

Fishing the Olive Caddis Emerger

by Carl Haensel

One of the most versatile flies in my vest has always been an olive caddis emerger pattern. From Montana to Costa Rica, variations of this fly have caught more trout for me than many other flies combined. Why is this? First, it's versatility. You can use this fly as a wet fly, a trailer for a dry fly and as a nymph. Second, it does a great job at imitating an emerging caddis pupa, but can double as many other things when needed.

To figure out how best to fish this fly, let us start by examining a caddis emerger. Caddisflies are true flies, and go through a four-step life cycle: egg, larva, pupa and adult. While most anglers are familiar with the moth-like caddisfly adult and possibly the small larva,



This fat brown trout from Spring Creek, Centre County, was fooled by an olive caddis emerger fished through the top of a run.

there is another step in the cycle. As the larva grows, it forms a protective casing around itself. Then, it spends a period of time as a pupa, changing into an adult caddisfly. When the caddis pupa exits the protective casing and races to the surface to fly off as an adult, we call it an emerger.

When the caddis emerger moves toward the surface, it is a jumble of expanding wings, legs, antennae and the trailing casing, called a shuck. This period of rapid change is what we take advantage of as fly

anglers. Since each caddisfly emerger may look slightly different from others emerging at the same time, trout are much more likely to not be picky when they see something that looks more or less like what they've been eating. Thus, matching the hatch does not need to be as exact a science when fishing emerger patterns. Similarly, since the caddis emerger may be found near the bottom, middle or top of the water column, trout are likely to take it wherever they find it. This is what gives the angler the ability to fish this fly in surface film, along the bottom or anywhere in between.

Once you've got the science of the situation figured out, it's time to start casting. As in any good hatch, an active caddisfly hatch will draw some of the biggest trout in a stream to the surface. They will take the prime feeding spots as well, so target areas near the top of a run, where the riffle dumps in. Caddisfly larva and pupa are very common in shallow, swift water, and areas just downstream are good bets to find feeding fish. Start by using your olive caddis emerger as a trailing fly about two feet behind a dry fly. This works best with an unweighted version. Make sure you try skittering or bouncing your flies along the surface of the water at both the beginning and the end of your drift. This works especially well when using an emerger pattern since naturals are often actively moving near the water's surface, trying to lose their pupal shuck or casing. If this doesn't bring the fish up, casting a weighted caddis emerger and fishing it on a swing like a wet fly will often bring strikes when you least suspect them.

I noted that this fly does a decent job of imitating things it's not intended to, and that is one of its greatest attributes. I've frequently used it as an emerger pattern during mayfly hatches and had excellent success, and I've fished it when adult caddis are laying eggs and have similarly been pleased with the results. If you're low on nymphs and nothing else is working, try using the olive caddis emerger as a trailer on your normal nymph rig. Caddisflies are active throughout the trout season, so regardless of the situation, keep a variety of olive caddis emergers in your vest. You'll rarely be disappointed. ☐