BEGINNERS GUIDE TO FLY FISHING

DRIFTHOOK FLY FISHING
CONTENTS

04 Gear Essentials
09 Your Fly Fishing Rod
14 Fly-Fishing Line
18 Fly Fishing Knots
26 Basic Fly Casting
32 Fly Fishing Presentation
39 Beginner Fly Fishing Entomology
47 Reading The Water
54 Nymph Fly Fishing (Nymphing)
60 Dry Fly Fishing
64 Streamer Fly Fishing
70 When A Trout Takes Your Fly
74 Landing And Releasing Trout
DRIFTHOOK FLY FISHING

We want anyone who picks up a fly rod to have the confidence and knowledge to catch more.

Drifthook Fly Fishing was born in Colorado in 2014, the brainchild of a group of professional guides and avid anglers with decades of fly-fishing experience.

From the headwaters of the upper Colorado River to the tailwaters of the Uncompahgre River, Drifthook’s comprehensive fly-fishing program and fly kits have been thoroughly tested, and we’re thrilled to be able to finally share them with the world.

Our specially curated Fly Fishing Starter Kits and Instructional Videos give all fly-fishers—from beginner to advanced—the skills and essential gear to enjoy their time on the water and to Catch The MONSTER Trout of a Lifetime.

Matthew Bernhardt, a third-generation Coloradan, grew up at the forefront of the state’s fly-fishing revolution, enjoying time on the water side by side with experienced guides and lifelong anglers.

By combining his passion for fly-fishing with input from other experienced fly-fishers and guides and his fine arts degree from Colorado State University, Matthew spent five years carefully developing the Drifthook Fly Fishing System, built to help every angler catch more.

When he’s not spending time with his wonderful family, you’ll find him out on the water catching MONSTER trout, and he anxiously looks forward to the day when his kids are old enough to join him there.

Photo by Matthew Bernhardt
GEAR ESSENTIALS

Understanding your gear will help you focus on your fly fishing experience.

Fly fishing is a sport where it is helpful to have all the right gear at your disposal. In this chapter, we’ll guide you on how you can pack all the right gear that can help you have an amazing fishing experience. This will also help you understand how the following gear can save time and help you focus on your fishing experience.
Hat
A quality fly-fishing hat can protect your eyes and face from the direct sun. The ideal hat won’t blow off in windy conditions; it will keep your head dry in the rain and prevent sunburn. It will also protect you from the mosquitos and errant hooks and can come in handy to cool off your head by dipping it into the river on a hot summers day.

Sunglasses
Polarized sunglasses help protect your eyes from ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun. UV rays can harm many parts of your eyes, including the cornea, leading to poor vision. Polarized sunglasses cut the glare off the top of the water and help you to easily spot fish and to see your indicator or your fly on the water.

Raincoat
A raincoat is a water-resistant coat worn to protect your body from the rain. This is a no-brainer to keep with you as a precautionary measure. There is nothing worse than having a great day on the water only to have it shut down early due to a little rain moving in on you.

Fly Fishing Vest or Pack
Fly-fishing vests have dedicated pockets to carry essential fly-fishing gear. Fly-fishing bags or packs offer the same amount of space for your gear; it all comes down to personal preference. Multiple companies offer amazing daypacks, waist packs, and chest packs – check them out online or at your local fly shop.

Emerger Swing Fly Fishing Kit

Learn More at Drifthook.com
Waders
Waders are waterproof pants that can keep you dry throughout your fishing session. Waders are great to have, but they are not a necessity when you are first starting out. Waders make it easy and comfortable to stand in water, and they allow easier casting and access to difficult fishing spots. There are two kinds of waders: neoprene or synthetic. Neoprene is for extreme cold conditions and is highly durable. Synthetic waders are lightweight and breathable.

Wader Belt
A wader belt is one of the most important safety measures for you as a fly fisher. The reason why it is so important is that it keeps water from coming into your waders in case you should fall into a deep pocket of water. Water filling up in your waders acts like an anchor and will pull you under. The belt helps keep this water out.

Wader Boots
Wader boots are also one of the most important overlooked gear essentials for fly fishing. They offer comfort during long hours of fishing and also traction to anglers for walking among the slippery conditions or wet rocks with relative ease. Wader boots come in different types and shapes, offering different levels of support. The options for grip and soles include rubber soles – recommended if you are on a drift boat or raft or plan on hiking the long distances, or felt – recommended for slippery rocks on the river.

Net
A net enables the angler to get the fish quickly, and that is important because for the health of the fish, it is important to get it in as soon as possible so it can be released without harm. The classic fishing nets are made of wood and fabric. You will also find nets made with larger thresholds that have clear rubber netting. The clear rubber netting works fantastic – your fly does not get stuck inside, and the net becomes more invisible underwater and doesn’t scare the fish. You can easily place the net inside your wader belt, or you can get attachments that work with your fly vest or pack.
Fly Box
A fly box is a case that stores your flies when you are going fly fishing. Fly boxes come in different shapes and sizes and can carry dry and wet flies, nymphs, terrestrials, and streamers.

Clippers/Nippers
Clippers or nippers can come in as a handy fishing tool – when you need to clip a line after you have caught the fish or when you need to change the fly. They also save your teeth from use over of biting off the line.

Forceps or Clamps
Forceps are handy and useful tools with a scissoring mechanism and a clamping tooth. Anglers use Forceps to remove flies from the fish easily and safely.

Split Shot or Weights
Split shot is used to weigh your fly-fishing rig to get your flies into the optimal feeding zone of the fish. In our program, we use split shot, but you can also use twist weights or weighted flies.
**Floatant**
Floatant is a liquid or powder that keeps your dry fly floating on the surface of the water. Dry flies (which will be discussed further in the guide) are adult insects that you will find on the surface of the water. When there is a hatch on the water, trouts can see the flies above the surface and approach them to eat.

**Indicator**
An indicator is also called a strike indicator, which is attached to a fly line suspended by a sinking fly called a nymph. This small tool indicates when a fish strikes the submerged fly. We recommend using clear bobbers because they are virtually invisible to fish below the surface.

**Leaders**
The leader is basically the link of line that is in-between your fly or hook and the actual main line. Leaders typically range from 7.5 feet to 11 feet but can be purchased as long as 20 feet for particular Euro Nymphing techniques.

**Tippet**
A tippet is a specific-gauge monofilament or fluorocarbon line that is attached to the end of the leader, to which you tie the fly. One major advantage of using the tippet is that it extends the usage-life of the leader – since leaders can be expensive. If you replace or change the flies often, gradually, the leader’s taper will be cut off. With the use of a tippet, you can avoid losing the taper – the fly ties to the end of the tippet.
YOUR FLY FISHING ROD

The fly fishing rod is one of the biggest differences between regular lure fishing and fly fishing.

The rod is typically very lightweight and thin compared to most fishing rods. It’s still a thin, tapered tube made from carbon fiber or synthetic materials. It has rings to control the line and a handle as well as a reel seat where you mount the reel.

Photo contribution from Tom Dossoff

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The history of fishing rods goes back as far as ancient Egypt and China. Based on stone inscriptions from 2000 BC, fishing has been recorded in Egypt, China, Greece, Spain, Italy, England, Trinidad and Tobago, and Germany. However, the fishing rod was invented even before that. Prehistoric people used their bare hands to catch the fish, but that kept them from catching fish in deep waters.

The design of rods enabled the development of fishing hooks and lines. The first fishing hooks were improvised from small wood or bone pieces that were pointed at both ends and tied together with a line. The next type of fish hook uses the same hook shape and design we recognize today.

