips, flank feathers, hackle points or similar materials may also be used for the wings.

C. Tying procedure (black/white)
1. Clamp hook in vise
2. Attach thread at rear of shank
3. Bind in red hackle fiber tail
4. Attach black chenille
5. Carry thread forward to shoulder
6. Wind chenille forward and bind it off
7. Attach black hackle
   a. Wind 1-2 turns
   b. Bind down and trim hackle
   c. Pull back slightly and secure in place
8. Attach white bucktail wing
   a. Select small bunch of white bucktail
      1) Generally about 3 initial amount
      2) Keep somewhat sparse
   b. Trim from skin at base of hairs
   c. Even tips slightly
   d. Hold firmly in place
      1) Natural tips to the rear
      2) Tips reaching to about bend of hook
      3) Keep finger-thumb pressure firm
   e. Bind firmly in place with several wraps
   f. Trim butts of hair at angle
9. Wind head, whip finish and lacquer

DEMONSTRATE a white winged, black chenille gnat, leaving the fly in the vise for comparison purposes.

NOTE that the hackle can be much sparser on this pattern relative to the previous one.

EMPHASIZE keeping hair wings sparse for movement in the water. As a rule of thumb, take what you think you need, reduce it by half, then reduce that by half again for a good wing.

EMPHASIZE keeping the natural tips to the tail of the fly and somewhat even.

DISCUSS and **ILLUSTRATE** other types of wings that can be used on this pattern. **NOTE** that they will be used in later patterns.

DEMONSTRATE proper trimming of the wing material to aid in forming a smooth, tapered head.

D. Variations
1. Tail - scarlet, yellow, chartreuse, black
2. Body - scarlet, yellow chartreuse, white, fluorescent pink, red or orange, variegated
3. Hackle - matching or contrasting colors
4. Wing
   a. Materials - hackle tips, wing quill slips, calf tail, flank feather
   b. Matching or contrasting with hackle and body materials

DISCUSS some of the variations of the pattern that can be used in local waters with examples for examination.

If time and interest permit, allow young people to try tying patterns based on the examples shown.

5. Experiment to see what works!

Summary Activity

If possible give the participants a chance to try their flies on a local body of water with abundant panfish like bluegills, crappies, pumpkinseeds, or similar species. Challenge them to try modifications of their flies on their own to see if they can find something that the fish prefer in their area at that time of year.

Lesson Narrative

Panfish as Teachers

Panfish are marvelous fishes for young people who are learning to fish or make their own lures. They are often abundant, generally easy to catch, and seldom overly fussy about the types of flies they will take. The panfish flies listed in this lesson are relatively simple and easy to make. They are also easy to fish. Perhaps the most difficult thing about them is getting a size that is appropriate to the fish being taken. In general, it is easier to catch bigger fish on small flies that it is to catch smaller fish on large ones (green sunfish crappies may be exceptions). Size 10 or 12 flies will work on small fish and bragging sized ones as well, making small patterns valuable.

Panfish Candy

This pattern is a general one that has many variations. While small hands may find the convenience of a number 8 hook valuable, a size 10 wet fly hook may be more effective once the fly is ready for its real job. The general pattern follows:

Hook: #8 or 10 wet fly
Thread: 6/0
Tail: two strands of rubber leg material
Body: chenille
Feelers: optional, rubber leg material
Head: lacquered thread

Many variations on this pattern are possible. Simply vary the color of the chenille or the rubber leg material. White rubber leg material is usually used, but other colors certainly will work. Black, chartreuse, yellow, olive, red and brown are all proven body colors in one area or another; but nearly any color can be used, including variegated chenille that ties with multiple colors on a single strand.

Tying Panfish Candy

Start tying the fly by clamping a hook in your tying vise, gripping it near the bend and keeping the shank parallel to the work surface. Attach the tying thread near the end of the shank (toward the bend) by using the "open x's" method. Trim away the tag end of the thread and bind in the tail material by laying a piece of rubber leg material (about 2 inches is adequate) along the shank and binding it in place about in the middle of the piece. Holding it tightly in place take several turns to bind it down. Next stretch the forward end gently and wind several more turns over it. Fold that section back, put tension on both tails, and wind back over them to the start of the bend.

Next, bind in a piece of medium chartreuse chenille at the tail tie-down area. Carry the thread forward to the shoulder area and bind in a small loop of rubber leg material to serve as "feelers." Once they are bound in place, stretch them forward gently and bind them in place behind the head area. Then wind the chenille forward, taking on wrap behind the tails (if a wide split is desired) or winding tightly over the tail tie-down area. Wind a smooth body to the head area, and bind the chenille in place. If split "feelers" are desired, take one wrap in front of them to allow for later manipulation. Wind a smooth head, whip finish, and apply a drop of head cement. To flare the tails and antennae, gently tug them into place.

