

Vince Wilcox's  
**Naturally Artificial  
Signature Flies**



# Vince Wilcox's Naturally Artificial Signature Flies

Learn to Tie the Best Selling, Most Effective Patterns

Vince Wilcox



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# Introduction

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Creating effective, durable flies should be the goal of every fly designer. In this book I've tried to demonstrate how to reach that goal through the combination of natural and synthetic materials. I show you not only how to tie my best Signature flies (most of which have been sold hundreds of thousands of times and fished in forty-nine states and fourteen countries) but also the thought processes that went into creating them. What influenced the creation of the pattern? Why did I choose the materials that I did? How does a given kind synthetic material complement another type of natural material? I discuss how and when to fish them. In addition, I've tried to break each fly down into its most basic steps, so that even a beginning tier will be able to follow along.

Fish have relatively small brains, but what they possess instead of big brains are instincts, and these instincts may be honed so sharply that the fish give the impression that they are intelligent. If you are fishing a high mountain stream where it is rare for fish to be exposed to artificial flies, the fish will be "dumb," or at least cooperative. Now take that same species and place it in a heavily pressured river, and you may have to change your tactics dramatically. Think 15-foot leaders and size 26 midges launched 30 feet back from the bank.

To keep up, tiers have to constantly anticipate hatches and fishing conditions. We have to innovate, show them something new. Hatches may vary from river to river, state to state, or even from run to run, but more often than not what changes most dramatically are the conditioned instincts of the fish. If you have a particular color and size of insect hatching, you

will need to imitate that same color and size to be successful, no matter where in the world you are fishing.

The patterns in this book try to anticipate the instincts of the fish, leading to more hookups. Although I acknowledge the bin appeal of my patterns and am flattered by the anglers who love how they look, they were not made for the angler or the bin. I designed each and every one to catch more fish. After years of experimentation, of trial and error both at the bench and on the stream, these are the patterns I've found to work the best. And they've been tied in the most effective way I know, using a combination of materials. Whether using feathers or fur, foam or flash, I like whatever it takes to do the job.

This book uses a difficulty scale that assigns a rating from one to four stars, but if you're a beginner, please don't be discouraged if a fly has a ★★★★★ ranking. The steps have been laid out so that every level of tier can follow along easily and complete the fly. It just might take more time if you're a beginner. The following are the criteria on which the rating is based.

- Time it takes to complete the pattern.
- Number of materials used to create the pattern. Generally speaking, the fewer the materials, the easier it is to tie. Some materials also require more skill and time to prepare.
- Level of skill required to complete the various techniques.

I included an "estimated time to tie" (ET<sup>3</sup>) feature to give you a better idea of how long

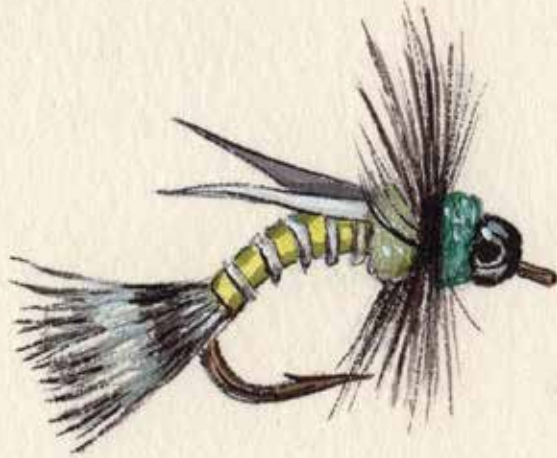
## *Introduction*

each fly will take to complete. After years of teaching and tying these patterns, it seemed helpful to give fly tiers the chance to anticipate their time commitment and to measure themselves against other tiers. Your time can improve rapidly if you tie more than one fly per pattern. I would highly recommend tying at least a half dozen of a given pattern at one sitting, and more if you have the time.

The finished fly does not have to look exactly like the finished pictures to catch fish, but I assure you it doesn't hurt! Take your time to complete each step correctly and don't be afraid to back up a step if need be. Tying the fly correctly the first time will make it easier to repeat the process each succeeding time, and the flies will look better and catch more fish.



# Nymphs



Prince Charming.

Prince Charming



Superman

Superman

# Minute Midge

This is a fast, efficient, and productive fly to tie; the basic rotary vise skills needed for the Minute Midge can lead into more complicated patterns.