It was made of canvas, canvas-bone, or wood-bone. These hooks were tied to the line but were impractical used. Jointed rods appeared in the 18th century with a wooden bottom part and a bamboo top, which allowed the rod to have more flexibility. Industrialization led to the creation of mass-produced lines made by machines rather than handmade lines made by fishermen. People later began importing lighter wood for fishing rods from South America, the West Indies, and even Europe.

The 19th century saw the introduction of a new lightweight and stronger composite bamboo rod. Bamboo was cut into thin sections, then glued back into a hexagon shape. Split-bamboo rods remain popular in fly fishing, which means they must be a pretty good fishing tool. In the 20th century, graphite rods replaced those made from other materials because they were less expensive, flexible, and less sensitive to weather conditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, boron and graphite rods appeared alongside graphite because they were comparatively cheaper materials.

Different Types of Rods and Their Uses

Today's fishing rods are much more sophisticated, requiring much more detail, and are available in 2-piece or 4-piece sections. The 4-piece sections are superior for travel, but the 2-piece rods are easier to control and provide more advanced play. Consider your budget first, and buy the best rod you can afford. Your fly rod will be one of the essential pieces of gear that will assist you in developing your skills. Some anglers are fighting their gear, often because their fly rod was under-budgeted. Beginners and experts alike benefit from high-quality fly rods.
ANATOMY OF A FLY ROD

Your fly rod is composed of six sections.

A. Reel

B. Handle

C. Hook Keeper

D. Ferrules (rod itself)

E. Guides

F. Tip

When setting up your rod and reel, think about which hand is dominant. If you are right-handed, you should set up your reel for a left-hand retrieve - in other words, you cast with your right hand and reel in with your left (or the opposite, if you’re left-handed).

Weight and Length

When purchasing a rod, you will be bombarded with multiple combinations of weight and length. One question to answer is, what type of fish will I be fishing for on a regular basis?

The weight of the rod directly correlates to the weight of the line that is attached to it. So what does that mean? It means if you have a pile of fly-fishing line that weighs 6 pounds, then you should have a 6-weight fly rod to match. The idea is that when your finger is on the handle, the weight of the line and the rod should balance.
So, how do you know which weight to choose?

**Weight 1-3:** This weight is designed for fishing for the tiniest of fish. This is optimal for small trout, brook trout, or panfish.

**Weight 4:** This is a great all-around fly line weight for small fish species such as panfish or small to medium-sized trout.

**Weight 5:** This weight works OK for small fish, but it takes a little bit of the fight out of the catch on smaller fish. It is universal for average-sized bass and the majority of trout.

**Weight 6:** This is the ideal weight for trout fishing. It will quickly bring in the joeys and make a medium or large fish a thrill to catch. It also works well for bass, small salmon, and similar-sized fish.

**Weight 7:** If you want the best weight for bass fishing, this is the rod for you. And if you are hunting gator-sized trout, this is a great solution for accuracy and strength. This weight is also effective for small- to medium-sized salmon and steelhead trout.

**Weight 8 and Above:** These line weights are used for strong alpha and saltwater fish.

So, which rod/reel/line should you get?

First determine what type of fish you are going to go after. Knowing what you plan to fish for allows you to choose the right fly line weight and fly reel to use.

Line Weight = Rod Weight = Reel Weight

Whether purchasing your first rod or your 10th rod, just make sure to match everything up, and you’ll be good to go.

Fly Rod Length

OK, so you know what you’re going to fish for, and you know the correct weight, but how do you figure out the proper length?

Use a 9-foot rod if you’re using heavy line, 6-weight and higher. This is also a good length if you need to make long casts, such as on a lake or large river, or if you live in an area that has strong wind. This length will help cut through those gusts.

Use an 8.5-foot rod for all-around fly-fishing in a wide variety of conditions. This is also good for a 2-piece or 4-piece for travel.

Use an 8-foot rod (or shorter) for precise and short casts. This length is typically used in small-stream fishing or for chasing after panfish with a 1- to 5-weight fly line.

So, after all these options, you’re probably thinking, what else is there to know? Rod Action...

What is rod action, and which action is best for you?

One thing to keep in mind is that unlike with line weight and rod length, there is no precise method for determining proper rod action. But, in general, the following will give you an overview of the topic.
ACTIONS OF A FLY ROD

A. Fast Action
A fast-action rod is built to have the least amount of flex. The stiffness of a fast-action rod is ideal when you’re going for larger fish, and it is the best for making long casts. It can also help bring in a fish faster, because you have more control over the line after you have hooked into one. Another benefit of a fast-action rod is that it cuts through the wind with ease.

These all sound like great things, but if you’re in an area where the fish are typically smaller, this could make a fun catching experience seem too easy.

B. Moderate Fast Action
A moderate fast action rod offers a good mix of performance and versatility. It works great for dry flies and also nymphing and will still work great in the wind. It also offers a level of flex that will help play the fish without breaking your fly off. This rod is great for most anglers and fishing scenarios.

C. Moderate Action
A moderate-action rod is a great choice for beginners. It is flexible but also has a good amount of stiffness. The rod will bend on the top half of its length and remain stiff on the lower half. This will help improve accuracy of your casts, because it follows the natural timing of the arm action of a beginner fisherman.

D. Slow Action
A slow-action rod is modeled after the original bamboo fly rods. They were built for accurate short casts that easily hit the water, especially small rivers and streams. They are flexible throughout the entire shaft, making them ideal for using small dry flies and nymphs. These rods are also forgiving if you are not a strong caster.

A sensible 3-rod collection for trout might look something like this:
- 9’ 5-weight (moderate fast action)
- 8’ 3-weight (moderate action for dry flies)
- 9’6” 6-weight (longer, fast action for heavy nymphs and streamers on big water)

OR-
- 9’ 4-weight (moderate fast action)
- 7’7” 3-weight (moderate action for dry flies)
- 9’0” 6-weight (all-around nymph and streamer rod)
FLY-FISHING LINE

The fishing line’s whole purpose is to allow the casting energy to travel from the rod to the fly and be presented to the fish.

Whether you are new to fly-fishing or an expert at it, you can’t skip or ignore the importance of knots and the fly-fishing line. You can easily buy the fishing equipment of your choice because the industry uses industry-standard labels. Many rods will come equipped with a label listing their appropriate line weight.

Thus, any 6-weight rod will balance with a 6-weight line. This is true for most reels, as well. The rods, reels, and lines will all be useful only if they are well-balanced.

Fly-fishing Line

Fly-fishing is different from traditional fishing in numerous ways. The traditional fishing set-up entails the use of weights or sinkers to weigh down lines. This weight gives you the ability to cast the bait far from the boat.

With fly fishing, there are only a few tools: a line and a fly. Due to the light weight of the line and the importance of casting, the fly-fishing line is an area where you don’t want to skimp on cost (although, you don’t have to spend a lot of money to get into the sport of fly fishing). High-quality fly line will pay off eventually.

Fly-fishing line comes in various weights, followed by a number that indicates increasing line weight. The heavier a line is, the greater its weight. The right number for your fly line depends on the species of fish you’re after and your location in reference to the water.

Another important variable to consider when using a fly-fishing line is the weight of your fly-fishing rod. Most fly rods have a weight recommended by the manufacturer. This recommendation is made assuming average fishing conditions and will produce optimal results.

This does not mean you cannot use more or less weight in your line. Doing so would be more effective in some situations, especially if it pertains to the type of fish being caught.

