

Magic Skwala



I spend quite a bit of time tying flies. I tie everything from “the old standby’s” to innovative patterns I have found from other tiers on the web and in literature, to my own creations. I have always enjoyed tying and entomology, and now it has become somewhat of an obsession. We have all heard of “gear-heads”, fly-fishers who collect countless rods, reels, and lines to cover any fly-fishing situation imaginable. Well, I am a “material head”, and I collect every book, tool, and material to help me create any fly imaginable. And unfortunately I am a “gear head” as well, which has been a hot topic in my household.

One of the best quotes I have ever heard regarding fly tying came from one of my mentors growing up: he said “Tying flies is a great way to be on the water when you can’t actually be on the water.” At 16, this didn’t make much sense to me, but now at 33, the more I think about it, the more this hits home. We can’t fish everyday. Whether it’s the “honey-do” list, the kids sporting events, the river being blown out, or it’s closed for the season in the regulations, there’s always something that prevents us from getting out on the water every-day. But, we can usually find at least an hour or so to sit down at the vice on any given day; tie a couple bugs, maybe crack a beer to get the creative juices flowing, and unwind in the thought that at some time in the near future, you will be casting that fly you are tying to whatever species you are chasing. Hey, it’s got to be better than watching some of the reality TV shows out these days, right?

As a Guide on the Yakima, I use my winter (non-guiding) season to tie flies for my clients. Yeah, the store-bought Purple Chubby works great for the first couple days of the Skwala hatch, but once the hatch really gets going, and the fish are seeing a couple dozen Purple Chubby’s a day, maybe that Chubby loses it’s...well...Chubby. We always say you catch the biggest fish on the first few days of the hatch, and I would suspect that might have something to do with those larger fish learning their lesson quickly, maybe repeating to themselves in Troutenese “Don’t eat the Purple Chubby, Don’t eat the Purple Chubby...” At this point, these larger trout pass on that Chubby and let the smaller guys begin their learning process. But you know those larger trout can’t resist the real thing, so why not present something that looks and moves a little more realistic.

The fly pictured above is one of my creation’s to suggest something more realistic, dubbed the “Magic Skwala” by Joe Rotter himself, and here I am sharing this “Guide Fly” with all of our Red’s fly tiers. The fly was designed to mimic the colors, silhouette, and action of the natural insect closely. Not only does it look fairly realistic, but it also has great fishing characteristics: foam for floatation and visibility, Silicone Legs that don’t dry and crack in the sun, Bright Yellow Dubbing on the Ventral side of the Thoracic Region (just a little entomology lingo for fun!) that matches many adult Skwalas, and more. Does it fish, you ask? You bet, this fly has brought some of my largest trout to hand in the month of March. Below you will find the step-by-step tying procedures, along with the recipe, so tie some up and let us know how they work. If you’re not into tying but interested in fishing them, then book a trip with me and you can fish them all day long for free, haha!

Magic Skwala Recipe:

Hook: Tiemco 2312 #8-#10 (or similar)
Thread: Olive 6/0
Egg Sac: Black 2.0mm Foam
Tails: Grizzly Dyed Olive Neck Hackle Quill (Hackle Fibers stripped From Quill)
Ribbing: X-Small Gold Wire
Body: Olive Dubbing to match natural
Ribbing Hackle: Grizzly Dyed Olive
Underwing: No-Fray Wing Material—Dark Gray
Overwing: Elk Hair Dyed Gray
Bullethead/Overwing: Elk Hair Dyed Golden Brown
Thorax Hackle: Black
Thorax Dubbing: Yellow
Indicator: White 2.0mm Foam
Legs: MFC Speckled Sexi-Legs—Yellow
Antennae: Same as Tail

Step-By-Step Tying Procedure



1) Pinch the barb of your hook down. Attach the thread to the hook, and advance the thread backwards towards the gape of the hook. When you let the thread hang by the bobbin, it should be meet the tip of the barb of the hook (you should still be able to see this even though it is pinched). Tie in one 1/8" wide by 3/4" long section of 2.0mm Black foam extending off the back of the hook.

Tip: Create a triangle shape (^) at the end of the foam where you tie in to keep the bulk at the tie in area down.



2) Fold the foam over and tie in at the same point it was originally tied in. This creates the Egg Sac. Tie in one Stripped Hackle quill on each side of the hook. The quills should taper from thick to thin heading off the back of the hook. Save these quills ends, as you can use the thinner part for the antennae. Wrap the thread over the quills up about 2/3rds of the hook shank. Cut off the quills, and cover the cut ends with your thread.