**Difficulty:** ★★

**Tier's Choice:** Size 20, Chartreuse

**Season:** All

**Estimated Time to Tie:** Beginner —5 minutes; intermediate—2.5 minutes; expert—1 minute



## Chronic Midge (stillwater version)

**Hook:** Mustad, C53S, sizes 14 to 18

**Bead:** Pearl, glass

**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70

**Tail/shuck:** Pearl, Midge Diamond Braid

**Abdomen:** Black, Midge Diamond Braid

**Wing case:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel

**Gills:** Pearl, Midge Diamond Braid

**Thorax:** Olive brown, Ice Dub



**Hook:** Mustad, C53S, sizes 18 to 24

**Bead:** Rainbow metallic, glass

**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70

**Abdomen:** Bonefish tan, Midge Diamond Braid

**Wing case:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel

**Thorax:** Olive brown, Ice Dub



**Hook:** Mustad, C53S, sizes 18 to 24

**Bead:** Rainbow metallic, glass

**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70

**Abdomen:** Rust, Midge Diamond Braid

**Wing case:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel

**Thorax:** Olive brown, Ice Dub

## Minute Midge



**Hook:** Mustad, C53S, sizes 18 to 24  
**Bead:** Rainbow Metallic, glass  
**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70  
**Abdomen:** Red, Midge Diamond Braid  
**Wing case:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel  
**Thorax:** Olive brown, Ice Dub



**Hook:** Mustad, C53S, sizes 18 to 24  
**Bead:** Rainbow Metallic, glass  
**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70  
**Abdomen:** Fluorescent chartreuse, Midge Diamond Braid  
**Wing case:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel  
**Thorax:** Olive brown, Ice Dub



**Hook:** Mustad, C53S, sizes 18 to 24  
**Bead:** Rainbow Metallic, glass  
**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70  
**Abdomen:** Peacock, Midge Diamond Braid  
**Wing case:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel  
**Thorax:** Olive brown, Ice Dub

As the name would suggest, with a little practice the Minute Midge can be tied in about a minute. Regardless of your skill level, this is one of those flies that you can use to fill a box without having to spend a lot of time or money.

To create the head of the fly, rainbow Metallic glass beads are inexpensive and have a realistic sheen irresistible to trout. When it comes to the body, and because most midges

are very slight in the abdomen, eliminating bulk is important. In addition to an appropriate size and good durability, the product Diamond Braid possesses a reflective property that strongly resembles the natural sheen of the larva, or “gassed-up” pupa, as it swims toward the surface. Diamond Braid is available in a wide array of colors, but underwater light spectrum tests reveal that red is one of the last colors to stay

## *Nymphs*

visible beneath the water. Fuchsia tinsel adds a “pop” of red to the wing case to help fish locate the fly in darker or deeper water while adding to its attractive properties. Ice Dub arrived in shops back in the mid-nineties, and after nearly fifteen years, it is still my first choice of dubbing regardless of fly classification. It has lots of great colors to work with, and adding a pinch of UV pearl to any dubbing blend creates an instant UV effect.

Midge patterns are invaluable in tail waters, but that doesn't mean you should overlook them in freestone streams and lakes. Fish feed on chironomids throughout the season in nearly every situation. What midge larvae lack in size they make up for in volume. Trout eat oodles of them! Fish will feed on midge larvae and pupae during late autumn and winter when few other insects are actively hatching. For tail waters and spring creeks, the Minute Midge will become a year-round producer in your box. Try it with a longer leader and lighter tippet.

When I know the fish are feeding exclusively on midges, I like to fish the Minute Midge in tandem with another midge imitation like the Little Green Machine, Lint Bug, or VW Midge. I'll also trail them behind a larger pattern like Superman, T.N.T., or Prince Charming. It is always surprising how many times the fish will decide

to take the larger fly even when there are no naturals present in those sizes.