If you are new to fly-fishing and are unsure of what line weight to use, we recommend using the manufacturer’s recommended line weight. This gives you optimum performance right out of the box. As you become more skilled and competent with your fishing rod, you’ll learn when a heavier or lighter line is needed for different circumstances.
FLY LINE LENGTH AND TAPER

Next, you should consider the line length. When it comes to fly-fishing lines, most manufacturers produce around 100 feet at a time. If you are an experienced traditional angler, you might think 100 feet is a short distance. Yes, you’re right, but consider these two things as well:

Not only must you factor in the length of your line, but your leader and your backing as well. The backing is often 100 feet+, depending on the fly rod’s reel size and weight. A leader is approximately at least 7 to 15 feet in length. By combining all of these, you will be over 200 feet long.

You’ll rarely be more than 50 feet away from your target and can often walk right up to it. Fly-fishing is far more about precision than distance. Besides weights and lengths, the fly-fishing line comes in a variety of tapers. Taper lines determine how the line is weighted and have a substantial effect on the cast.

There are three basic types of fly-fishing line with the taper:

A. Weight-Forward Taper (the most common type)
   The popular choice of taper for fly-fishing is the weight-forward taper. Weight-forward fly line runs has a consistent thickness through most of the line, but towards the end, it thickens up for a bit and then thins back off to the point where the leader attaches. Different designs and manufacturers of rollers are available.

B. Double Taper
   A double taper pattern is similar to a weight-forward taper pattern, but the thinner middle part is twice as long as the thickest part. The double taper provides a more refined presentation. If you’re throwing for distant targets, this type of line is not the best choice. However, if you are fly-fishing for skittish fish, this line is the best choice.

C. Level Taper
   Surprisingly, level taper fly lines are not commonly used, but they are a relevant idea worth mentioning. A level taper isn’t discussed at all in the fly-fishing community. The line is the same length throughout, without any breaks in continuity.
TYPES OF FLY FISHING LINE

The last difference is what kind of fly-fishing line is used. There are three types of fly presentation materials:

1. Floating Fly Line
2. Sinking Line
3. Sinking Tip Fly Line

These tapers are available, including handlebar weight forward, double, and level tapers.

A Floating Fly Line
Floating Fly Line is the most common kind of fly line, and it’s designed to float from the back of your reel to the fly line. If you’re trying to learn to fly fish, you should use this line.

Sinking Fly Line
A sinking line is used when fishing for a specific depth and line of a group of fish. The deeper you feed, the faster your bait sinks. A certain number quantifies the color and speed of sinking.

Intermediate Sinking Lines:
0.5 - 1.5 mm IPS (Inches Per Second)
Slower
30 - 50 - 70 IPS
4.5 - 3.5 - 4 IPS
Medium
4.6 - 4.9 - 5.2 IPS
6 - 5.5 - 6.5 IPS
7 - 6.5 - 7.5 and less
Fast Sinking Lines
8.5 - 10 - 11 IPS
9 - 8.5 - 9.5 IPS
3.5-4 - 4.2 - 4.5 IPS

You’ll most often use a sinking line when fishing in deep water where the line sinks below the surface.

Sinking Tip Line
A sinking tip line combines both floating and sinking lines. Most of the line tends to sink, but the last 10 or so feet tend to float. This ability to sink makes a fishing line useful in situations where fish are feeding at a greater depth. The sinking tip line is an advantage when recasting. For a longer line length, with a shallower depth, this can be difficult to cast. As the majority of the line does not sink, the chance of the line getting tangled or hung up on objects is significantly reduced.

Learn More at Drifthook.com
ATTACHING BACKING TO REEL

Tying a new kind of fishing knot can be as challenging and rewarding as catching a large brown trout; it’s all part of the wonderful, intricate world of fly fishing. Fly-fishing provides a variety of interlocking facets and the many vertical depths you can go into. You don’t need specialized knots such as the Albright or the Slim Beauty to catch trout and salmon; you can catch trout and salmon with only the basic knots.

Your backing, fly line, leader, tippet, are all one system, but the individual parts must be connected by knots. The knots are used to tie on the fly line, leader, or tippet. Regardless of one’s level of expertise, it’s perfectly acceptable to look up a lesser-used knot like an Arbor knot when one obtains a new reel and wants to add a backing.

It’s a fun activity to learn new knots. You can learn how to tie different knots better than others or begin tying new knots you never knew before. As the adage goes, there are many different ways to skin a cat, and there are also many different ways that you may choose to connect your fly line system to your fly reel.

How to tie the Arbor Knot

1. Wrap your line around the arbor of the spool with the tag end of the line. Then tie a simple overhand knot around the standing part with the tag end.

2. Tie a second overhand knot in the tag end just an inch or two from the first overhand knot.

3. Pull the standing part of the line to slide the first overhand knot down to the spool and the second knot to jam against the first.

4. Trim tag end close.

Some reels have an indentation in the frame of the spool to let you know how much backing to put in. If yours doesn’t, fill it at least half full. (Most trout reels can be outfitted with 150 to 200 yards of 20- or 30-pound-test Dacron and more than 250 yards of backing on saltwater reels used for tarpon, billfish, or other large fish.)
It’s a good idea to buy your backing and fly line from a specialty fly shop because the employees there can advise you on the best line for your local conditions and because their reels wind line onto your reel effectively and quickly.

In any circumstance, you require backing in your reel because it is designed to hold a fly line and a certain amount of backing material.

Regardless of whether or not you plan to catch anything larger than a pike, you must fill the reel arbor with the appropriate amount of backing. If your fly line is not correctly wound around the narrow spindle because it is too tightly coiled, then it will be difficult to straighten and use it effectively.

Winding backing onto a reel is time-consuming (150 yards at one inch per crank), and the backing must be wound tightly and evenly, back and forth across the width of the reel arbor. If you wind loose coils of backing near the base of the arbor, then wind tighter layers on top (such as when you land a large fish, or merely when you complete the job of winding the backing onto the reel), then the tighter coils bury themselves under the loose coils, creating a snarl that jams your reel.

If you do not wish to have a fly shop reinforce your reel, you can do it yourself, but be very careful in doing it, so you can do it right. It’s easiest to wind line onto the bottom of the rod if the reel is attached to the rod butt, so attach your empty reel to the rod in the position you intend to crank. If you are casting with your right hand, you should use your left hand to crank while holding the reel handle with your right hand.

Thread the end of the backing from the product spool through the rod’s stripping guide, through the reel line guide, around the spool arbor, and back out through the line guide. Use this Arbor Knot to attach the backing directly to the spinning wheel.

To ensure that the backing is wound under tension, a pencil should be run through the spool and held by the ends so the spool turns freely. As you wind the device onto the reel, you should pull the reel through to create tension. We would recommend pressing the overlay on a folded towel. Then, step on the towel, which provides the required tension to wind the thread back tightly.

When winding the backing onto the frame, make sure you evenly wind the backing onto the spool. Avoid winding the backing onto one side of the spool or the other.

Once the reel has at least half of the reel’s spool filled with backing, you can now connect the fly line to the backing.
ATTACHING LINE TO BACKING

What knot should I use to attach the line to the backing?

Blood Knot or Perfection Loop connection

If your line has no loops, it can be connected with a Blood Knot. The blood knot consists of three steps:

1. Overlap backing over fly line. Twist backing around the fly line making 5 turns. Bring tag end back between opening in the two lines.

2. Repeat with the other fly line, wrapping in opposite direction making 5 turns.

3. Slowly pull lines in opposite direction of each other. The turns will wrap and gather together.

4. Finish by clipping the ends close to the knot.

Note that most lines and leaders have loop-to-loop connections where a Blood Knot is not needed, but if your line does not come without one, then you should learn to tie the Blood Knot.
ATTACHING LEADER TO LINE

What knot should I use to attach the leader to the fly line?

Loop-to-Loop Connection or Snail Knot

The majority of fly lines on the market today come with loops on both ends, and the majority of leaders on the market come with one loop on the butt end of the leader.