Ron's Bluegill Bug

This is an excellent panfish fly that is attractive to many species. It is tied on 2x to 3x long hooks in sizes from about 12 to 8. The smaller sizes are much easier for fish to inhale, making hook-ups much more likely on each strike. The general pattern for the bluegill bug follows.

Hook: 2x or 3x long, size 12 to 8

Thread: 6/0 black
Tail: short tuft of marabou (color to match or contrast with body, clipped to about d inch)
Body: chenille (solid or banded colors - color selection discussed below)
Legs: rubber leg material
Head: tying thread, lacquered

Color choices can be critical to the fish, but most colors or their combinations can be productive. Solid bodies or combinations of red, yellow, black, white, chartreuse, orange, brown, or fluorescent colors like pink, red, orange, yellow, chartreuse or glow white can be mixed or matched to produce effective flies. Variegated chenille is often very effective. The tail is clipped bluntly to a short, stout tuft, approximately 1/4 inch in length beyond the body. The paired legs are tied in the middle of the body, with the rear legs reaching back to about the tip of the tail and projecting from the sides of the body, and the front legs pointing to the side or even slightly upward and relatively shorter.

Tying the Chartreuse/black Bluegill Bug
Clamp a 2x long, size 12 nymph hook in the vise with the shank parallel to the work surface. Using the normal technique, attach the tying thread to the hook at the rear of the shank. Bind in a small clump of black marabou (a small marabou "short" is about right). Careful use of the short can give the tier about 3-4 tails per feather. Trim the tail to a blunt, brush-like shape, leaving a tag of about 1/8 inch of tail projecting beyond the shank. Attach a piece of medium fluorescent chartreuse chenille at the tail tie-down area and carry the thread forward about 1/3 of the length of the shank. Wind a tight body covering the rear third of the shank, tie off the chenille and trim the end. Bind in a similar length of black chenille and carry the thread forward to the middle of the hook. Using a loop of about 3 inches of round, white rubber leg material, bind in the legs at the middle of the hook. Leave the rear legs projecting a bit beyond the tail and pull the front ones forward gently while securing them in place with additional turns of thread. Wind one turn of black chenille behind the rear legs, one between the front and rear legs, and a third in front of the front legs. Bind off the chenille and trim it before tying in section of fluorescent chartreuse chenille for the front third of the body. Carry the thread forward to just behind the eye, wind the front section of chenille in place, and bind it down. Trim the chenille carefully. Press the materials back from the eye if required before winding a smoothly tapered head, whip finishing the head and covering it with a drop of head cement. If the front or rear legs are still connected in a loop, split the loop. Gently tug on the legs to get them to lie as desired. Your fly will be ready to meet the bluegills as soon as the head cement dries! Red and black, yellow and black, solid black, chartreuse and scarlet, scarlet and yellow, and many other combinations are very effective, depending upon the water conditions and the mood of the fish.

Chenille Spider
The chenille spider is very similar to the soft hackled trout wet flies we will be tying later in the program, like the gray hackle peacock or the teal and orange. The major difference is in the bulkiness of the pattern, based primarily on the use of chenille as a body material. It can be tied in numerous color combinations or monochrome arrangements, but the elements are basically the same in all of them. A general pattern follows.

Hook: wet fly, size 12 to 8
Thread: 6/0
Tail: long, soft hackle fibers
Body: chenille (colors of your choice)
Hackle: long, soft (colors as above)
Head: tying thread, lacquered

For demonstration purposes we will be tying a scarlet/black chenille spider. The pattern is tied from tail to head, so the thread is attached at the rear of the shank on a standard wet fly hook. A small bunch of scarlet hackle fibers are plucked from a feather, held firmly in place and bound down with thread, leaving about a shank-length of fiber beyond the tie-down area. Attach the black chenille (medium or heavy), binding it in place over the tail tie-down area. Carry the thread forward to the shoulder area, and wind the chenille forward smoothly. Bind the chenille in place with several tight turns of thread, trim the end, and take a couple additional turns of thread. Select a soft scarlet hackle with barbs approximately 2-3 times the gap

width of the hook. Prepare the hackle and bind it in place with several tight turns of thread. Carry the thread forward, and wind 2-3 turns of hackle. Catch the tip of the hackle feather and bind the hackle in snugly. Trim the excess hackle away, press the hackle fibers back slightly, and bind them in place with several turns of tying thread. Wind a smoothly tapered head, whip finish and apply head cement.

Chenille Gnat
Chenille gnats are similar to spiders except for the addition of a wing and the use of slightly shorter hackles. They can be tied in numerous blending or contrasting colors, but black, scarlet, chartreuse, yellow, white, olive and brown are all proven. Some tiers like to add a butt of contrasting color or blend two colors to create a bumble bee effect. The wings can be made of many materials, although bucktail is selected in this case for simplicity. Hackle tips, trimmed flank feathers, wing quill slips and other materials may be used in forming wings. A general pattern for this simple fly follows.

