

Fishing – Level 4

Fly Fishing

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Ever wonder how to fly fish? I did as my father loved the sport and he was pretty good at it. So like father, like son, I wanted to learn how to fish this way. Fly fishing is a pleasurable pastime built on the camaraderie of those you do it with. Fly fishing is another way to fish and it takes a special skill to do it correctly and effectively.

It does not matter if you are after trout or just pan fish, a once in while fly fishing person or a diehard fly fishing person, fly fishing can be fun for all.

I find that fly fishing is an escape from the stresses that are all around you and brings with it a kind of peace that only a fly fisherman can understand. The sight of a fish rising to take that perfectly placed fly is what keeps me coming back to the sport.

Species

Most fly fishermen focus on the pursuit of trout, although anglers fly fish for everything from largemouth bass to blue gills, to big-game saltwater species like marlin, tarpon and even sharks.

I spend most of my time pursuing the elusive pan fish and the wile bass with a fly rod. I understand the allure of trout fishing but pan fish and bass are more plentiful where I live. I have found there is no greater feeling than to land a 3 pound largemouth bass on a fly rod.

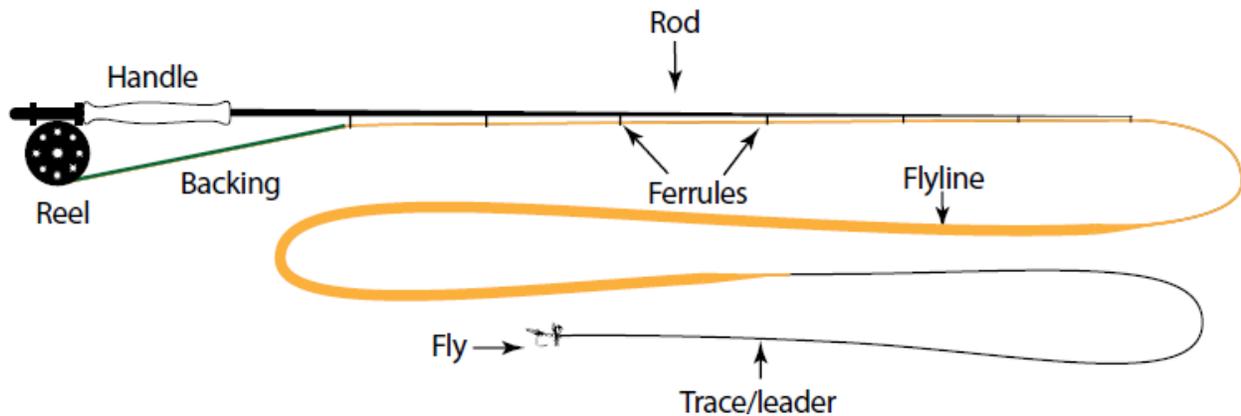
Places

There is no wrong time or place to use a fly rod, as long as you are abiding by current national and state rules and regulations.

You can fish everywhere from the open ocean to backcountry creeks or lakes. In fact, many fly fishermen practice their craft at home, honing their casting skills on the front lawn or at the local park.

I find that smaller lakes and ponds offer the best places to go fly fish. You ideally need someplace without many other people around.

Parts of a fly rod



The fly rod looks different and is different from all other rods. The reel is located at the very end or heel of the rod and has a vertical mounted spool. The handle is located between the reel and the rod, where on most other types of fishing rods the handle is located at the heel of the rod. The backing is what I also call the working part of the line. As you work the fly you will pull on the line in the backing area often creating a large loop that will need to be re-casted out when you cast again. The line guides are called ferrules on a fly rod. The line is also special. The line is very heavy and usually very thick as compared to other fishing line. There is also a trace or leader that is tied onto the fly line. This leader is usually 2 to 6 pound test line. And then comes the fly, a small delicacy that you will present to the fish waiting below the water.

Fly Fishing Casting Basics

Unlike in spin casting, where the weight of the lure pulls the line off the reel, in fly casting, the weight of the line carries the fly to the fish. Remember the fly rod and line (and thus the fly) will go in the direction you point the rod tip in a cast. To learn to fly cast, it's important to understand the mechanics of the fly rod.

A fly rod is flexible, giving you the ability to cast the rod and release energy through it to send out the line. To get the rod to release energy, you want the rod to bend, then stop. Proper bending and stopping of the fly rod will create a good fly cast with proper energy. Releasing energy through a fly rod is not necessarily strength-related, it's more timing related. Practice is the best way to become good at timing your cast.

Fly anglers seldom need to cast more than 50 feet when fishing, but once you have mastered the basics you can also try long-distance fly casting. You will need to learn to cast short (20 to 30 feet) first, and then practice at greater and greater distances.

You can't learn fly casting from a book. You need to just do it. The more you practice, the better you'll become. Practice on a lawn or in a park. Casting while fly fishing is not practice. Practice allows you to focus on casting fundamentals without distractions.

The Grip

Grasp the fly rod firmly with your casting hand and place your thumb on top of the rod grip. When you are learning casting, keep the fly rod butt under your wrist and in line with your forearm. That way, the rod will remain in the same straight plane during your cast. If the fly rod comes out of plane during the cast, the tip wanders and the fly line follows the tip, wandering and spoiling the cast.