Using the loop-to-loop connection, you can easily switch out leader to your fly line. Using the Loop to Loop:

1. Slip the loop of the leader over the loop of the flyline.
2. Run leader line through same loop.
3. Pull fly line and leader line in opposite directions to lock the loops together. Be careful that the loops join together end to end.

If your fly line does not come with a loop, then use the Snail Knot or Knail Knot.
ATTACHING TIPPET TO LEADER

What knot should I use to attach the tippet to the leader?

Double Surgeons Knot

The tippet is the last line of thread connecting your fly to the leader. The tippet isn’t tapered and should be the same diameter or slightly smaller than your leader’s terminal end.

To tie the double surgeons knot:

1. Lay the tippet and leader on top of one another overlapping each other by several inches.
2. Form a overhand loop.
3. Pass both the tag end and the entire leader through the loop. Repeat step 3.
4. Moisten knot and pull all 4 ends tight.

When fishing with nylon monofilament, it’s easier to cast properly, and the more supple material will allow your fly to move more freely in the water.

Fluorocarbon has a higher resistance to abrasion and stretch. It is more expensive as well. Its main selling point is that its light refraction index is close to that of water, which means light passes through it at much the same angle, making it less visible in the water than nylon monofilament. Many anglers believe that the fluorocarbon provides an advantage in situations where the water is clear since fish have exceptional vision.

The tippet serves a dual purpose of allowing you to change your fly only once and saving the monofilament. If you tie the fly directly to the leader, the fly will become shorter as you change flies. Attaching a 2-foot tippet section will keep the leader from getting longer but not the tippet itself.

Additionally, a level-diameter tippet section is extremely limp and therefore does not turn over and land straight like a leader. It loosens slack in the system, reducing slack and allowing you to make perfect presentations for the trout.

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ATTACHING FLY TO TIPPET

What knot should I use to attach the tippet to the fly?

Improved Clinch Knot or Non-Slip Loop Knot

The final knot, and the most important knot in many people’s estimation, is the tippet-to-fly connection, which is the weakest link. The most common knot used to connect fly-fishing lines is the Improved Clinch Knot. We also recommend the Non-Slip Loop Knot for trailing flies as it gives more movement to the fly in the water. It is also great for streamers where you need a little more action other than a dead drift.

The Improved Clinch Knot

The Improved Clinch Knot is a common choice for tying your end fly or last fly to a monofilament or fluorocarbon line. The knot is easy and quick to tie, and we have found it to be the most reliable.

1. Feed the line through the eye of the hook of fly.
2. Double back parallel to the standing line and pinch the two lines together with thumb and forefinger of opposite hand.
3. Begin twisting to put about five to seven twists in the line.
4. Feed the tag end back up through the opening behind the eye of the fly
5. Feed the tag end again through the large opening.
6. Moisten the lines and pull the knot tight.
NON-SLIP LOOP KNOT

Great knot for droppers, tags and streamers where you need additional movement in your presentation.

This knot makes a non-slip loop at the end of your tippet or leader. It works best for adding animation to your fly on the water, as it lets the line float in the eye of the fly.

To tie the Non-Slip Loop Knot:

1. Make an overhand knot in the line about 10 inches from the end. Pass the tag end through the hook eye and back through the loop of the overhand knot.

2. Wrap the tag end around the standing part 4 or 5 times. Bring tag end back through overhand knot, entering from same side it exited from before.

3. Moisten he knot then pull slowly on the tag end to cinch the wraps loosely together.

4. Then pull the loop and the standing line in opposite directions to seat the knot. Trim tag end.

Breaking strength is just one of the important factors to consider when tying a knot. If you are using a 6x tippet, you want a strong knot because you don’t have a lot of leeway, but if you are using a 15-pound-test fluorocarbon, a weaker knot is still pretty strong.

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BASIC FLY CASTING

Casting with a fly rod can be both challenging and rewarding, as can be the art of fly fishing.
Casting with a fly rod can be both challenging and rewarding, as can be the art of fly fishing. It takes practice to develop your ability and can be done without difficulty. With a basic knowledge and a willingness to set aside time to practice, anyone can become an accomplished caster.

When casting with regular fishing gear, the fishing line is wound tightly around the reel, weighing the lure. When the weight of the lure and the momentum of the cast are combined, the line is suddenly pulled off the reel. Fly-fishing is different because flies are lighter than traditional lures and can be cast and retrieved without weights.

You should imagine how far you could throw a stone versus how far you could throw a feather to get a good idea of how far humans throw.

This is where direct-casting of flies comes into play. In contrast to the regular fishing line, the thicker fly-fishing line adds more weight and control to the line. The energy created by the casting stroke runs through the line almost like a crack of a bull whip. A line casts the fly when it releases the fly.

The Loop
With every cast, the fly line trails behind the rod tip. If the casting stroke is stopped as soon as it begins, the energy will be transferred into it, and it will continue to unroll, forming a loop. There are a few things to look out for when you are casting, to ensure that you are casting correctly. The top loop should roll parallel to the base of the loop. The loop should be a minimum width of two to three feet. The loop should unroll smoothly, and ideally in a straight line, with the entire line and leader stretching before falling into the water.

Loading the Rod
To cast the fly rod, energy must be applied to the rod and then released into the fishing line. This concept is similar to using force to an object, which results in a sudden release.

The Energy Transfer
The energy stored in a fly rod must be transferred into the line, and the line must be cast smoothly to produce a good cast. Each casting stroke is made with smooth and deliberate control. When the rod is abruptly stopped, its energy is efficiently transferred into the line and launched towards the target.
OVERHEAD CAST

The overhead cast is a fishing technique that is used 90% of the time while fishing and is the foundation of virtually all other casting variations. The casting exercise or practice requires the use of complete fly-fishing gear and a large open space such as a field or parking lot.

The cast can be divided into two parts: the back cast and the forward cast. The back cast is necessary to help transfer energy from the rod to the arrow so the arrow can be launched.

The Back Cast

1. Stand with your shoulders square to steady the rod and grip with four fingers wrapped around the handle, thumb on top. Pull about 25 feet out from the tip of the rod, and then draw it back toward you perpendicular and straight, while facing your target with your feet about shoulder-width apart.

2. While holding the rod low to the ground, accelerate the rod up and backward in one smooth motion.

3. Stop your acceleration when the rod is at a vertical level. Your destination should approach firmly.

The Forward Cast

4. With the line extended behind you, a smooth and accelerating stroke will bring the rod forward.

5. Drop the rod tip down so that the energy transfers into the line and then forward. To unroll a line, lower the rod tip. The line should be completely straight.

6. Keep your wrist straight, and using your bicep and shoulder for support, use the fingers of your other hand to generate the cast. Using your wrist too much can defect the cast.

As you cast back, make sure to pause for the line to unfurl completely. It is acceptable to look backward during practice to observe how far the line extends. The overhead cast is effective in many situations, but you’ll see some of its drawbacks if insufficient space is available.
The roll cast is one of the most critical casts. The overhead cast has two basic variations, the static cast and the dynamic cast. When you’ve got limited or no casting room, the roll cast is useful and is the baseline of all switch and Spey casts with single and double flying rods.
The static roll cast begins with your fly line in the water in front of you and then raising the rod tip overhead until your casting hand is about ear level but a foot or so away from your body.

Stop the rod motion, so the line hangs behind you, forming a D-shape from the rod tip to the water surface, and then flick your wrist forward to start the forward rod motion. When it reaches about eye level, stop the forward rod stroke, and the fly line will roll out in front of you, completing the roll cast.

When you need a little more distance from your roll cast, use the dynamic roll cast, which involves picking some of the fly line up off the water as you draw your rod tip back (rather than drawing the line across the water as in a static roll cast) and then letting some of the line set back on the water before beginning your forward rod stroke, also known as splash-n-go.

