

The Clouser Crayfish

by

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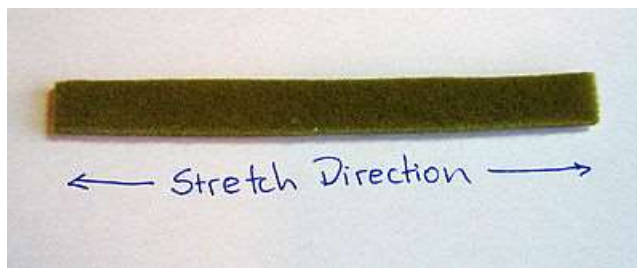
Nearly all Sierra streams and rivers support large populations of crayfish. Since I was a kid, I've had this irresistible urge to turn over rocks in rivers to see what was living under them. Often the first thing to appear from the muddy water was a pair of waving antennae. Here in California, I have often seen crayfish clinging to rocks or strolling among the bottom vegetation, and I've spent my fair share of time chasing them around with my wading staff. While the larger ones would probably be a formidable adversary, smaller crayfish certainly become meals for trout and bass alike.

The most recent issue of Fly Fisherman Magazine (March 2006) ran an article about the "7 Best Crayfish Patterns." Despite the author mentioning that the Clouser Crayfish is "one of my favorites" he doesn't give directions for tying it. In fact, it is surprisingly difficult to locate a the full tying steps for this fly. Because there are a number of tricks involved in putting this fly together, just the recipe of ingredients is inadequate if you want to know how to tie it. I hope this article will remedy this glaring deficiency.

Materials

Hook	Mustad 75980 or 38941, Sizes 4 - 10 (#6 shown)
Thread	Tan 6/0
Weight	Heavy lead wire
Antennae	10 pheasant tail fibers.
Under Body	Antron or poly dubbing in tan or light green. (I use Fly Rite #36 ginger cream.)
Body (shellback)	Olive furry foam strip. Width should be about 1.5 to 1.75 times the hook gape.
Claws/pincers	Mallard flank feather, tinted olive or brown with marking pen.
Hackle (legs)	Grizzly, ginger, or dun hen hackle.
Eyes (optional)	Black beads on #20 mono fishing line.
Weight (optional)	Dumbbell eyes.

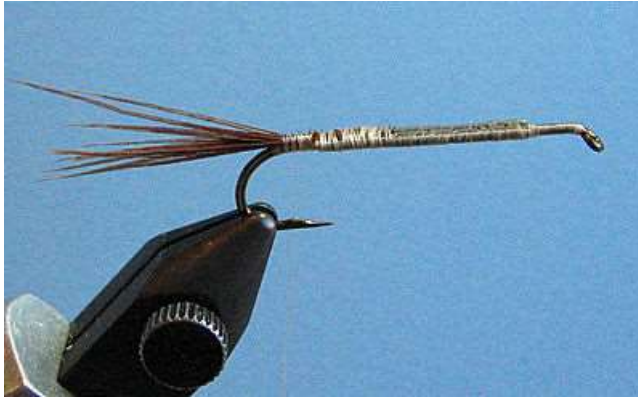
Before moving to the tying instructions, some background. Bob Clouser designed this fly primarily for Susquehanna River smallmouth bass. I actually spent 5 years driving over this river on my way to grad school, never realizing that it was a famous bass river. (I also never realized that the neighboring town of Cortland, source of the eponymous apples, was also *the* home of Cortland flylines. But I digress.) Clouser intended this fly to be fished as a nymph, tumbled along the rocks at the bottom of the stream. By adding dumbbell weights near the hook eye, one can turn it into more of a streamer pattern. I also like to add eyes, although his design had none. An example is the far right fly in the first picture. Both eyes and dumbbell weight are optional and omitting them make for a faster tie.



The only non-conventional material used for this fly is the furry foam. It is a blanket-like material sold in most good fly shops. The one interesting property of furry foam is that it is stretchy in one direction but not the other. Like a rubber band, when a strip of furry foam is stretched, it gets thinner. Hence, by controlling the tension on the strip of foam, one is able to create tapers such as the tail of the crayfish.