Hook: wet fly
Thread: 6/0
Tail: hackle fibers
Body: chenille (colors of choice)
Hackle: long, soft (colors of choice)
Wing: bucktail (colors of choice)

Tying a Black/white Chenille Gnat
Like the other flies in this series, this one is tied from the tail to the head, so the thread is attached at the rear of the shank to start the tie. With the hook clamped securely in the vise, bind in a tail of scarlet hackle fibers. The tail should be about shank length and moderately heavy. Trim the butts of the tail fibers and bind in a piece of black chenille before carrying the thread forward to the shoulder area. Wind the chenille forward evenly to the shoulder, bind it in, and trim the free end. Select and prepare a black hackle feather (wet fly quality) and bind it in at the shoulder. Wind one or two turns of hackle, tie off the hackle and trim away the excess. Pull the hackle fibers back slightly and bind them in place with a couple turns of thread. Select a small bunch of white bucktail. Usually I find that taking half of what seems right, then taking half of that amount yields about the right amount of bucktail. Lift the hair and cut it free from the skin at the base of the hairs. Even the tips slightly, and hold the bundle of hairs firmly in place while binding them tightly in place with 4-6 turns of thread. Lift the butts gently and trim them at an angle, providing a good base for winding and finishing the head. Wind a smooth, evenly tapered head, whip finish and apply a drop of head cement to finish the fly.

Variations of this pattern are almost innumerable. Tails are commonly of scarlet, yellow, chartreuse or black hackle or of the same materials as the hackles. Bodies of scarlet, yellow, chartreuse, white, fluorescent pink, red or orange, olive, brown, tan, or variegated colors can be effective. They can have matching hackle colors, contrasting hackle colors, or colors that blend with the body. Wings may be made of many materials (see above) in matching or contrasting colors. The key is to experiment to see what works in your area at any given time and to make sure you have some flies to meet the demand of the fish.

This simple series taught many basic elements of fly tying that will be expanded upon and reinforced as the program continues.

Exhibit or Sharing Suggestions

1. Prepare a poster, models or photographs to show the steps in tying one of these panfish flies.
2. Study fly fishing books or magazines to see patterns that might be useful for panfish. Share some of your results with others in your group.
3. Prepare a method demonstration on tying one of these patterns and present it appropriately.
4. Prepare a photographic story of tying panfish flies from the beginning of the tying process to using them. Share the story with your friends or in some other setting.
5. Record your experiences with tying and using flies in a tying and fishing journal. Share that journal with others in an appropriate setting.
6. Make a series of flies and fly pattern cards that can be exhibited at a fair or similar gathering.
7. Try variations as suggested or as your mind suggests. Try your patterns on fish and record your results.

Share those results with your group if desired.

Community Service and "Giving Back" Activities

1. Consider ways of helping other young people learn how to tie flies, setting up tying clinics or instructional programs for interested people.
2. Tie a set of flies that can be used as auction items or door prizes in community events or fund raisers.
3. Donate flies to a local fishing program.

Extensions or Ways of Learning More

1. Observe panfish and the foods that they eat on your local waters. Using what you know about tying flies, try to develop a pattern that imitates or suggests a food the fish seem to prefer. Research existing fly patterns to see if someone has developed a fly that does what you want. Modify existing patterns or create your own pattern in an attempt to catch the fish you are seeking.
2. Collect stomach contents from fish you like to catch. Observe the contents of those stomachs and record what you find in a notebook. Determine if their food habits are the same all the time or if they change with the time of day and season. Use references to entomology or other fields to assist in identifying what the fish are eating and attempt to create a seasonal reference to their favorite foods.

3. Observe fish actively feeding on a local stream, pond or lake. By careful study, see what they are eating and how they feed. Do they take everything that is a potential food item, or are they selecting something from a set of food choices? What characteristics seem to determine which food items are taken and which ones are rejected? How can that apply to your fly tying efforts.
4. Observe reactions of fish to your flies. Try different types of retrieves to see if fish behave differently to flies sitting still, slowly sinking, moving slowly, being twitched, or swimming steadily. Speculate on why any observed differences may exist.

Links to Other Programs

The link to the rest of the sportfishing program is obvious. Fly tying is a natural link to fly fishing as well as to crafting other types of tackle. Rod building can be a means of having an excellent fly rod at a lower cost. The feathers, furs and other materials needed by a fly tier can lead to interests in hunting, trapping, waterfowl, poultry science or other seemingly unrelated fields. Understanding aquatic ecology as well as keen observation skills are important to success in both tying and fishing flies. This can provide entry into the sciences, either as a future vocation or as an avocational activity. Fishing flies can lead to an interest in several fields of engineering as well, including materials science. Tying flies can be a great introduction to economics and marketing for young entrepreneurs. Finally, the hobby of tying flies is both craft and art. It can lead into many other areas of activity from writing and photography to science.