This creates a larger D-loop in front of you and reduces the amount of line on the water. The latter is significant because it still provides an anchor point for the fly line, which is required to load the rod, but it also reduces energy loss to the water, allowing the fly line to travel farther.

The difference between a static and dynamic roll cast is subtle, but if you think about it while on the water and practice, you’ll notice it.

It’s important to remember that the roll cast isn’t intended to be a change-of-direction fly cast; instead, the cast will go in the same direction as the fly line began. When fishing in a pond or still water, this isn’t a big deal, but it’s vital to remember this while fishing in a river.

If you want your fly to land in a specific location, the fly line should begin on the water pointing in that direction. You can do this on a river by making the line hang downstream and using a water haul to flip the line upstream or out in front of you. Once the line is pointed toward your target and the current begins to bring it back downstream, you can start the roll cast.

Lift your rod hand to the level of your ear. Having the angles right is crucial to a successful roll cast. Bringing your rod up to this height means that your roll cast begins and finishes with the proper angles. The location of your rod is crucial here, just as it is when learning to perform a standard overhead cast. If you find it easier to cast by picturing a clock face, launch a roll cast with your rod tip at 2 o’clock.

Fly casting is an intuitive operation, similar to riding a bike, once you’ve mastered the fundamental mechanics. You don’t consider where you want to ride your bike; all you have to do is look, and the cycle will follow. Using the same thought process while casting will go a long way toward ensuring that your flies land where you want them to.
Pushing the rod forward and snapping the wrist is the most important part of the casting motion. It’s easy to overdo this move by leaning too far ahead and snapping your wrist too hard, as with everything in fly fishing.

The trick is to note that it should be one continuous motion rather than two separate acts. You vigorously drive the rod forward as you lift your rod parallel to your ear and look where you want to cast. The rod tip can stop between 10 and 11 o’clock if you’re picturing a clock face. Keep in mind that this must be a single fluid motion.

Don’t let your rod tip fall too low when you finish your cast. When you lower the rod tip, the cast will unroll on the water rather than above it. Every subtle presentation you were looking for with a roll cast in tight water is now ruined. If you’re fishing with several flies, it also raises the chances of tangling them.

Benefits of the Roll Cast

The roll cast can be stealthy and accurate, as well as a fast way to get a fly up and back into the water with little false casts. The roll cast can be used to lift heavy sink-tip lines and shooting heads, as well as to throw larger flies. A roll cast will also help you stop tangles and help you avoid smacking yourself in the head with a meaty fly.

Learning to roll cast, like everything else in fly fishing, requires time and effort. The reward, on the other hand, is well it. This basic technique will be helpful more often than you think. Before going to the fishing, spend some time practicing in your yard. You’ll be shocked by how easy it is.
FLY FISHING PRESENTATION

Learning how to present your fly to the fish properly is vital to being a good fly angler.

Choosing a mark, casting without alerting the fish, and drifting your fly along with the current so it looks like food to the fish are the steps involved in the presentation process. You might spend a lifetime honing your presentation skills, but it’s crucial to start with a strong base. Even the most novice fly angler will catch more fish if they practice simple presentation techniques.

The Dead Drift

To catch fish with a fly rod, you have to learn to mimic. Fly fishers accomplish this by matching the hatch with the appropriate fly and naturally displaying the fly. A fish’s food is usually served drifting in the current. The dead drift is a method used by fly fishermen to mimic a naturally floating insect.

The problem for fly fishers is that the line on the river’s surface causes drag, interfering with the fly’s natural drift. Any unusual movement of the fly will be detected by a cautious trout or other river fish, and they will easily identify it as a fake. Anglers must ensure that the fly has plenty of room to drift. There are many ways to do this, but the most effective method is learning to “mend” the fly line.
THE MEND

The technique of repositioning the line on the river’s surface to overcome the current’s drag force is known as “mend.”

Fly fishers sometimes cast over swift currents to position their flies in slower water pockets where fish hide. The stronger current in between will easily sweep the line downstream of the fly lands in the quiet water. The current generates a downstream “belly” in the line, which pulls the fly along. The line is repositioned upstream immediately after the cast to correct this and allow the fly to drift like a normal insect.

How to mend upstream:

1. Cast to the target, keeping your rod tip low and pointing towards the fly.

2. Don’t let the line get settled. Draw a wide, upstream semicircle with the rod tip right away, lifting the line off the water and positioning it upstream of where it landed.

3. The line should land with a gentle upstream curve without moving the fly away from the goal if done correctly.

4. Return the rod tip to the fly and track it downstream as it drifts. The line should now have slack, allowing the fly to hit the trout until the current catches up with it.

Practice the mend until it feels normal and automatic, and remember that there is no law dictating the size of the mend, the number of mends you may create in one drift, or the way you should mend.

The only rule is to do whatever it takes to get your fly naturally drifting. Correctly introducing your fly to trout from various angles will seem much simpler once you clearly understand the dead drift and the mend.
THE ¾ UPSTREAM PRESENTATION

Presenting upstream is a perfect way to sneak up on fish when you are casting from behind the fish as they face upstream in the current. Casting from behind the fish can be difficult because the fly line and leader may cross over the fish and scare them. Try to visualize where the fish would be and cast at a slight angle to avoid the line landing directly over them.

Positioning yourself well downstream of a target, casting directly upstream or slightly across the stream, and allowing the fly to drift back toward you with the current are all part of the upstream presentation. Since the line slacks as it flows back downstream, this is a simple way to produce a dead drift. If a fish hits, make sure to catch the slackline when it comes in, so you have enough line tension to set the hook.
THE DOWNSTREAM PRESENTATION

The downstream presentation, unlike other angles, means that the fish sees the fly first, rather than the leader or fly line. Position yourself well upstream of the mark, cast downstream, and feed slack line as the fly drifts down to the trout to make a downstream presentation. Pull a few extra feet of line from the reel with your free hand before making the cast. Allow the additional line to slip through your fingers as the fly drifts downstream after the cast, to prolong the drift. Maintain line contact and be prepared to set the hook at any time.

The hardest part of downstream fly-fishing is setting the hook – if you do your tickle, rod sticks to the hookset and most likely you’ll pulling the hook straight out of the fish’s mouth, so you need to have patience and after the cast, wait long enough (just a bit too long), and then instead of typical straight up hookset, hook the fish by swinging the hookset downstream lower parallel to the water. This will help remove the slack from the line; the tension of the water and it will help set the hook.

The downstream presentation, unlike other angles, means that the fish sees the fly first, rather than the leader or fly line. This makes it suitable for sight-casting to rising fish easily spooked or in glassy, clear water.
HIGH STICKING

Cast upstream and slightly across the water, finishing with your rod tip high so the fly lands before the leader.

High sticking varies from other presentation approaches, and it includes holding your rod tip in the air and hanging your fly on a short line while keeping much of the fly line off the water. To make a high stick presentation, get as close to your target as possible and leave just a few feet of line – plus your leader – past the rod tip. Holding a few feet of slack in your free hand can be useful if you need to cast further.

Cast upstream and slightly across the water, finishing with your rod tip high so the fly lands before the leader. Keep your tip up when the fly lands, and watch it as it drifts over the surface. Lower the rod tip as the fly drifts downstream to create slack and prolong the drift.

Since you can keep the line off the water so it won’t produce drag, this presentation works wonders in rough water or rivers with loads of boulders and complicated surface currents. High sticking is usually reserved for cases where the goal is just a few rod lengths away. There are no hard and fast rules on which presentation to use in which situation.

To find out what works and what doesn’t, you’ll need some practice. If you practice and get good at both of these techniques, you’ll notice that they’re interchangeable, and it’s up to you to choose the one that will give you the best presentation.