One last convention before we start with the instructions. Because this fly is tied facing backwards, the "head" of the fly is the side towards the hook bend. The "tail" of the fly is the end towards the hook eye.

Tying Instructions



1. Attach lead wire on either side of the hook shank, starting about where the barb would be (pushed down in this picture) and leaving at least a two hook eye gap at the hook eye end. This provides a nice flat surface to attach materials and provides weight.
2. Tie the pheasant tail fibers antennae over the curve of the hook. The fibers should be about the length of the hook shank.



3. If you wish, attach the eyes. The original design was eyeless. The eyes shown here are black beads strung on 20 lb mono fishing line, which is then melted to create a plug to hold the bead captive.



4. The furry foam strip should be about 1.5 to 1.75 times the width of the hook gape. Tie the strip with the loose end pointing towards the head (and hook bend) of the crayfish. It should be secured right behind the eyes.



5. Dub a robust ball for the body/head of the crayfish just behind the head and eyes.



6. Prepare two mallard flank feathers by cutting out the tips. Since we will only use about half of the fibers on each feather, bend back the bottom fibers (in this picture, the fibers to the right), then stack the two feathers on top of each other.



7. Tip: this is the wrong way to position the mallard flank feathers. The typical defensive claw position of a real crayfish is above the crayfish's body. If we tied-in the feathers the way they are positioned in this picture, they will droop down.



8. Ahh, that's much better. The notch of the feather is placed on top of the dubbing ball. Using your left hand, sweep the feather fibers straight back (towards the head of the crayfish) and tie in.



9. Here's what it looks like done correctly. Notice that the claws sweep up. By adding wraps up the dubbing ball you can control how high they point.



10. After trimming the unwanted part of the mallard flank feathers, dub over the point where the claws are attached.



11. Pull the furry foam over the dubbing ball and claws and tie in. It's starting to look like a crayfish already!



- 12. Pull the furry foam back over the head and wrap it down so the tag end is again positioned over the head as shown in the photo.
- 13. Attach the hackle feather on this little furry foam "step" that you just created.
- 14. Wrap your thread to the eye of the hook as shown.



- 15. Dub a tapered tail from the eye of the hook towards the head of the crayfish. You want your thread to end up back at your hackle tie in point, as shown in this photo.



16. Once you are satisfied with your dubbed tail, use a pair of hackle pliers to wind the hackle up to the hook eye. Allow the weight of the pliers to suspend and hold the unattached hackle in position while you work on the rest of the fly. Since the furry foam will eventually be stretched over the top of the tail, trim off the top hackle fibers. Notice that the thread is still even with the end of the furry foam.
17. This is probably the most difficult step to describe. You want to create three segments in the tail. To start, take one wrap of your thread around the tail with the furry foam still over the head. Then pull the furry foam down over the tail and make two pinch wraps with the thread. Then lift the furry foam up, make another wrap further towards the eye, lower the foam, and make another two pinch wraps. As you progress towards the hook eye, stretch the furry foam progressively tighter so it tapers.



18. Here we've made it to the third and final pinch wrap. Notice the taper in the tail.



19. Finally, whip finish and cut off the thread. Take the fly out of the vise and draw the furry foam down and around the hook eye. Rubbing the furry foam just over the eye of the hook with your thumb nail, you can work the hook eye through the matrix holding the furry foam together. Trim the tag end of the furry foam straight and cut off the corners to round out the tail shape. Finished!

As I mentioned earlier, if you intend to fish this as a streamer, you might want to add dumbbell weights under the tail flipper. (See the far left fly in the first picture.) Also, Clouser suggests adding a bit of styrofoam under the furry foam head to make it buoyant and ride right-side up. Finally, I haven't tried this yet, but using a turned-up-eye hook like a salmon hook would also help it ride upright when stripped in.

Good luck with this fly. It is perfect for dredging through those deep and mysterious pools that most fly fishers skip.

— Rodney