

## AZTEC LEECH



By Dick Nelson

(Photography and text to fit this format by Bob Bates)

Most of you know that Dick Nelson passed away several years ago. His son Bill Nelson tied this Dick Nelson pattern at the 2010 FFF Fly Fishing Fair and Conclave in West Yellowstone, MT. Much of the information in this article is taken from Dick Nelson's tying notes which Bill passed out during the demonstration. A link to a pdf copy of Dick's tying instructions is given in the closing comments.

Dick was an innovative and skilled fly tier and teacher. In 1987 he received the **Buz Buszek Memorial Award** which is the highest fly tying award the FFF gives. Then in 1997 he received the **Charles Brooks Award**. In 2000 the **Dick Nelson Fly Tying Teaching Award** was instituted in his honor. The award is presented to an individual who excels in teaching the art of fly tying to tiers at all skill levels. Further evidence of his creditability was the crowds around his tying table at Conclaves and other shows.

Dick began tying this pattern in about 1989 to imitate annelids, or segmented worms. "Annelids, or Segmented Worms, are distributed worldwide and form an important part in the diet of fish."

"One of the three classes is the Earthworms, which includes the Bloodworms, e.g., the San Juan Worm. The common earthworm has been well known to fly fishers for centuries as *garden hackle*, a bit of which attached to the hook point, though not according to Hoyle, does increase a fly's attractiveness."

"Another class is the Leeches, which has about 500 species that range in length from 5 mm to 4 ½ inches. Leeches are underappreciated by most fly fishers. They are present in most lakes and streams and are available throughout the year."

“Leeches elongate their bodies when swimming and their rear ends seem to act like a tail. Two- to three-inch long black, brown, and olive Aztec Leeches are the most popular.”

“After tying the Leech to your tippet, immerse it and squeeze out the air bubbles to thoroughly wet it. Then it will penetrate the surface film upon touching down and go to work immediately. When fished with an approximately one-inch long, slow, strip-pause-strip retrieve, the Aztec Leech will undulate through the water just as the natural does. The retrieve should not be erratic, but smooth and steady.”

Most anglers use full sinking lines to take the fly to where many of the leeches live.

As you read these tying steps and Dick’s tying instructions you will realize that he tied a very tough fly. It will be lost on a big fish before it is shredded.

**Materials list:**

**Hook:** Mustad 7957B (1XL, Regular wire, TDTE, round bend, forged, bronzed), Size 6. (This hook model is no longer available. Alternatives: Daiichi 1560; Mustad, 3906B; Tiemco TMC 3761)

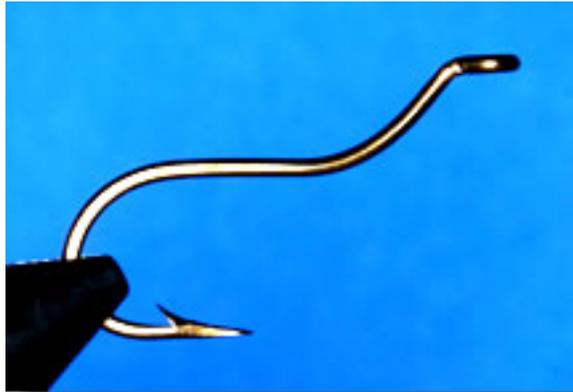
**Thread:** 3/0 or 6/0, Color compatible with yarn

**Weight:** Lead wire, same diameter as hook shank, 1 inch

**Body:** Acrylic knitting yarn, heavyweight, 4-ply (knitting worsted weight). Color of choice

**Head:** Thread

## Tying steps:



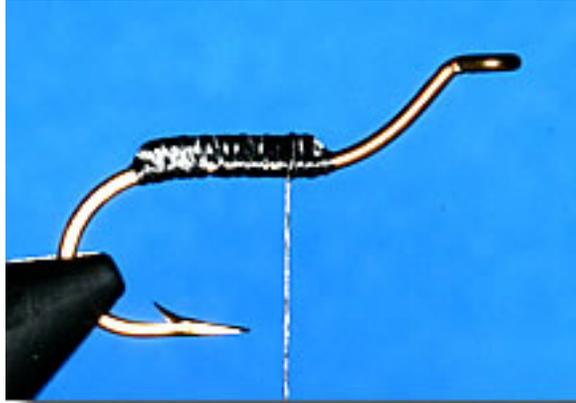
1. Two things need to be done before tying begins. The hook needs to be bent by using two narrow jaw pliers. Grasp behind the eye with one pair of pliers, and with the other pair facing in the opposite direction grasp behind mid shank. Then by twisting both toward each other the force is spread out and the hook bends. Bend the shank until the eye is approximately parallel to the shank. Making a sharp bend by putting the hook in a vise will usually break it.

