
Using Stipple Dots To Add Detail On Fly Rod Poppers And Sliders



**With Other Thoughts About
Making Them**



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All Photos Taken By The Author

All Flies Tied By The Author

Illustrations By The Author

Introductory Comments

It is possible to catch fish on an unpainted hard or soft foam popper to which you have glued the head to the hook and added feathers or other materials to the tail. But it is typical that these flies are fished with at least a basic body color and eyes added. Splattering paint, adding a few lines of color, and placing a few dots around the body are some simple and easy ways to spiff up a popper. Exceptional work can be done using airbrush techniques with a bit of skill, the proper equipment, and a bit more time.

This booklet is intended to document the manual techniques I have developed to add details to popper bodies. The tools are all hand made except for the artist's brush used to add a base background color. The method permits me to use the same stippling or pointillist techniques I use to create Pen & Ink drawings on paper on my poppers using acrylic craft paints. The tools may be used to add just eyes and the minor touches of detail you would tie for a fly you intend to fish or used extensively to create an artistic fly intended for display.

Tools



The tool kit above was created for the most recent class I gave on my popper painting methods. The one on the right is my own kit. The lighter green handles are the same as the ones in the above kit with a couple of larger sizes added. The others are from my original kit and make dot sizes between those of the others.



Artist brushes and acrylic craft paint may be obtained from numerous stores that deal in Arts and Craft supplies and from chain stores such as Walmart.

The rods in the tool kits I make are 1/4", 3/16", 5/32", 1/8", and 3/32". The 1/4 inch tool will not be used unless the popper is extraordinarily large. Most of the needles I use to make the

other painting tools are marketed in the U.S. as Prym Sewing.

- 1.) Yarn Darners come in a seven pack in sizes 14/18
- 2.) Tapestry Needles come in a six Pack in sizes 18/22
- 3.) 20 Sharps / Long in Size 7

From the Yarn Darners take the longest one. Take the one next to it. Then take every other one on down

Tools

the row. Pick one of the shorter two needles from the Tapestry Needles. Cut these needles below the eye at a point where the needle shaft has become round. Grind a couple of Sharps from the point to different diameters. The smallest diameter should make a consistent dot. Use #600 sand paper to smooth the ends. If you want any sizes between what the above process has given you, grind some of the remaining needles down from their points. The needles are glued into balsa handles which are numbered for size and epoxied. Decide whether you want to number from larger to smallest dot or the other way around. When there are

minor differences in the diameters this will help you pick up the specific rod needed.

With my five rods and fifteen needles I am able to properly scale from a #12 popper to the largest saltwater popper body.

Wooden dowels and the back end of different diameter drill bits may also be successfully used as stippling tools. Holding a small diameter implement in the hand for an extended period can be uncomfortable(more so when holding the business end of a drill bit. So depending on how much you use them, a handle may be helpful.



Yarn Darners



Tapestry Needles

Paint

While there are other fully acceptable brands, most of the acrylic craft paint colors in my inventory are Delta Ceramcoat. The rest are Anita's All Purpose Acrylic. Anita's paint is thicker than I like to work with. So I usually pour out a bit, replace it with distilled water, and shake it vigorously for a minute or two. If you need to blend colors, I suggest using colors from the same maker. The colors may otherwise separate between uses and it may take a good bit of shaking the bottle before it is again usable.

The bottle must be shaken before

use as the painting tools are dipped in the bottle cap. For long painting sessions with the same color, the paint in the cap may need to be refreshed by recapping the bottle and giving it another vigorous shaking. Eventually a crust will build up in the cap which needs to be removed.

Before I've ever been able to use all of the paint in a two oz. bottle, small particles begin to appear in the paint. This is particularly noticeable when brushing on the base coat. When this becomes too annoying, it is time to purchase a fresh bottle of the color.