Present the fly to the same target from various angles and observe how the current affects it – using both big and small mends. Structures close to the bank and structures on the other side of the river are also good places to fish. In difficult situations, combine the various methods of presenting the fly. With enough practice, you’ll soon be able to present your fly naturally in almost any situation.
PRESENTING STREAMERS

Casting Streamers

It’s true that heavy flies put the casters into a lot of trouble during fishing. The heavy fly pulls the line down and tangles the hook. Pick the water line in your backcast and drop it back into the water after the forward cast, then create another back cast without allowing the fly to sink. On the forward cast, throw line to lengthen the cast, then let it drop to the water again. Carry on casting until the line reaches the length you want.

Swinging a Streamer

Cast a streamer across the water and slightly downstream from where you are standing to dead drift it. Enable the fly to swing freely in the current without changing the line or the fly: no mends, tugs, or retrieves.

Cast the fly to the same water and retrieve it with a lifelike motion after a few casts with a dead-drift swing. Secure the line with your rod hand’s index finger. With your line hand, reach for the line that runs from your index finger to the reel. With your line side, pull a few inches of fly line from the water. Drop the line you retrieved into the water between your reel and the point where your rod hand index finger secures the line. Allow the fly to drift a little. Drop a few inches of the line once more. Repeat this procedure until you’ve recovered the majority of the rows.

Create the food chain, with a small bait fish being pursued by another, to attract larger fish. Attach a weighted streamer to the end of your leader to achieve this effect. Tie an unweighted streamer to the end of the first fly’s hook as a secondary fly. Toss the two flies into the air. Allow them to sink for a few seconds before retrieving them. To get the flies out, use an animated pull.

To avoid disturbing the water, start fishing by aiming at targets closer to your location and casting to distant targets afterward.
Drifthook customizes fly-fishing boxes for optimal success on the water during any month of the year. Each fly-fishing kit includes guides to improve your fishing experience. The boxes contain expert-picked flies for your fishing sessions, no matter if you are a beginner or a pro fly fisher. You will find the right option in our catalog of boxes. You’ll find all the discussed flies in our kits at Drifthook.com.

Insects are the most diverse group of all animals on the planet, with more than a million different organisms. They have lived for more than 350 million years almost everywhere, in every ecosystem.

While entomology is a complex topic, we need to concentrate on a few key points. Entomology is the study of such bugs that reside in and around our streams for fly fishers. For trout, these bugs are an essential food source. We’ll catch more fish if we learn some simple “fly-fishing entomology.” It’s all about catching trout, as we all know.

You may recall the word “metamorphosis” from high school biology class. We learned in that class that a butterfly goes through four phases. Beginning as an embryo, it develops into a larva, then a pupa/emerger, and finally a adult or dun.

Fly Fishing Entomology studies “life cycles” or “growth stages” of insects that trout feed upon and mimics with artificial fly patterns.

Fly anglers focus on the same four phases while imitating different lifecycles. We target trout feeding activity with nymphs, emergers, dry flies, and spinners. Nymphs are bottom feeders, so nymph patterns should be fished near the stream’s bottom. Emergers rise from the bottom of the water column and travel up the water column to the surface. On the surface, dry flies that look like adults or spinners are fished.

Fly fishers base their fishing activities on knowing when these times occur and when insects move from one point to the next. Understanding these levels, water temperatures, and the time of year is crucial for increasing your trout capture rate. A basic understanding of entomology supports fly selection as trout are caught by choosing the right fly.

In other words, the essential part of this experience is being able to recognize the bug family and stage it is currently in. Then, choose a fly from your fly box that closely matches and show it to the trout.

The five most commonly used bugs for fly-fishing will be discussed here. Even if you only use one or two patterns from the following list, that will be enough for a great day of fly fishing.
Midges are sometimes confused with their close cousin, the mosquito. They are a favorite of trout and can be found all year in lakes and rivers. Midges are characterized by their long, narrow scaleless wings that lie back over their bodies. They’re a tiny creature that’s about the size of a #16 to #22 hook. The males have long feathery plumose antennae. As we previously mentioned, they have a mosquito-like appearance.

Midges go through four phases in their lifecycle. However, only three of those stages - larva, emerger, and adult need our attention. The larvae have segmented bodies and resemble tiny worms. They have a red color because of their diet. The midge larva is a regular nymph pattern.

These are usually caught just under the surface of the water and in the water column.

The emerging midge pattern is the pupa. The pupa forms a “U” shape and is encased in an air bubble to lift itself to the surface or just below the surface during the emerger process.

The adult period is the last one. These creatures are tiny and difficult to use for fishing as individuals. Midges congregate on the water’s surface when they mate making for a bigger meal for trout, so a pattern like a Griffith’s Gnat is a fine choice for a fly fisherman. The Griffith’s Gnat imitates the midge’s “mating clustering.”
Because of their wings, mayflies are the easiest to find. The wings are straight and vertical, resembling the sail of a sailing ship on the sea. It is most common for them to hatch in the morning and evening.

Mayflies - Nymphs
Mayfly - nymphs are divided into four categories: swimmers, clingers, crawlers, and burrowers.

Swimmers have a sleek and streamlined appearance. They have a 'minnow' shape, which means they are oblong. This shape makes swimming more effortless as they have a three-part fringed tail with fine hair that propels them through the water. For breathing, oval gills are located on the sides of the abdomen. They have muscles, but they are thin and wobbly and tend to go about by swimming. They hide among the rocks, pebbles, and stream bed grasses.

Clingers have a large, flat body and a prominent head with eyes in the dorsal region. They survive in fast water and cling to rocks in the swift current due to their physical abilities.

Crawlers live in the flowing water of streams and, on rare occasions, lakes. Like swimmers, they have gills that stretch from the abdomen.

Burrowers live in the thick silt and sandy areas of stream beds. Their name comes from the fact that they dig U-shaped burrows in the sediment with their upturned mandible tusks. The gills are also situated along the abdomen, allowing food particles and dissolved oxygen to flow through the burrow.
Mayfly emergers are one of the most critical stages to recognize for fly fishers. Emergents have a shuck behind their bodies as they make their way to the surface during the emergent process. They emerge from the shuck and enter the adult stage once on the surface. The emerger has air and gases that accumulate under their protective shell at this time, raising their buoyancy and propelling them to the surface. The nymphs are unable to breathe during this molting process.

They raise their wings to fill with fluid and harden their veins until they reach the surface. When the emerger’s wings have “dried,” it becomes an adult known as a “dun.” They are not yet sexually mature, so they must go through one more process, or molt. They fly from the water to surrounding foliage, where they remain peacefully until they molt or shed their exoskeleton to turn into spinners for the final time.

Adult mayflies are now known as “spinners” after going through the dun level. Their simple wings make them easy to spot while they’re in the spinner stage. Their sole purpose is to mate and lay eggs at this stage. They don’t eat or drink because they don’t have a digestive system or a functioning mouth during this time. They emit a scent to attract a mate, lay eggs, and then repeat the lifecycle.
For trout, the caddis is one of the most abundant food sources. Trout consume caddis from the larval stage to the adult stage of their life cycle. Caddis will spend up to two years as a nymph in streams, rivers, and lakes. They rise to the surface of the water and fly away when they are ready.

A Caddis larva sifts organic particles from the water with silken nets or hairs on their legs. Some species are scrapers feeding on algae films, while others are shredder-herbivores, chewing fragments from living plant matter.

Caddis larvae resembles a small grub and are vulnerable during this time. They build a protective case as a defense. These lightweight bags are made of silk and debris such as sand, gravel, or sticks. More material is applied to the front of the case as the larva develops. The case is wide enough for the larva to turn around in the tube and trim the case’s unwanted back end. The case is open on both ends to allow the larvae to draw oxygenated water through the back end, over their gills, and out the front end.

