

Midge Fishing Techniques

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I use a specific midge leader-tippet arrangement for each fishing locale (My experiences include RR, Taneycomo, Bennett Springs, Montauk, White River, San Juan in New Mexico, North Platte in Wyoming). Later, I will describe my process at Roaring River in detail. At Bennett Springs, the water is clearer and I use smaller final tippet and many times I go from 4 lb mono to 6X below the indicator depending on depth of fish. Taneycomo midge fishing involves most often not seeing the fish and I start out with 4 lb Seaguar as my final tippet. If 4lb works, I stay with it. If the Taney fish are midging and I have no strikes on 4 lb fluorocarbon Seaguar, I put on 5.5 or 6X Trout Hunter until I find the midge that works. I like to use 4lb Fluorocarbon at Taney because of the potential of hooking bigger fish. Tungsten beads are preferred to get the midge into the feeding lanes. 95% of the time, I begin with the Harvester midge size 20 or 22. If not productive, I try Primrose and Pearl (P&P), Ruby Red, and then back to variations of the Harvester currently not named.

Five considerations to properly present small tungsten bead midges.

1. A floating fly line and mono tapered leader are required. Fly line floatant should be applied to fly line and butt section of the leader if line and leader fails to float. Cleaning fly line and leader before your next fishing trip generally solves the floating issue.
2. Use fluorocarbon tippet.
3. There must be a little downstream water flow. At Taneycomo, If the turbines are off and the wind is out of the East, go home or fish something other than midges. In slack pools where the movement as little as 1 foot per 10-30 seconds, you can create strikes. Very slow water flow provides the opportunity to 'twitch' the indicator to move the midge about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Usually by the third or fourth 'twitch' you have a strike when you have a midge match.
4. Fast water may require 'high sticking' such that no leader is floating on the water. If the fast water proves to be reproductive, you may need to re-tie the leader-tippet to get the midge into feeding lanes.
5. Experiment adjusting the midge's depth. Styrofoam balls with a toothpick allow for adjustment. Sometimes, 6 inches up or down will generate more strikes. The indicator size must be large enough to see and not to big make resistance to the take. Toothpick size also matters. Large toothpicks will split the indicator. You may need to use a small $\frac{1}{16}$ th drill bit to enlarge the hole to fit the thinner Great Value toothpicks. Indicator color is not an issue.



Tippet Material

I carry 8 spools in this arrangement, monofilament 6lb and 4lb, fluorocarbon 6 lb, 4 lb, Trout Hunter 5X, 5.5X, 6X. I arrange all spools such that the tippet comes off in the same direction, but I'm left handed.



Use a Dremel tool to remove any of the excess plastic manufactures use to “allow their spools to snap together” so different brands of spools slide together and spin easily. I prefer Rio spools because they are larger spools, tippet comes off with fewer curls. Their tippet retainer elastic band has a little brass rivet with a hole that allows the tippet to be removed easily. If I pull out too much tippet, I can spin the spool backward and put the tippet back on the spool.

Building the Leader

Six steps to making midge leaders in lengths of 9 ft to 18ft

Use an 18 ft leader in lower section of Roaring River while standing on the high bank. Also with sunny calm conditions at Taneycomo, White River at Wildcat Shoals, and below Navajo Dam in New Mexico.

Step 1. Purchase any inexpensive monofilament tapered leader ending in 4X or 5X and cut off the perfection loop. Attach the butt end to fly the line with a nail knot. Apply UV knot sealer to the nail knot. This allows knot passage through the smallest eyelet. When netting a fish with an 18 ft leader, you will reel most of the fly line onto the reel. The nail knot goes smoothly through the eyelets as the line goes on and off the reel. When a new leader is needed, cut back the fly line until all cracks are eliminated. You may lose 3-4 inches of fly line. The plastic coating on the fly line will crack above the nail knot and the fly line sinks.