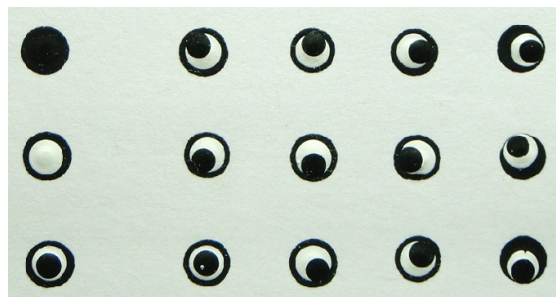


Eyes

Painted eyes may be added to a fly by placing one to three or more dots. Place the largest dot first. Additional dot(s) of successively smaller diameter may be added as the previous layers dry. Approach placement of each eye part slowly for better control. Brace the forearm if necessary for better control. Brace one or both hands for even

greater control.

The pupil may be placed in different areas to achieve different effects. The left column demonstrates placing dots within others to make an eye. The other columns show various options for locating eye parts. Note the gleam dot painted in the pupil of the bottom eye in the second column from the left.



Popper Bodies

Pre-shaped popper bodies are commercially available in hard foam, soft foam, and cork in different sizes and styles. Some make poppers by punching out or shaping flip-flops and other types of closed cell foams with a Dremel. Open cell foams quickly absorb water and are not really suited for a body intended to float at or just under the surface. Glues may be used to combine thin sheets of different color closed cell foams to good effect.

Unshaped cork, soft foam, and such woods as balsa and bass may be obtained and shaped by the tier. This

has the advantage of allowing the tier to make custom shapes.

A needle may be used to pass rubber legs through cork and soft foam bodies. While I've never had success using a hot needle to make a hole in hard foam bodies for rubber legs, some claim to have used this method. A drill may also be used to create a hole.

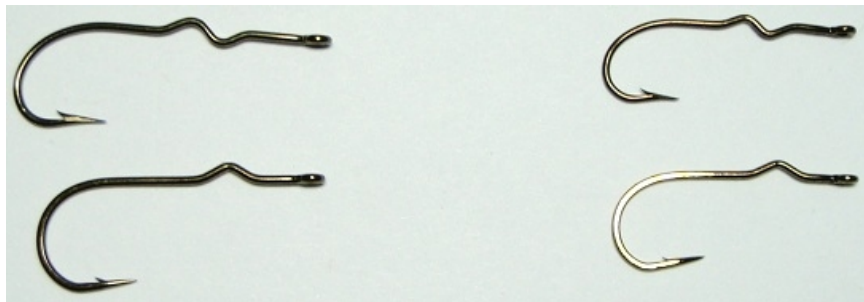
Because of the time required to do the amount of painting I typically do on my poppers, I've so far resisted the temptation to shape my own bodies.

Popper Hooks

A number of different straight shank hooks may be used with popper heads. I frequently use the Orvis Straight Eye Big Eye Hooks(#4641) in sizes #12 and #14 with Wapsi Hard Foam Bream Bodies. In these micro bodies the hook slot is not always true which will result in a popper that is out of balance with a kink shank hook. The situation can often, but not always, be salvaged by careful seating a straight shank hook.

Kink shanked hooks have an ad-

vantage over straight shank hooks in that the kink tends to prevent the hook from twisting out of the desired angle in relation to the body. The Mustad 33903 is a commonly recognized kink shank hook. The newer Mustad Signature CK52S(Freshwater) and CK74S(Saltwater) are sharper but cost more. In sizes larger than #8 the hook gape of the Mustad 33903 doesn't suit my preference. The CK52S is better. Tiemco and Wapsi also have makes of kink shank hooks.



Above: Mustad 33903 #6
Below: Mustad CK52S #6

Above: Mustad 33903 #8
Below: Mustad CK52S #8

Note the 33903 is a double kink hook while the CK52S is a single kink hook.

