

San Juan Worm

There's no denying the effectiveness of the basic San Juan Worm. Originally developed for the San Juan River tailwater in New Mexico, the pattern has proven itself from coast to coast, especially on other tailwaters. Because they're so fast to tie, it's always a good idea to carry a dozen in various colors, and when fishing tailwaters I carry more than that.

How to Fish

The San Juan Worm should always be fished on a dead drift. In deep water, I use an indicator and some kind of weight, either a split shot or a Worm with a bead secured halfway up the shank. In shallow water I dispense with the indicator and often the bead, and sight fish while letting the fly tumble naturally along the bottom.

Tying Challenges

Tying the San Juan Worm is easy. Making it durable is harder. Traditionally, a whip finish is made at front and back, with the Ultra Chenille body pulled over the top of the hook. I find the fly twists when this is done. Instead, I like to secure the fly at the back, spiral the thread forward over the chenille, and secure the front of the fly. I then run a bead of head cement between the underbody of thread and the chenille, thereby anchoring the entire body. Fuse the ends of the chenille with a cigarette lighter. This keeps the chenille fibers from stripping off their core and also gives the fly a natural taper.

The San Juan Worm invites modification. As mentioned above, weighting the fly with a bead works well. You can also wrap the chenille rather than pulling it over the top of the shank. Another killer option, especially for heavily-fished water, is to use two colors of chenille, one for the tail or head and another for the rest of the fly.

San Juan Worm Pattern

Hook: scud hook, #6-16.

Thread/underbody: 6/0 or 8/0 to match or contrast with body.

Tail/body/head: vernille or Ultra Chenille.