When the time comes for the larva to develop into an adult, it enters a pupa-like state, sealing the tube’s ends to shield it from predators. When it’s ready, it breaks free from the case and is catapulted to the surface by shaped gases, where it flies away.

Adult caddis have membrane-like hairy wings that form a roof-like tent over their bodies while they are at rest. Adults are nocturnal and, like moths, are drawn to light. Adults have limited lives since they are primarily non-feeders trained to breed at this stage in their lives. After mating, the female caddis lays eggs in a gelatinous mass that she attaches above or below the water surface, depending on the species.
Stoneflies are among the few insect species that emerge as adults during the winter and early spring months. Stoneflies live in fast-moving, transparent streams with rocky bottoms, as their name suggests. Stoneflies thrive in small mountain brooks and streams that run through wooded areas.

Two tails and two sets of wing pads or plates differentiate stonefly nymphs. Their gills are found near their legs in the middle of their bodies. They spend about a year as nymphs, with a few species living up to three years before maturing. Stoneflies crawl about, clinging to the rocky bottoms for protection from the current. They consume fallen leaves from streamside trees and other aquatic plants as part of their diet. Stoneflies that feed on caddis, midges, and mayflies are predatory.

A stonefly emerger is not the same as the other insect we discussed earlier. Stonefly emergers crawl to dry land onto rocks or trees rather than rising to the surface to hatch into the sea. They hatch into adults once they are out of the water.

Adult stoneflies have a limited lifespan, ranging from a few days to a few weeks. Adult stoneflies, unlike mayflies, may eat, but most do not. They eat seeds, nectar, and other plant matter. They perch in the foliage and make a 'drumming' noise by hopping up and down on their perch to attract a mate. The female flies back to the water after mating in the foliage, dropping the fertilized eggs as she skates across the ice.
TERRESTRIALS & EGG PATTERNS

Terrestrials

Terrestrials live mostly or entirely on the ground instead of the bugs mentioned above, which live in water. Terrestrials are a diverse group of insects that include beetles, flies, moths, grasshoppers, crickets, bees, and beetles; all of them live on soil.

For us anglers, Terrestrials live on land and can be eaten by a trout. Specifically, a critter that lives near or above a trout stream. Typical fly-fishing imitations include ants, spiders, beetles, and grasshoppers, to name a few.

Egg Pattern for Fly Fishing

It is important to understand and select the right egg patterns when you are getting into fly fishing. Orange and pink eggs fly are few of the best colors as they resemble to the real eggs.

Make sure that you have different colors within the oranges and light pink as this also helps in giving a realistic look. Free drifting or trapped eggs stuck in gravel are in the water for a while, and it shows in their color. Their color becomes less vibrant and turns more translucent.

You should also have cream-colored or off-white eggs as these types of fly eggs naturally imitate those eggs that didn’t fertilize. When the real eggs aren’t fertilized after they have been laid, they get a wheateish color which is murky instead of translucent. You should also consider having egg cluster patterns just in case you find yourself fishing in murky waters.

Mostly, the eggs are made from the yearn and cut into an oval shape to resemble a natural egg, with a wide variety of colors. The most common colors are peach, pink, orange, and yellow. The color you pick depends on where you are fishing as the ideal color to match is the most common natural eggs that populate the area where you will be fishing.

Using a seasonal hatch chart for flies and Drifthook Fly-fishing curated fly boxes, you automatically improve your chances of successful fly-fishing experience. You can download your copy at Drifthook.com.
READING THE WATER

Learn More at Drifthook.com
THE ART OF READING THE WATER

Shelter, Feeding Lanes, Holding Grounds.

You might ask, why do I need to learn how to read the water, or what do you mean by reading the water, is it a book? Reading the water is finding the most optimal place that trout inhabit and where they will be feeding.

In many of the big rivers, no more than 10% of the water holds fish. So being able to recognize where trout reside and feed will improve your success on the water.

Trout look for three items when finding perfect nesting spots, also known as ‘lies.’

1. Shelter. This could be cover from a rock, log, undercut bank, or even deeper water or riffles that break up the surface area.

2. Feeding Lane. This is typically a current, or moving water, that brings the meal to the fish.

3. Holding Grounds (or Lie). This is a location with minimal resistance or current.

An optimal location for trout is where they can hold their ground with minimal resistance and the food comes to them. This could be behind a rock, in front of a rock, or on the side of a rock. Or in deeper water, where the current above is moving faster than it is below. Anywhere there is slow to average paced current with faster water close by.

So, where do we look for these locations?

Anytime moving water hits a solid object, it slows down the current and provides all three of the necessary ingredients for a trout’s optimal holding grounds. When the water hits these objects, it creates what is known as a seam.

As a fly fisherman, you are always looking for seams, the area where the fast water is next to slow-moving water. You typically can find seams on the surface.
**ROCK SEAM**

**Back Seam**
As you see here, the area behind a boulder or outcropping rock can be a good place to start when you are new. It makes an easy target to huck flies and land in the seam zone.

**Side Seam**
Just as easy a target to learn is the side seam of a rock or boulder. Instead of casting behind the rock, cast up and above the rock and let it float in the seam line.
Pillow Seam
This is also known as the front of the rock. When water pushes up against a rock or boulder, it slows down just enough for trout to hang out and actively feed. When you spot trout in this location, approach with caution so as not to spook them.

River Bend Seam
One of my favorite areas to fish is in a river bend seam. You can cover a lot of ground and these areas typically hold larger amounts of trout.
**POOLS**

*Head of a Pool*
When fish are actively feeding, they will gather at the head of a pool where faster water is coming in. This area is a perfect feeding zone with minimal water resistance.

*Tail of a Pool*
Just like the head of a pool where the water speeds up, at the tail of the pool, the water does the same before leaving the area. Typically, trout like to feed in water that’s moving at 1 mph. These two zones are optimal locations for that speed.
BANKS & SHELVES

Undercut Bank
As you scope out the area you want to fish, look at the embankment in front of you and on the opposite side of the river. You will most likely find undercut embankments that can hold MONSTER Trout. These embankments provide shelter and typically have faster moving water in front of them. They're the perfect hiding place from danger and offer the fish easy access to dive out and catch a meal. When fishing embankments, always approach from the opposite side. Cast as close as you can and let the rig float as long as possible.

Shelf Seam
In a few magical places, you will find these shelf formations that are very similar to an undercut bank. Just like an undercut bank, shelf seams are great holding grounds for MONSTER Trout.
**DEPTH CHANGES**

**Depth Changes**
Look for areas that have a sharp depth change in water. If the water is clear, look for darker spots. Light can only travel so far through water, meaning the darker spots are areas of deeper water.

**Throughout the year, these holding grounds will change.**

A shallow area that has no fish during the day might be prime feeding ground for Monster Browns at dusk and at night, when they have the cover of darkness to protect them from danger.

In the winter months, the cold water slows down the fishes’ metabolism, so they find the area with the least amount of resistance to save on precious energy. Look for deep holes during this time.

As water temperatures rise, trout will move to areas with easier access to food, but when the water temperature gets above 60, the oxygen level in the water begins to drop, so they will search out areas of shelter with well-oxygenated water such as riffles.

**The optimal water temperature is between 55 and 60 degrees.** Brook trout and cutthroat trout do best in cooler temperatures, while brown trout can withstand slightly warmer temperatures.
NYMPH FLY FISHING (NYMPHING)

Learn More at Drifthook.com
Fly-fishing with nymphs is one of the most iconic and common ways of fishing, and it is one of the most essential techniques for any angler to learn. Nymph fly fishing is simply referred to as nymphing, and we will use that word going forward. Anglers worldwide bring their fly-fishing gear to rivers, lakes, and streams every year, searching for trout. In the next chapter, we’ll talk about how Drifthook Fly-fishing boxes can help you start fishing even if you do not have any prior experience of fishing and selecting the insects that trout feed on.