Cementing the Hook Slot

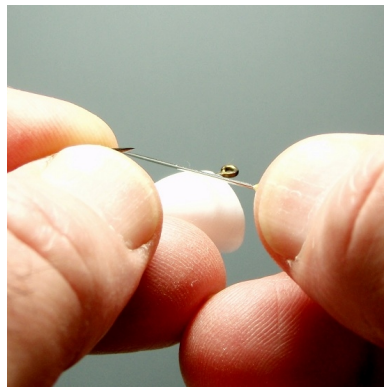
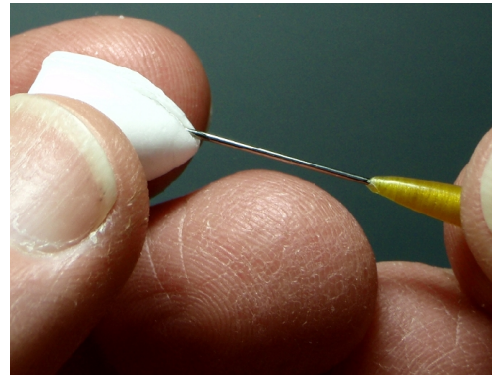
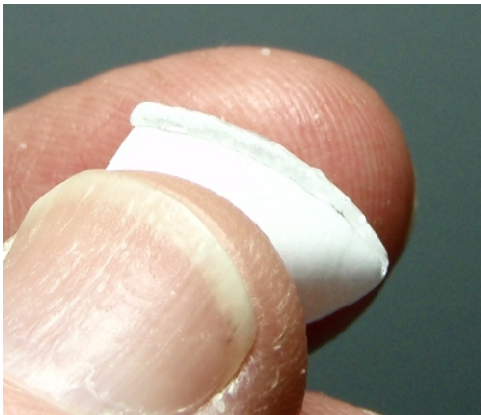
In my experience super-Glue(CA) and epoxy have been the most commonly mentioned substances used to seal a popper hook. My choice is Gel CA. When not in use I keep it in a closed container in my refrigerator. If you have ever tried to wash wet CA off your hands, it immediately turns White and dries instantly. It is the moisture in the air that the substance reacts with. Given that part of what a refrigerator does is remove moisture keeping it in the frig allows me to almost always use the entire contents of a tube of CA before it dries.

When using CA I run a bead of it along the open popper slot and since it doesn't flow as the more liquid CA product I use a small bodkin to fold it into and throughout the slot to ensure a large bonding area. After inserting and positioning the hook in the slot, I run another bead of CA along the slot

and again use the bodkin to smooth the CA into the slot. As a last step I use a small strip of paper towel to wipe off any excess CA from outside the slot. Once the CA is dried very little material is usually needed to completely fill the slot.

Some hooks will fit snugly in the slot right out of the box. Sometimes it is necessary to widen the slot before the hook will fit and then sometimes it is necessary to wrap thread around the hook shank to achieve a snug fit. The latter has the additional advantage of providing more area for the glue to bond too.

TIP: When wrapping thread to obtain a better fit of a kink shank hook into the slot, turning the hook to it's side so the kink is not pointing up and down while doing so makes it easier to wrap thread into the kink portion of the shank. The thread tends to slide to the bottom of the kink in any other alignment.



Cementing The Hook Slot



There will most likely be some CA residue on the bottom of the popper body in the area of the slot after the first and second application of CA. If wiped promptly, virtually all of it can be removed. I use pieces of paper

towels for this. The paper towels pieces I use are about 1½" X 5½". The paper strips are rubbed across the slot in the same fashion on might use to shine a shoe after applying polishing.

Filling The Hook Slot

Some glues used to seat hooks may leave a bump above the curve line of the popper body. This can be sanded smooth if desired. No CA I've used ever completely filled the slot so the use of some kind of slot filler had to be found since I want the look of a professional finished product. The results of using more glue or multiple coats of paint were less than satisfactory. Elmer's Carpenter's Wood

Filler is the product I finally settled on. If kept moist, it is very malleable and easy to sand smooth when dry. Keeping it moist is the issue with the Wood Filler. The plastic container that it comes in is less than optimal. I transfer the product to a glass jar with a tight screw lid and add a bit of distilled water as needed. With this modification the Wood Filler can remain usable for several years.



