Scuds
From a fly fishing point of view scuds are important insects because they are active all year long, so, the fish eat a lot of them. When the trout season opens in the spring, scuds will be active while many other insect species are just warming up. They make up to 20% of a trout diet. Also, when no fish are showing, the fish will still be feeding on scuds, which makes them a must-have pattern.

WHY?
- Scuds are members of the class Crustacea, order Amphipoda.

- Scuds' are distant cousins to crayfish, sowbugs, and shrimp.

Scuds spend their entire life beneath the water's surface. There is no pupal stage or emergence of any kind.

**WHAT ARE SCUDS?**
When swimming they stretch out completely straight (curved scud patterns not only look wrong when stripped through the water, they have poor hooking ability) and the scud bends into its characteristic curled position when it scuttles about along the streambed or among the vegetation.
There are 2 species of scuds that the fly fisher needs to be aware of. These are Gammarus and the smaller Hyalella.

The Gammarus scuds are larger in size than Hyalella. Gammarus can attain sizes of up to 3/4 of an inch, while the smaller Hyalella seldom exceed 1/3 of an inch. #12 to #16 are a safe bet.

Of the two species the Hyalella is more widespread. Gammarus need alkaline waters rich in calcium to generate large populations. A good rule of thumb to determine the alkalinity of a lake is by the water clarity. Alkaline lakes tend to be clearer bodies of water with light clay or silty bottoms and good growths of green weeds. Acidic lakes on the other hand tend to be darker in color and lily pads may be prevalent. A good rule of thumb is, darker the water the darker the coloration of the scuds.
During times of low weed growth the scuds will be pale in color. As the weeds grow, scuds are able to change color to match their surroundings. Scuds lose the ability to camouflage themselves effectively as they near the end of their lives. The coloration tends to become various tones of yellow. From time to time anglers might observe scuds with an orange colored spot in the middle of their body, these are pregnant females. The orange spot is the brood pouch, or Marsupium. At certain times’ trout will key in on these pregnant scuds, so the angler should have a few patterns tied that imitate this characteristic.
Though scuds live in the shallowest margins of lakes and streams, they intensely dislike light. They typically hide in deep cover while the sun is shining but quickly come out to forage when the skies dim. Overcast days can be good days to fish a scud pattern. Regardless of the species scuds prefer to inhabit the shallow regions of a lake. Scuds are capable in living in depths as great as 50 ft, but prefer shallower depths of 15 ft or less. Scuds prefer to inhabit vegetation but are quite at home under rocks and sunken debris. Hyallela will bury themselves to avoid predators and search for food.

WHERE ARE SCUDS?
Instead of trying to make a scud imitation, make a scud impression. Give the trout something that moves and twitches and doesn’t have an up or a down or a sideways.

HOW TO FISH SCUDS IN STREAMS AND STILL WATER?
For practical purposes, think of scuds as nymphs. They swim, but not well enough to negotiate current, so in moving water, dead drift them near the bottom. Depending on the depth and speed, a variety of methods can be effective, including Czech nymphing, high-sticking and basic nymph-and-strike-indicator fishing. In stillwater, let the fly sink to the bottom, then retrieve it with a slow hand-twist retrieve. When you’re fishing several nymphs together, scuds are also a good choice for the point fly.
Fly fishing with scud patterns is straightforward. Try to present your patterns either on or near the bottom. Try a floating line coupled with a leader from 15 to 20 feet depending upon the depth. Fishing a weighted scud pattern on a dry line and a long leader is a favorite method. It is much like chironomid fishing. The intermediate or Stillwater lines give you a horizontal presentation yet enable a slow enough retrieve to properly simulate the scud. The clearer the water the longer the leader.
As for retrieves it is tough to beat the old reliable hand twist retrieve. At times a slow 10 to 12 inch strip retrieve can work well. Strip the line and wait 2 to 3 seconds or more before stripping again. A brisk choppy 3 to 4 inch strip retrieve can work well when the water temperature is up and fish are active. The slower the fishing the slower the retrieve.

For inactive fish, retrieves have to be slow and methodical to be successful. It is easy to fall into the, "rip and strip" method if for no other reason to keep warm and active.

Another tactic worth trying when trout are ferreting scuds out of the marl is allowing the fly line to sink into the bottom ooze and debris and then twitching the fly creating a tell tale puff.
- low light and overcast days
- in 15’ and less of water
- in and near weeds
- on the bottom

- Scuds mate from late spring, when the water warms up, through to the late summer or early fall, when the water starts to get too cold.

- The fall would be a good time to fish a pregnant scud, with the orange spot, as the aquatic vegetation starts to die down. This helps to make the scuds more visible to the trout.

**WHEN TO USE SCUD PATTERNS?**
Pronounced curved pattern profiles should be avoided. Successful hook styles include standard shank or a scud pupa to suggest mobile scuds. When swimming they stretch out completely straight and the scud bends into its characteristic curled position when it scuttles about along the streambed or among the vegetation.

Pheasant Tail, Hare’s Ear Nymph or caddis larva pattern

**WHAT FLIES IMITATE SCUDS?**