Step 2. At the other end of the tapered leader, cut back to about 6 lb mono for the end of the tapered leader. Add as much 4 lb monofilament line needed to make the leader as long as required for the location or add as much 4 lb monofilament line as you are comfortable casting. You should make the leader to the indicator at least 9 ft and sometimes up to 18 ft. At the end of the 4 lb monofilament extension, attach 4-pound fluorocarbon with the surgeon's knot. This tapered leader mono/fluoro surgeon's knot will be the location of the indicator. The midge can be presented many times in the same water without alarming the fish providing the fly line does not go over the fish. Cast 5-10 ft above a fish or school of fish and let the midge naturally drift over the fish or school. Allow the midge to drift past the fish or through the school and retrieve only after water drag appears to be diverting the natural drift. Continue covering more water by casting farther across and upstream. The feeding depth of the fish determines the fluorocarbon tippet to midge length. Secure the surgeon knot with UV glue. Four-pound fluorocarbon cut at a diagonal can fit through a size 20 tungsten bead midge. Four-pound tippet is appropriate when the water is a little dingy, or a windy day with waves on top of water, cloudy, etc. If the day is sunny, no wind, clear water, use a 6X tippet. I prefer Seaguar as my terminal 4 lb fluorocarbon tippet. If I have success with 4 lb. tippet, I do not fish a smaller tippet. Watch the fish and if they turn off at the last second, try 6X tippet. If the fish continue to ‘turn off’ before the strike, change midges

and/or tie on a 7X tippet until you find a winning midge. Use the Pitzen knot to attach the midge to the fluorocarbon tippet. Discard leader/tippet in a "tippet saver". The leader is deadly to wildlife. Adding two "7/16th" nuts to the stem improves handling with wet fingers.



I use Dr. Slick 'extra hand tweezers' to hold small midges for tying.

Step 3. Generally, fish will move very little (less than 1 or 2 ft) to take a midge because the meal is so small. On occasion, fish travel 3-6 ft to take the midge. The indicator immediately goes under as the fish returns to its feeding lane. The fish generally sip in the midge, which gives a little "blip" on the indicator. Erratic fish behavior is also an indication that the midge may have been taken.

Step 4. Set the hook by gently but quickly raising the rod tip such that the midge only moves 1 or 2 inches. This reduces break off. While fish are 'midging' and you have a midge match, you will have 2 or 3 times as many strikes as netted fish. Test your drag from time to time to assure your drag is set light. Have all the line on the reel and be ready for a strike. When you detect a strike, set the hook by raising the rod up and over your head. The reel drag will 'whine' and the line tension should be light enough to have a hook set and the tippet does not break. Leave the drag set light. To put pressure on the fish, move the fly rod from vertical to near horizontal right or left to weaken the fish. I play the fish with the rod and reel without touching the line. When a run occurs, return the rod to a low vertical position (45 to 60 degrees) to reduce tippet pressure. Continue the change from vertical to horizontal as you recover line and play the fish. One of your goals is to never leave a midge in a fish. Always take the barb off all midge hooks, even size 20 to 26. You can purchase flat surface curved pliers at Harbor Freight for about \$2.00.



Step 5. Releasing the fish. The preferred net is rubber mesh. Often you can release the fish from a rubber net without touching the fish (barbless hook). Generally, the midge hook will catch the fish by hooking the top jaw lip. Allow the fish a few seconds to swim around in the net or arrange the fish with head against the rubber net and move the net back and forth. Often the midge will pop out and the fish can be released without being touched. If the midge does not pop out, I pull the tippet until I can see the midge and try again. I touchless release midge caught fish 65% of the time.

Step 6. If you see fish 'midging' and cannot match the midge, try a Griffith's gnat dry fly. It will be successful if the fish are looking up taking midges off the water surface. Re-tie your leader with 24 inches mono to within about 12 inches of the gnat, then use 6X fluorocarbon to the gnat. Generally, this small amount of fluorocarbon will not sink the gnat.

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