The above three popper images are the bottoms of #8 popper heads which have had the hook slots filled with Elmer's Carpenter's Wood Filler, sanded smooth, painted, and epoxied. I use a finger to spread out the material in the slot and sand when dry. There remains a very slight bow in them visible to a close inspection by the eye at this stage. But it takes a magnifying glass to detect the bow once the body is epoxy coated. The clear coating on the bottom is perfectly smooth.

Protecting Paint

Two-Ton(30 minute) epoxy, a poly-urethane(Loon Hard Head or Delta Ceram-coat Gloss Interior/Exterior Varnish are two examples.), varnish, or Sally Hansen Hard as Nails may be used to apply a protective clear coat to a popper head. Five minute epoxy is not suitable as a clear coat because it quickly yellows and soon cracks. When it cracks off it can take the paint with it. Another downside is how quickly the five minute variety dries which limits the number of poppers a batch of epoxy will protect. The haste with which the user must proceed may lead to a incomplete coverage.

The advantages of epoxy is that if properly used on a basically smooth surface, it will almost always give a glassy smooth surface. Any minor dimples in the surface may be no longer visible and the finish is relatively tough unless the popper is frequently handled by forceps to remove the popper from the mouth of fish or bounced off something like a rock. In my experience needing to use forceps is more common with micro poppers swallowed whole by Bluegill and other small Panfish. Forceps will inevitably result in even two-ton epoxy cracking off which usually takes the paint with it. The main disadvantage of 30 minute epoxy is the necessity to rotate the popper head for at least 30 minutes. Touching the popper head can result in finger prints or other marks on the popper until hours have

passed. I try to avoid touching the head of an epoxy coated popper for at least eight hours and for as long as twelve hours if the time can be afforded.

Loon Hard Head will make a durable protective coat for a popper. However, unlike on coat epoxy, I apply at least four coats. That many coats may not be necessary. But it is what I am comfortable with. This is for my small bream sized poppers and all soft foam poppers. On the others my preference is to use epoxy. For any popper larger than a #10 more coats may be necessary if you want a glassy smooth surface.

There are different methods used by makers who clear coat their poppers with epoxy to increase the working time for a batch of epoxy. One method is to use an equal part mixture of epoxy resin, epoxy hardener, and 70% rubbing alcohol. Another is to keep a straight epoxy batch cool. This thickens the epoxy mixture in it's container. But it thins very quickly to a usable consistency when placed on a popper head. Both of these methods will dramatically increase the number of popper heads which can be coated in a batch. I've recently begun trying the second method with good results. I use the metal artists watercolor palette to hold the epoxy in a shaped cup of aluminum foil all placed in an ice filled bowl and a brush to apply the epoxy.



Holding The Popper While Painting

If you have a rotary vise and only want to brush a body color and paint eyes on your popper, the job can be done with the popper head in your vise. This is slightly harder to do with a non-rotary vise. But the amount of

painting I do on my popper heads make it worthwhile to hold the popper in the hand when painting instead of keeping it in the vise. I use a pair of locking forceps for this purpose.

Simple To More Complex Micro-Popper Patterns

The following sections will present images in photographs of finished poppers and sketches of painting steps of some of my designs which I hope will convey my methods and techniques.

The first two images are painted in dots of one size. Both poppers have at least two different colors painted against their respective backgrounds. These use Wapsi #10 Bream bodies. I use #10 and #12 hooks with these.



White Background With Greens

Hackle: Green or Olive Grizzly
Stipple: Seminole Green & Citrus
Tail: White & Chartreuse Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/Red/Black
Throat: Cardinal Red Dots



Black With Turquoise & Gray

Hackle: Black
Stipple: Turquoise & Custom Gray
Tail: Black Puglisi Silky Fibers
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Red/Black
Throat: Not used

The following sketches provide an example of painting steps used for the above. Notice that though only one painting tool was used to apply the

dots, not all are the same size. This happens when more than one dot is applied per dip of the tool in the paint and dips between wiping the tool.





