



# YOUR GUIDE TO THE DELAYED HARVEST

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Cooler fall days are becoming more frequent throughout the Southeast Council states, and many inland anglers are dreaming of targeting trout on the Delayed Harvest streams of the region. For those new to fly fishing or the region, "Delayed Harvest" may be a new term. Basically, it is a management approach used by state wildlife agencies to "put and grow" trout in streams that have been "put and take" through the hot summer months. From Fall through early Spring, harvest of these trout is prohibited, and only artificial lures with a single hook are permitted. While this does not necessarily translate to flies only, you'll soon notice that fly fishers make up the vast majority of anglers on these streams.

Delayed Harvest fishing can be incredibly rewarding: cooler days, the promise of a more "level playing field" in the absence of bait fishers, and trout kept hungry by decreasing insect populations all make the season something to look forward to. But to get most out of it, there are several things you need to keep in mind. Here, we try to cover some of the basics that you need to know to make your Delayed Harvest fishing a success.

## A LITTLE DH STRATEGY

I was having a great day fishing a North Carolina Delayed Harvest stream last March, and was in the midst of targeting a particularly fishy reach when a hatchery truck skidded into a pullout on the road beside the stream, and within minutes 10-12 inch trout were raining down all around me. Another angler on the road slowed down and yelled to me "You just hit the fish jackpot!" In fact, the opposite was true. The fish I was focused on scattered in the commotion, and the newly stocked fish were too stunned to respond to anything, let alone the lifelike nymph I was using. If you've ever fished



**An egg pattern from Atlanta Fly Fishing Club's website.**

## DH STRATEGY CONTINUED

within the days right after a stocking, you've probably noticed that the fish don't know how to feed on natural food yet. So, early in the Delayed Harvest season, you just need to get their attention, usually with the ugliest, least natural-looking fly you have, or, as many refer to them, "junk flies." There are several tried and true "junk flies," and it's a good idea to fill a large portion of your fly box with them. For some of the best patterns, look at this article, which has links to tying videos as well. But if you don't want to tie your own - most of them are incredibly simple - your local fly shop will likely carry them:

<https://guiderecommended.com/junk-flies-8-favorites-that-catch-fish/>

Once Delayed Harvest is underway, you'll find a mix of newly stocked fish and fish that have started to get the hang of being fish in a stream. Keep an eye on the stocking schedules so you know what to expect on a given stream the day you visit. In general, though, in addition to throwing gaudy flies to confused fish, you'll be fishing smarter fish with small nymphs, with the occasional dry midge in the afternoon. Although this article references North Carolina, I've found these patterns to work well in Georgia and Tennessee as well:

<https://smoothangler.com/10-flies-we-love-for-north-carolina-fall-fishing/>

If you've been happily fishing big dries in summer, or going after bass and bream with poppers, Delayed Harvest means upping your nymphing game. If nymphing is still a new frontier for you, you'll find abundant online resources to improve your skills. These websites have good reminders for everyone who is still learning traditional nymphing "best practices" or who has

forgotten since last year: <https://www.skip-morris-fly-tying.com/ten-ways-to-improve-your-nymph-fishing.html> and <https://guiderecommended.com/nymph-fishing-tips/>



There are a couple of additional things that will improve your catch rate. One is a cast you may have already used to drop tiny dries into precise corners: the Tuck Cast. The Tuck Cast allows your nymphs to hit the water before your line, getting them down deep - the key to catching trout hunkered at the stream's bottom - fast. The first link explains the Tuck Cast, while the second one shows how it's done:

<https://troutbitten.com/2019/04/16/fly-fishing-strategies-the-tuck-cast/> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuvTP8ZmyLk&ab\\_channel=TacticalFlyFisher](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuvTP8ZmyLk&ab_channel=TacticalFlyFisher)

You may also find it helpful to explore dynamic drifting, but at the minimum, try to add some action to the end of the drift. This link explains the concept:

<https://www.hatchmag.com/articles/nymphing-get-even-more-hookups/7711207>

You may wonder why I'm not discussing Euro Nymphing. That's an entire topic of its own. I invite you to take your own deep dive down the Internet's Euro Nymphing hole for now, but who knows? Maybe we'll revisit this in the future.

## DH MEANS PUTTING THE FISH BACK ALIVE

So you're catching all the fish, and holding them up for the requisite "grip and grin" photo. Maybe dial back on your enthusiasm a bit. Delayed Harvest fish, at best, will be caught over and over. Your goal is to get them into the net, remove the hook gently, and send them on their way as quickly as possible. It's going to be a long winter for those October stockers! If you need some tips on quick netting for successful release, try this site:

<https://thecatchandthehatch.com/proper-catch-release/>

## STAYING SANE AND SAFE

We've all experienced the growing popularity of fly fishing, and have probably muttered epithets while driving along a popular Delayed Harvest reach counting the number of cars cramming the pullouts. It goes without saying that your best bet is to fish on a weekday, early in the morning or late in the afternoon, preferably in the rain, on a cold day. But while crowds may impact your "angler satisfaction," fish have to eat, and angler density isn't as likely to put them off feeding as you might think. However, it may require you to be more patient, to walk a little further from your car, and to fish water that doesn't immediately strike you as the fishiest water ever. Here are some additional tips for fishing in pressured water: <https://2guysandariver.com/fly-fishing-crowded-waters/> and <https://www.henrysforkanglers.com/fishing-info/blog/fishing-with-company>

Finally, if you are fishing on those cold windy days, or far from your car, remember that you need to stay alive to tell everyone how great a day you had. Always keep in mind some basic safety precautions for cold water: [https://dvff.clubexpress.com/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=78048&module\\_id=483129#:~:text=Wear%20proper%20warm%20clothing%20designed,Fleece%20or%20wool%20hats.](https://dvff.clubexpress.com/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=78048&module_id=483129#:~:text=Wear%20proper%20warm%20clothing%20designed,Fleece%20or%20wool%20hats.)