Second cut three pieces of yarn. For a size 6 fly the lengths are: 1-inch (tail support), 2-1/2 inches (tail) and 5 inches (body). Remove one ply from the two longest pieces.

If you want barbless flies, smash down the barb with smooth jaw pliers before you start tying.



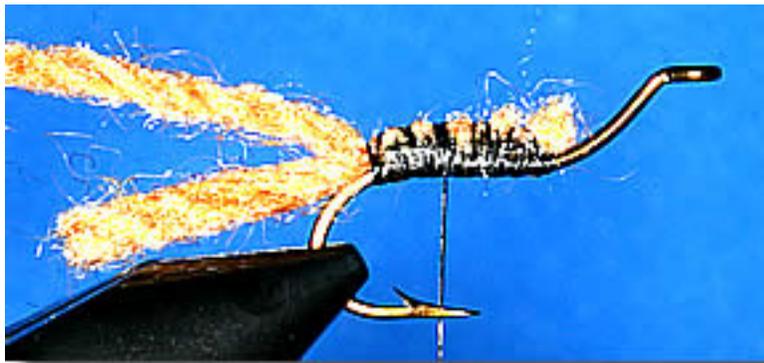
2. Lay thread base from bend at the back of the hook forward to the front of the saddle, and half hitch.



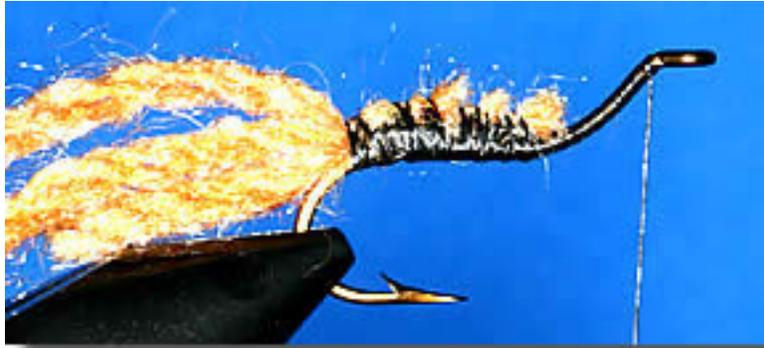
3. Cut a piece of lead (diameter of hook shank) tie on top of the hook and smooth down the ends. Wind thread over ends of lead, advance thread to front of lead and half hitch. Put a little cement over lead to prevent bleeding.



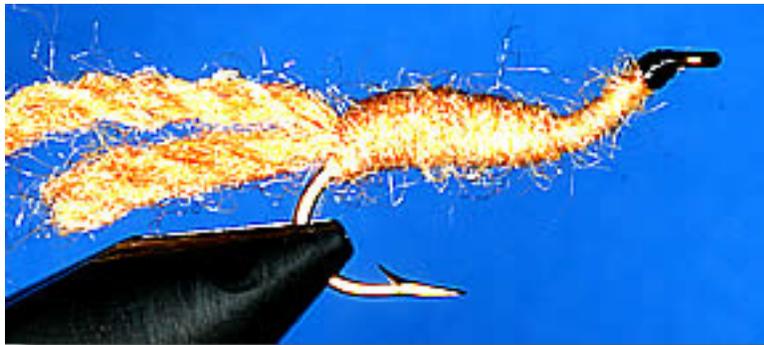
4. Tie tail support piece on top of hook, leave thread about the middle of the lead and half hitch.



5. Tie the tail piece on top of hook. Leave thread about 2/3rds back from front of saddle (lead) and half hitch



6. Put the long body yarn on top of the other yarn. Tie down to back of lead, wind thread up to the behind eye and half hitch. Saturate the thread with thinned cement.



7. Bring body yarn under hook to near side twist it eight times in the same direction as the yarn twist. (If you want a segmented body, twist the yarn a lot more.) Make the first yarn wrap around the shank and under the tail support piece. Wrap the yarn to within one eye length of the eye with an occasional recovery of the twist, secure and cut excess yarn. Build a small thread head, whip finish and trim thread. Put on a little head cement on the thread head. This is the end of thread operations.



8. Use a fine tooth comb to comb out the tail piece. Take only a ¼ inch of yarn at a time, and pinch the butt so you don't rip out the tail support piece.



9. Trim the tail support piece as shown. Hold the tail out of the way when you do it.



10. Trim the tail so the overall fly is 3 inches long. You can rough up the body with a used hacksaw blade, dubbing brush or gun cleaning brush. Or you can do as Bill did and burn off the fuzz with a cigarette lighter. Protect the tail with your fingers and start with a very quick movement through the flame.

**Closing comments:** This leech swims through the water in a very realistic manner. Try a variety of colors to match the leeches in your waters, and go fishing. For a pdf copy of Dick Nelson's tying notes [Click Here](#).

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.  
You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at [flyofthemoth@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:flyofthemoth@fedflyfishers.org)