Yellow/Black, Brown, & Red

Hackle: Black
Tail: Yellow Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/White/Black
Throat: Cardinal Red Dots
Notes: Different Sized Dots



White/ Black, Custom Gray, & Red

Hackle: Black
Tail: White Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/Custom Gray, Black
Throat: Cardinal Red Dots
Notes: Different Sized Dots - Dots in Dots



Lime/Black, Seminole, White

Hackle: Black
Tail: Chartreuse Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/Yellow/Black
Throat: White Dots
Notes: Different Sized Dots - Dots in Dots



Custom Olive/Black, Yellow, White

Hackle: Black
Tail: Olive & White Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/Yellow/Black
Throat: Not used
Notes: Different Sized Dots - Dots in Dots



Citrus-White/Seminole Green, White

Hackle: Black
Tail: Green & White Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/White/Black
Throat: Not used
Notes: Different Sized Dots



Latte/Chocolate Brown, Red, & Orange

Hackle: Brown
Tail: Tan & Brown Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/Latte/Chocolate Brown
Throat: Not used
Notes: Different Sized Dots - Dots in Dots



Yellow/Orange. Chocolate Brown

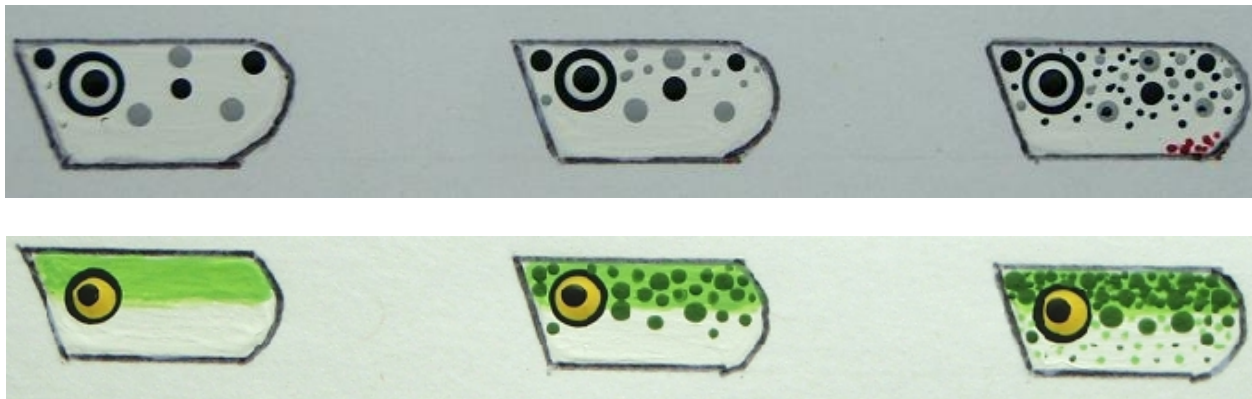
Hackle: Black or Brown
Tail: Orange Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: Black/White/Black
Throat: Not used
Notes: Different Sized Dots - Dots in Dots



White/Black, Red

Hackle: Red Grizzly or Black
Tail: White Marabou
Legs: White Rubber
Eyes: White/Black/Red
Throat: Not used
Notes: One sized Dot leaving bit of White

Painting Step By Steps For Two Designs On Previous Page



Frogs - Variations On A Common Theme

There may well be no more common theme in the design of a popper than the frog. I've created or made versions of several so far and can easily see doing more in the future. My first frog started out as a version of a commercial hard bodied popper. The temptation to play with the design was too much. The second was a copy of a deer hair frog tied as a display piece. The rest have been intended to reflect deer hair frogs. They weren't

conscious imitations. But there have been so many made, without doubt I was influenced by others I've seen. Typically I started out with the closest thing to a frog color I had, Seminole Green. It worked well enough but just didn't seem right. When I found an Olive, it was too dark. So I ended up mixing bottles of three different shades. The following page has images of some of what I consider my frog variations.