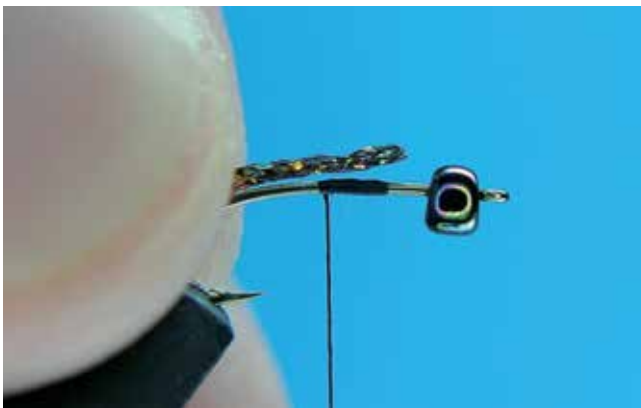
Nearly every good larva pattern can be modified to a pupa imitation by incorporating gills or wing pads into the thorax region. Begin by fishing the pupa version deep, letting it bounce along the bottom. As the hatch progresses and the fish move up in the water column to feed, so should you. Try removing any additional weights you may have previously applied to your tippet and be sure to let the flies swing at the end of the drift, because fish are more likely to target the emerging chironomids at this stage of the hatch. If you have multiple weights on your tippet, begin by removing one at a time, because minor adjustments can mean all the difference when nymph fishing. I can't tell you how many times I have seen the addition or the subtraction of one weight lead to several more fish in the same run.

Sizes of chironomids will vary from season to season, generally growing larger during the warmer summer months. In most cases stillwater chironomids are larger than their river counterparts, so carry them in a few sizes larger—sizes 14 through 18—when fishing ponds and lakes. Some of my favorite colors for every situation are illustrated in this chapter, but don't be afraid to experiment with different colors. After all, the fly takes only a minute to tie!

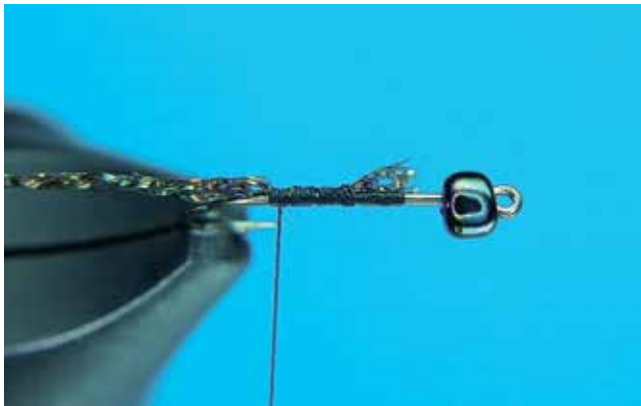
## Minute Midge



1. Start the thread halfway down the shank.



2. Take the braid and pinch it on top of the hook shank so the tag end sticks out just past your thread.



3. Continue to pinch the braid to the hook shank. As you begin wrapping the thread around the shank, the braid will roll to the far side of the hook. Keep the braid parallel to the far side of the shank and continue to tie the braid down the shank. As you reach the area you are pinching, remove your hand from the shank and just hold the braid in the correct position by applying light pressure on the braid toward the rear of the fly.



4. After you reach the halfway point of the bend with your thread, start your way back up the shank and position the thread about a bead's width behind the bead.

## *Nymphs*



5. Using consecutive wraps, bring the braid forward to form the abdomen. When you reach the rear of the thorax area, make several tight wraps of thread to secure the braid.



6. Take your scissors and trim the remaining braid.



7. Grab your tinsel and hold it on top of the hook so that it is at a 45-degree angle to the shank and just behind the bead. It is easier to tie the tinsel in the correct position if you hold it at this angle because it will want to roll to the top of the shank when you begin wrapping the thread.



8. Tie in the tinsel so that the thread is positioned at the rear of the thorax and the tinsel is centered on top of the shank.

## Minute Midge



9. Using a small amount of dubbing, dub your thorax. Use dubbing sparingly and add more if necessary.



10. Take your tinsel and pull it forward so that it's in direct line with the eye of the hook. Make several tight wraps of thread over the tinsel just behind the bead to secure it into position.



11. Trim the remaining tinsel.



12. Make several whip finishes directly behind the bead.

## *Nymphs*

### **Minute Midge Pupa**

Here we will illustrate how to tie the same fly in pupa version. You can turn nearly any midge larva into a pupa by following these simple steps.



