

LBL – Little Black Leech

Sunriver Angler's Fly Tying Corner

By: Phil Fischer



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I first learned about fishing leeches in Idaho's Henry's Lake some years ago. I had just bought a brand new Bucks Bag donut float tube and I was eager to try it out. I launched it near the Staley Springs Boat launch and kicked out past the weed line and started fishing. It was a pretty warm day and fishing was slow, almost to a point where the process of casting and stripping my Halloween leech, a Henry's Lake standby, put me into a trance. After an hour of gently kicking my way over to the Stump Hole and almost napping, I was suddenly jolted awake with an aggressive strike. I lifted the rod and nothing. Wide awake now, I cast to the same general area, and the second time this fish didn't miss. After playing it to net, I lifted the fish onto the 22 inch measuring gauge on my tube and the tail flopped 2 inches past the last mark. A 24 inch Cuttbow from Henry's Lake! This was the largest fish I had ever caught in my life. And I caught it on a leech in my new float tube. That evening back at the Elk Creek Ranch I confronted the fly shop owner who sold me this float tube. In a loud voice I said, "That tube you sold me is defective". Defensively Andy said "what?" "Several other fishermen overheard the conversation and moved

in closer to hear what was wrong with my new tube. I repeated, “That float tube you sold me is defective. The measurement gauge on the stripping platform only goes to 22 inches. It is not big enough!” Well Andy got a hearty laugh when he realized that meant I had caught a big fish on the maiden voyage in my new tube. Time and time again since that day on Henry’s Lake I have used a favorite leech pattern as the first fly of the day.

Leeches are an important food source in many lakes, including those in Central Oregon. They swim in an undulating motion through the water. And trout love them. Most are about 1-3 inches long and the color varies from tan to olive, brown, rust and black, most often taking on the color of their environment. Leeches are good swimmers, so a moderate to fast retrieve is often the ticket. I like to take 6” strips, with pauses periodically on an intermediate line. Most of the leech patterns I tie are lightly weighted in the front of the fly to help the fly rise and fall while being stripped, imitating the snakelike swimming motion of the natural. I often put just a touch of flash in the tail that helps draw attention to the fly. Depth is usually pretty important. So a good practice is to cast, pause and count to ten to let the fly sink before stripping it back. If that doesn’t draw a strike, let the fly sink deeper on the next cast with a count to fifteen. Keep adjusting until you find the preferred depth for the fish that day.

One of the patterns that I turn to regularly is the subject of this month’s article, the LBL, or Little Black Leech. The LBL is simple to tie, yet effective in a wide variety of lake situations. I used a red glass bead at the head, and wrapped about 4-5 wraps of lead behind the bead to help lightly weight the fly. I also use a short shank Daiichi 1530 hook in size 10. While leeches are long and skinny while swimming, by using the shorter shank hook I have more gape to help hook fish versus a longer shank size 12 or 14. The fly ends up being about the same size as on a smaller hook, but the wider gape of a size 10 is much more effective in hooking fish. I also tie similar patterns including an Olive, Brown, and Tan Leech, and a variety of shades and colors in between to make sure I cover the spectrum of leeches encountered in our local lakes. I blend most of my own dubbing so I can come up with many different shades to match the natural as needed.

LBL – Little Black Leech Pattern Recipe:

Hook:	Daiichi 1530 size 8-12 hook
Thread:	Black Danville 70 Denier (6/0)
Bead:	7/64” Metallic Red Glass, Brass or Tungsten Bead to match desired sink rate
Tail:	Black Marabou with 3-4 strands of red Krystal Flash or similar
Body:	Black Simi-Seal (75%) blended with Red Trilobal dubbing (25%)

Tying Instructions:

1. Place the glass bead on the hook. Lock it in place at the eye of the hook with 3-4 wraps of .015 gauge lead wire.
2. Trim a clump of marabou fibers off the stem of the feather and tie in right behind the lead wire and back to the tail set position. The tail should extend about 1 ½-2 times the length of the hook.

3. Tie in 3-4 strands of red Krystal Flash to extend the length of the tail on both sides of the hook.
4. Blend the dubbing using a blade type coffee grinder to blend the fibers together. Spin a sparse amount of dubbing onto the thread leaving the fibers loose so they will flare while winding from the tail set position on the hook to the head of the fly. Use a bodkin or dubbing needle to tease a few of the fibers out of the dubbed body. Alternatively, spin the fibers into a dubbing loop and wind it forward from the tail set position to the head.
5. Whip finish and lightly glue the head.