The Angle of the Cast

You may hear other anglers talk about the angle of the cast: sidearm, 45 degrees or overhead. You want to find a casting stroke in the position that is most comfortable for you. I start everyone with the overhead cast. The overhead cast puts your head and eyes almost in line with where you want the cast to go and therefore it will easily show you when you are off the mark you are aiming for. Eventually you will use all these casting positions when you are fly fishing, so you will have to practice them all. The fly fishing casting principles remain the same for all casting positions.

Aiming the Cast

To start out you will want to create short casts; aim about 4 feet above the grass. As your casts get longer, aim higher to allow the line and fly more time to reach the target. Learning to aim accurately is a hallmark of expert fly casting. You should spend considerable practice time learning to aim and to hit targets on the lawn beforehand.

Practice Exercise

For this practice exercise, first make sure you have the basic supplies. A fly rod, reel and line outfit as well as some leader, a tippet and a fly will do. Grab your supplies and head to your backyard or an open space like a park. You'll need at least 120 feet (60 feet in each direction) with no overhead obstructions.

Take a marker or pen and mark your fly line with an indelible marker at 30 feet. The marker will indicate how much line you have out when you cast. Then place hats or some other objects on the lawn 30 and 60 feet from where you will stand. The markers will help you develop the sense of distance that is critical in casting accurately to fly fish.

Thread the line off the reel and up through the line guides and out the tip top of the fly rod. Tie a 9-foot leader onto the end of the fly line using the tube knot and tie a small piece of yarn to the end of the fly tippet.

Stand on the lawn with your feet slightly apart. Pull about 20 feet of line off the fly reel and lay it out on the lawn to the right of where you stand (to the left if you are left-handed). Make sure the fly line is drawn tight on the lawn and is not lying in S-curves or it will not cast well.

It does not matter if you start by casting from the side or from overhead; just make sure it's in a straight line. The sidearm cast allows you to watch the line and thus to teach yourself timing and loop formation, so try that first. Using a horizontal side-arm cast, flick the fly rod tip forward from your right to your left (from your left to your right if you are left-handed), and watch the fly line form a loop and roll out to your left and then settle to the grass.

Using your arm and a flick of your wrist together (the way you'd throw a Frisbee backward and a baseball forward), cast the fly line repeatedly back and forth in back casts and forward casts. Try to make the line form candy cane-shaped loops in both your back casts and forward casts. Loop formation is the intent of your fly casting- the tighter the loops, the better the cast.

As you stroke the rod back and forth, keep a firm wrist and stop the fly rod abruptly after each stroke. Stopping the rod allows the fly line to form a loop off the rod tip. It also allows the fly rod's tip to turn over to unload energy into the fly line efficiently. The energy in the fly rod casts the line. You must stop the rod when making both the forward cast and the back cast to become a good fly fishing caster.

After casting sidearm for 15 minutes, or until you feel comfortable with the feel of the fly line and fly rod, try casting the rod at a 45-degree angle and then overhead.

Common Errors

Practice makes perfect when learning to fly cast. For those that are learning to fly cast, here are some common errors and how to correct them:

Problem: Back cast dropping to the lawn or water.

Fault: The fly rod tip is flopping over (pointing too low), sending the fly cast to the ground.

Correction: Stop the fly rod tip high. Keep a firm casting wrist.

Problem: Tailing loops.

Fault: Stroking the fly rod too hard or too soon.

Correction: Stroke more gently. Allow the fly line time to straighten out in the back cast completely before stroking the forward cast.

Problem: Fly snaps off with a crack in the back cast.

Fault and Correction: Same as for tailing loops.

Problem: The cast dies before reaching the target.

Fault: Underpowered cast caused by loose fly line or by a floppy wrist stroke.

Correction: Tighten the fly line before the pickup for the back cast. Use a firm wrist stroke on the back cast and forward cast, and stop the fly rod immediately after the stroke.

Learning to cast with the fly rod takes practice. You need to practice often and for at least 15 minutes a day. This type of fishing takes time to learn but once you do, you will be able to partake in another type of fishing that I hope you will enjoy.

The Fly

We talked about this in Level 3 a little bit. I was started out on what are called wooden poppers. These lures are easily seen when you are casting and when they are on the water.



These are great baits for pan fish and bass. They come in a multitude of colors. I have found that the colors red, black and white work the best. The smaller the popper, the smaller the fish that can take the lure. The larger the popper the fewer fish will strike your lure. I use relatively small poppers as I like the added action of having many strikes and you never know when the big one will strike! Big fish will strike small lures.

Fishing

Fishing with a fly rod is rather unique. You will start out casting the fly out onto the water. When the fly lands on the water it will create rings that will expand. After the fly has sat in the center of these rings for 10 seconds, gently pull on the line in the backing such that the fly moves about 6 inches. Let the fly rest there for 3 to 4 seconds and then pull on the line and move the fly again. When a fish strikes a fly it will suck it down into its mouth. At that moment you need to set the hook with a partial back cast while holding the line in the backing. If you were successful, you will have to reel in your catch. If you were unsuccessful you may have a pile of line at your feet that you need to cast out again. Be watchful when casting out line as sometimes fish will strike the fly just as it lands on the surface. Sometimes I get fish after fish and never am able to cast the fly to my intended target, those are the days I fish for!

Fishing Level 4 Requirements

- 1 – Know the 8 parts of a fly rod
- 2 – Be able to cast and hit targets at 30 and 40 feet in front of you.
- 3 – Catch a fish on a fly rod.