1. Follow the steps as if tying a larva until you get to step 8.



2. Now take an even smaller amount of dubbing to form a base for the gills. This light base layer of dubbing will give the braid something to seat into instead of slipping on the thread. As you become more advanced in tying, you will be able to skip this step because you will have better thread control when tying in the gills; the base layer of dubbing won't be necessary.



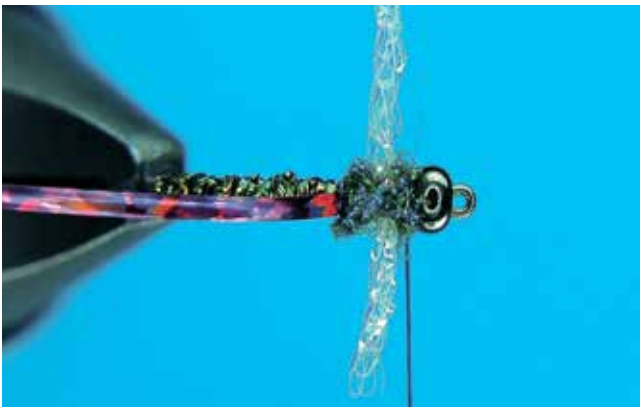
3. Take your pearl braid and hold it at a 45-degree angle in the center of the thorax.



## Minute Midge



4. Tie the gills in by X wrapping, also called figure-8 wrapping, into position in the center of the thorax area. You will want to make about three to four firm X wraps to secure them into position.



5. Take another small pinch of dubbing to cover up the thread wraps made in the previous step.



6. Now take the tinsel and pull it forward so that it is in line with the eye of the hook and make several tight wraps just behind the bead to secure it to the hook.



7. Trim the remaining tinsel and take your small English hackle pliers and clamp them to one of the gills. There should be roughly 2.5 millimeters of braid sticking out beyond the pliers in order to get it to singe correctly.

## Nymphs



8. After the gill is cauterized you may remove the hackle pliers.



9. Clamp the pliers to the gills on the other side of the pupa and use your cauterizing tool to singe the other gill as shown. You can use a lighter or a match as well, although they will not give you as much control as a cauterizing tool. Be careful that your entire fly doesn't go up in smoke!



10. Now the gills are sealed. You can skip this step, but the fly will lose some durability because the gills will tend to fray and disintegrate if they are not cauterized.



11. Remove the pliers and whip finish the fly. See how the gills look like they are glowing when viewed from the side? This is the effect that we are after.

# Lint Bug

A favorite of many anglers and guides throughout the country, this fly started out as pocket lint.

**Difficulty:** ★★

**Tier's Choice:** Size 18

**Seasons:** All

**Estimated Time to Tie:** Beginner—6 minutes; intermediate—3 minutes; expert—2 minutes



## Lint Bug

**Hook:** Mustad C49S, sizes 16 to 20

**Bead:** Black, brass or tungsten

**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70

**Flashback:** Wilcox's Lint Bug Flashback or Pearlescent wing strips

**Rib:** Copper brown, Ultra Wire

**Abdomen:** Lint Bug Dubbing, 75% center hare's mask/25% Ice Dub, UV tan, UV light olive, UV brown

**Thorax:** UV black, Ice Dub



## F.B.I.

**Hook:** Mustad C49S, sizes 16 to 20

**Bead:** Black, brass or tungsten

**Thread:** Black, 8/0 or 70

**Flashback:** Fuchsia holographic tinsel, medium

**Rib:** Copper brown, Ultra Wire

**Abdomen:** Lint Bug Dubbing, 75% center hare's mask/25% Ice Dub, UV tan, UV light olive, UV brown

**Thorax:** UV black, Ice Dub

Studying the half-digested contents of a trout's stomach can lead to some interesting discoveries.

During a conversation with my longtime friend and fishing partner Todd Aringdale, I mentioned that I felt like I could tie a fly using just about anything and still catch fish on it. The gauntlet laid down, Todd offered up his pocket lint. It was a nice shade of denim, with a mix of a few human hairs inlaid in the fibers. I sat at the bench

pondering what exactly I could do with the newly found material.

Fresh off the river, I considered the contents of the stomachs we'd been looking at earlier in the day. I started tying the fly utilizing the pocket lint dubbing. Todd looked on and suggested that I add some "greenish" flash to the back of the fly. "Good idea," I said. I took a strip of pearlescent wing sheeting and ran it down the dorsal side of