**SEC Board Members safely dressed in layers at a popular DH stream on a 30 degree morning...there were HotHands packs, too.**

## THE DH SOUNDS GREAT... WHERE DO I FIND ONE?

Not every watercourse has a Delayed Harvest designation, and often you'll find that these special regulations - and heavier stocking schedules - are limited to a certain reach. Similarly, not all states, and not all waters, have the same Delayed Harvest schedule. Your best bet is always to go to the source, i.e., the website of the wildlife management agency in the state where you will be fishing. But to get you started, here is a summary of Delayed Harvest info for SEC states, along with links to the websites where you can find detailed descriptions of the waters and their stocking schedules:



# KNOW WHERE AND WHEN TO GO

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## KENTUCKY

***Between October 1 and March 31, anglers on Catch and Release waters are restricted to single hook, artificial lures only. All trout must be released.***

Kentucky's numerous Catch and Release (aka Delayed Harvest) waters are listed on Kentucky Fish & wildlife's website at <https://fw.ky.gov/Fish/Pages/Seasonal-Catch-and-Release-Trout-Streams.aspx>. Stocking schedules for trout on all Kentucky streams are posted monthly at <https://fw.ky.gov/Fish/Pages/Monthly-Trout-Stocking.aspx>

## TENNESSEE

***Tennessee Delayed Harvest Waters have varying schedules restricting anglers to a single hook, artificial lures only. All trout must be released.***

Tennessee manages seven Delayed Harvest waters:

- Buffalo Creek: Between October 1 – January 31
- Big Soddy Creek, Doe River, Hiwassee River, Paint Creek, and Tellico River: October 1 -last day of February.
- Piney River: November 1-last day of February

See the specific details of each delayed harvest area for these waters at

<https://www.tn.gov/twra/fishing/trout-information-stockings.html> . The most current stocking information for Tennessee waters (delayed harvest and others) can be viewed at [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/twra/documents/fishing/trout/Coldwater-Trout\\_Stocking-Schedule.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/twra/documents/fishing/trout/Coldwater-Trout_Stocking-Schedule.pdf).

## **NORTH CAROLINA**

***Between October 1 and May 31, anglers on delayed harvest waters are restricted to single hook, artificial lures only. All trout must be released.***

North Carolina manages multiple waters for Delayed Harvest, and has one of the easiest websites to navigate. Map of counties with delayed harvest waters, and the 2023 stocking schedule, can be found at :

[https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Fishing/Images/2023/Delayed-Harvest\\_2023.pdf](https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Fishing/Images/2023/Delayed-Harvest_2023.pdf)

## **SOUTH CAROLINA**

***Between November 1 – May 14, anglers on delayed harvest waters are restricted to single hook, artificial lures only. All trout must be released.***

South Carolina manages 7 waters for Delayed Harvest: portions of the Chauga and Chattooga rivers, as well as sections of Cheohee, Corbin, Devil's Fork, Eastatoe, and Howard creeks. Detailed descriptions of the delayed harvest sections can be found in the SC fishing regulations at: <https://www.eregulations.com/southcarolina/fishing/trout-size-limits>.

South Carolina's DNR's weekly stocking schedule is at:

<https://www.dnr.sc.gov/fish/stocking/results.html>.

Additional information and access directions to some of the waters is included in

<https://www.dnr.sc.gov/fish/pdf/TroutBook.pdf>

## **GEORGIA**

***Between November 1 – May 14, anglers on delayed harvest waters are restricted to single hook, artificial lures only. All trout must be released.*** Delayed Harvest runs from November 1 to May 14 annually. Maps showing the location of Georgia's 5 delayed harvest waters (portions of the Chattahoochee, Toccoa and Chattooga rivers, and reaches of Amicalola and Smith Creek) can be found at <https://rabuntu.org/about/educational-programs/secrets/georgias-delayed-harvest-streams/>. Georgia DNR maintains a weekly stocking report covering all Georgia trout streams at [https://georgiawildlife.com/sites/default/files/Weekly\\_Stocking\\_Report%20\(1\).pdf](https://georgiawildlife.com/sites/default/files/Weekly_Stocking_Report%20(1).pdf)

## **ALABAMA**

Although we don't necessarily think of Alabama when we think of trout, there is a Delayed Harvest water for trout in Alabama. Owned and run by the City of Gadsden, a stretch of Black Creek through Noccalula Falls Park is open to trout fishing (with a valid Alabama permit and a City of Gadsden permit) from October 1 to June 30. Delayed harvest is typically from the opening until the end of April. More information is available at <https://flyfishgadsdenal.com>.

## **HAVE FUN WITH THE DELAYED HARVEST!**