Tip: When tying in the quills, try and get each quill to line up with the slits created by folding the foam over.



3) Tie in the Gold Wire for the ribbing, starting at the cut ends of the quills, and wrapping back to the foam Egg Sac. Leave the wire hanging off the back of the hook, and dub a smooth, fairly thick body back up to the 2/3rds point where the quills were cut off.

Tip: The Wire will be used as both a ribbing, and to secure the palmered body hackle.



4) Tie in the Grizzly dyed Olive Body Hackle for palmering at the front of the dubbed body. Make sure the natural curve of the hackle fibers is facing towards the rear of the hook.

Tip: Prepare your hackle before you tie it in: Strip off the fluff and hackle fibers towards the base of the feather to give you a clean piece of quill to secure to the hook.



5) Palmer the hackle back to the Egg Sac over the dubbed body, and use the wire to secure the hackle at the Egg Sac. Continue securing the hackle by ribbing with the wire up to the end of the dubbed body and secure with thread. Cut off the excess wire and wrap over the cut end. Also, cut the hackle tip off near the Egg Sac.

Tip: Wiggle the wire slowly, sided to side, as you are ribbing to reduce the amount of hackle you trap.



6) Tie in the Underwing. The material should be cut about 3/4 inch long, and about 3/16" wide. Create a "wing shape" (fingernail shape) at the end of the wing that will extend over the Egg Sac. Cut a tapered "V" in the other end to reduce thread buildup when tying in.

Tip: The wing will stand up at this point, but don't worry. Once the Overwings are put in place it will lay down nicely over the body.



7) Select a good clump of Elk Hair Dyed Gray and even the ends in a hair stacker, tips down. Tie in directly in front of the body, natural tips facing towards the back of the hook, and over the top of the Underwing. Once secured, make sure to use tight wraps so the hair won't roll on the hook shank.

Tip: Make sure to remove any underfur, as it will prevent good, even stacking.



8) Once the Gray hair is secured tightly to the hook shank, cut the excess off and cover with thread. Select a good clump of Elk Hair Dyed Golden Brown and even the ends in a hair stacker, tips down. Tie the elk hair in so that the natural tips extend over the eye of the hook. Make sure to wrap the thread over the hair all the way up to the eye, and tight to the eye.

Tip: The length of the bullethead hair should be measured as the same length as the overwing hair from the tie in point that the overwing hair was tied in at.



9) Cover the ends of the Bullethead hair with thread about 1/2 way back to the wing, and cut off the excess. Cover the thorax with thread to make a somewhat smooth thorax area. Tie in the Black Hackle (concave towards rear of hook) next to the Bullethead hair at the front of the hook.



10) Dub the thorax, using Yellow Dubbing, starting towards the eye of the hook, and wrapping back towards the wing. You want to end with the thread next to the wing and body.

Tip: It's OK to take a couple wraps of dubbing in front of the hackle, in order to make sure the entire thorax area is covered.



11) Palmer the Thorax Hackle, using 3 turns, back towards the wing, and tie in with the thread. Cut off the excess hackle feather, and take a couple more wraps over the cut end with the thread.

Tip: Don't worry about the olive thread showing between the thorax and the body. We will cover this up later.



12) Pull the Golden Brown Elk Hair back over the thorax to create a bullet head. Tie in the bullethead at the juncture between the thorax and the wing.

Tip: Make sure to pull the bullethead hair down as tightly as possible, simultaneously being aware of trapping black hackle fibers.



13) Tie in a 1/8th inch wide, 1/4 inch long piece of white 2.0mm foam on top of the same area the bullethead was tied in. Secure with a couple of tight wraps.

Tip: When in doubt, leave indicator foam a little longer than necessary. It's cheap, and it makes it much easier to cut to the desired length once it's tied on.



14) Tie in the Sexi-Legs on both sides of the fly at the same point that the foam was tied in. When looking down on top of the fly, the legs should create an X. You only need to use a couple of tight wraps on each leg to keep the thread bulk down.

Tip: Leave the legs long, you can always trim to your desired length later.



15) Finally, tie in the antennae (stripped hackle quills saved from Step 2) just above the legs on each side of the body. Cut off the excess, trim to length, and apply a small amount of Yellow dubbing to the thread. Cover the area between the thorax and body that is now olive thread with the yellow dubbing. Whip finish erring towards the body, and cut the thread. Trim all appendages to the desired length, and the fly is complete.

Tip: Wiggle the wire slowly, sided to side, as you are ribbing to reduce the amount of hackle you trap.

The finished “Magic Skwala” compared to the real thing.