One of my first Seminole Green Frogs tied as a slider



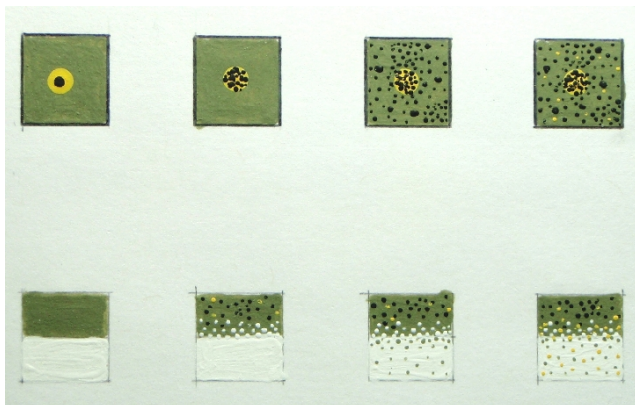
A Popper version of the design on the left in Olive.



This design is one of several heads made to be displayed. It took several hours to paint. The background color is lime.



This popper was also tied as a display item. It also represents several hours of paint time being painted like the one on the left completely with my smallest diameter painting tool.

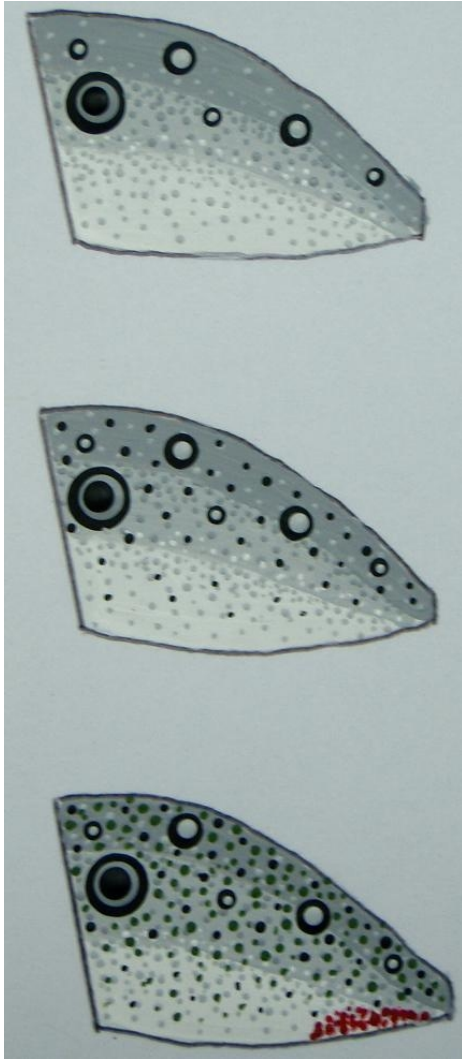


The top row in the image on the right demonstrates my method of painting the top side of the two poppers on the top of this page.

The bottom row on the left shows the steps in shading the side into the bottom of the top two poppers shown on this page.

Grizzly Minnow Popper

Study



The base painting on this fly from top to bottom were two shades of a custom Gray mix and White. Note that the darker Gray shade brushed on the top is then dotted into the lighter shade of Gray to soften the line between the two colors. Next the lighter Gray is dotted into the White.

The finished designed, pictured below is somewhat simpler than the study in that the dots are bigger. Some of the Seminole Green dots in the study and the finished fly appear to be Black. In the image of the finished fly the Gray is basically invisible. The shading is detectable in the real fly only more subtle. The exact same colors and mixes were used in both.

This fly is a good example of how an intended design of a fly may undergo modification during the first few attempts as you play with the design and see what happens. Refinements can happen over time if you continue to use the design.

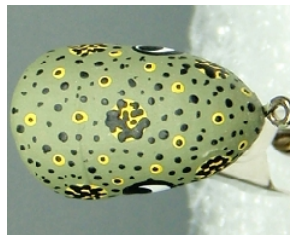
Finished Fly



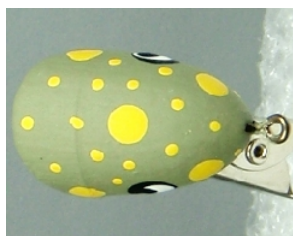
Detailed Painting Step By Steps - Large Frog Slider



Apply base Olive above line of hook shaft, - White Below - Eyes, Large and Small Yellow dot



Top view of previous step



Top view of previous step



Add small White dots along border in Olive and Olive along border in White - You are trying to suggest gradual shading



Place one Black dot in smaller Yellow dot - many Black dots for larger Yellow dots



Bottom view of previous step



Top view of previous step



Add Yellow dots in both colors of the border area - Space a few Yellow dots in The White area



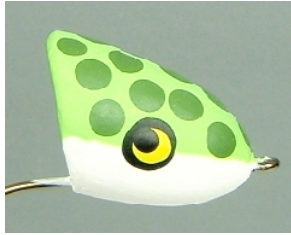
Stipple Black dots around Olive area using same tool as used to dot the Yellow dots



Bottom view of previous step

One variation with the above popper is to use a very light Olive for the bottom. As stated earlier, it may be tied as a popper. The only basic difference in the painting is eye placement. In the popper the eyes are placed further forward.

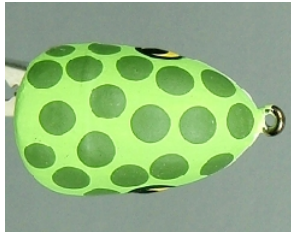
Detailed Painting Step By Steps - Large Green Machine Slider



Brush in Lime on top and White on the bottom - Or Brush Citrus all over - I do this one two ways Add large dots on top



Top view of previous step



Top view of previous step



Using same small reliable tool, add a few dots in White to shade into bottom.



Paint in medium dots on top if there are large areas of background showing - Add some around the Bottom - This is part of shading to smaller top down



Bottom view of previous step



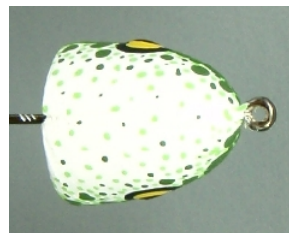
Top view of previous step



If using Lime Upper, Shade Lime into the bottom of the fly. Use White for this if using Citrus for the whole body background.



Using the smallest reliable tool fill in much of the top area. You want some background showing through.



Bottom view of previous step

Two of the micro poppers shown in a previous file are this same pattern with slight differences. One of them is the Orange/Yellow popper. The other is the Chocolate Brown/Latte popper. For the Orange version a single Chocolate Brown dot is placed inside the Largest Orange Dots. For the Chocolate Brown/Latte version a few Orange and Red dots are placed inside the large Chocolate Brown dots and a few spread around on the bottom.

Painting Designs On Other Popper Types

Top



Side

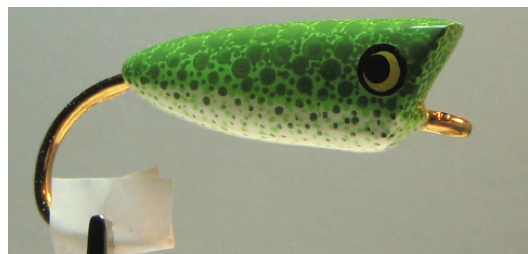


Bottom



The treatment of the bottoms of the flies on this page are basically the same. . . a few small dots using the same colors as used on the top the specific fly, with much wider spacing between.

Tie Clips



A Selection Of Other Poppers And Bodies



This is the end of my 2011 effort to update my document about popper making. I would like to credit Mr. Charlie Brown of Springboro, Pennsylvania for making the balsa bodies which appear on the top left of this page, the two tie clips which ended the previous page and the top popper appearing on the cover of the first part of this document.