For more in depth articles and videos on Dry Fly Fishing, Nymph Fly-fishing and Streamer Fishing, visit drifthook.com/discover

Nymphing is a collective term that refers to a fly that resembles subaquatic insects. Nymph flies are purposefully designed to resemble immature insects in their larvae or juvenile stages. Numerous insect species spend more time in the nymph stage of development than in the adult stage and constitute a significant portion of a trout’s regular diet.

Unlike dry fly fishing, nymph flies are fished entirely beneath the water’s surface and are frequently weighted to aid in this endeavor. This can be highly productive, as most trout feed beneath the surface, not at the surface.

Nymphs can be found in most rivers and lakes at any time of year or hour of the day. And wherever nymphs are found, hungry trout are sure to snack on them.

Given that nymphs make up between 75% and 90% of a trout’s diet, there is a good chance that there’s a nymph along the bottom waiting to be eaten and a trout in search of that nymph.

A nymph is a water-dwelling insect. Consider a perennial trout favorite, the stonefly nymph. Since stoneflies are large insects that spend 2–4 years in the water before hatching, trout consume them year-round. Due to their underdeveloped gills, stonefly nymphs must live beneath the rocks in swift currents with sufficient oxygen.

They, like all nymphs, undergo larval and pupal stages before emerging as winged adults, reproducing, and dying. Prior to a nymph completely hatching, there is a cycle of heightened activity that can last anywhere from an hour to several days, depending on the species. Nymph flies are purposefully engineered to resemble young insects in their larvae or juvenile stages. Numerous insect species spend more time in the nymph stage of development than in the adult stage and constitute a significant portion of a trout’s regular diet. Nymphs (mayflies and stoneflies), pupa (caddisflies and midges), and mergers are the most often consumed insects.

Although fishing with nymphs entails fishing for trout underneath the water’s surface, this does not guarantee that they will be easy to capture. A beginner can soon discover that, similar to dry fly-fishing and fly-fishing in general, there is a significant trial and error involved. The trick to using nymphs, as with other flies, baits, or lures, is to match the natural nymphs’ color, size, and action in a given fishing spot as closely as possible.
Trout are notoriously picky eaters, but with the proper steps from collection to fishing, you can have a lot of success with nymphs.

Although that might seem straightforward, it is impossible to see anything that occurs under the surface or what the fish are eating at any given time. This makes nymphing so enjoyable and mysterious, and why it is many anglers’ preferred method of fly fishing.

Trout are notoriously picky eaters, but with the proper steps from collection to fishing, you can have a lot of success with nymphs. This also brings us to one of the most important secrets of good nymphing: add a diverse range of nymphs to the water. It is recommended to keep a wide range of styles and sizes. Having a decent selection of nymphs will help break up a long day when you start hitting the right nymph. Examine the water, look for facts, trust your intuition, and, most importantly, follow a seasonal hatch chart for optimal success.

One of the most endearing aspects of nymphing is its adaptability. Whatever type of fishing you enjoy, being adaptable and flexible will allow you to catch more fish. Whether it is a massive lake, a small pond, a swift-flowing river, or a slow-moving stream, any body of water is likely to harbor some population of these insects. Thus, regardless of where you fish, you will almost certainly catch fish using nymph flies.

You will surely enjoy searching for pockets of water that are difficult to access and contain fast-moving water. Boulders fracturing the rifle into small pockets will highlight pocket water. It can be challenging to get nymphing rigs into this place, made even more difficult by the fast water.

The benefit is that there is less fishing pressure and thus more trout. Cast around the seams along the rocks’ edges, allowing the nymph to drift down the seam and into the pocket. Maintain a high angle on your fly rod as you dead-drift through the pocket water.

The first step is to determine the type of natural nymphs that the trout consume to adapt your artificial fly to the real thing. Make every effort to fit the colors and design and the average size and style. Although it does not have to be flawless, the more closely it resembles naturally occurring insects, the better.

The second thing you’ll need to learn is how to read the water to present your nymph in the optimal location and with the optimal appearance to fool a trout into biting. The more natural and lifelike your fly appears, the more likely you are to catch the trout you’re after. Let’s talk about two basic nymphing techniques, but you are encouraged to learn and try more advanced techniques out there as you gain experience.
BEGINNER TECHNIQUES FOR NYMPH FISHING

Start with Direct Upstream Casting

If you arrive at the river and you do not see a hatch or any rising trout, this is an excellent time to experiment with a weighted nymph and the direct upstream approach. Cast directly upstream or slightly around and upstream, as the name suggests. Maintain a low rod tip and strip in line as the current takes it to you. When a strike occurs, the line seems to leap upstream, or the leader becomes considerably tighter. If the line exhibits any unusual behavior when returning downstream and drifting with the current, set and handle the hook accordingly.

When nymphing directly upstream, it’s safer to stand in the same current as of the river you’re fishing, to avoid mends. Repairing line, especially without a strike indicator, causes the fly to move unnaturally. The only downside of this technique is that you often cast over the heads of fish, which can spook them. As a result, this technique is better used in faster water where the splash of the line and fly would be drowned out by other water noise.
MULTIPLE NYMPH RIGS

Double your chances for success!

Another fundamental nymphing strategy is to use two or even three nymphs simultaneously. This method has many benefits, including the ability to test two different fly patterns to determine the preferred design and drift them at various depths to determine where the fish are staying. However, there are numerous drawbacks.

This technique should be avoided if you are fishing in areas prone to snags, as you can easily snag and lose two flies instead of one. Additionally, this strategy should be avoided in windy environments, as tangles are far more likely to occur. Experiment with various flies and depths to determine which configurations perform best in which areas.
Modern advanced nymphing rods, reels, and lines perform admirably for their intended function. If you’re serious about nymphing, an 11-foot 3-weight might be a good option. However, if this is your first foray into fly fishing, it may be prudent to begin with a fly rod combo capable of more than just nymphing.

With the ever-popular 9-foot 5-weight, it’s difficult to go wrong. That rod will be enough to handle the largest trout you’re likely to encounter when nymphing and can easily cast both standard and indicator nymph rigs. Even though 9-feet seems short for fishing European-style nymphing rigs, you shouldn’t be afraid to play with these successful tips and techniques.

If you’re chuck-and-ducking (a style of fishing, very much similar to spin fishing. Here, the fly line and fly is pulled together while a weight is cast) the only fly line you’ll need to nymph creeks and rivers is a weight-forward floating line matched to your rod. If you decide to give stillwater nymphing a try, an intermediate or complete sinking line will come in handy, but you can still catch trout in lakes with a long leader on a floating line.

Along with a well-stocked nymph fly box, you’ll need the following basic fly-fishing tackle to get started: spools of tippet sizes 3X–7X, leaders, strike indicators, split shot, nippers, and hemostats.

Since the majority of nymphing techniques include short casts, a high-performance rod is not needed. Except for conveniently storing line, your fly reel can see little action when nymphing, unless you hook into a true giant.

To give you an idea of the type of fly-fishing outfit needed for nymph fishing, the following is a shortlist of gear:

- 9-foot 4,5, or 6-weight rod with a medium-to-fast action.
- The reel should be a standard single-action fly reel that is matched to the rod.
- Line: Floating line that is weighted forward.
- Leader: 9-foot tapered nylon or fluorocarbon leader.
- Tippet: 3X, 4X, 5X, and 6X spools.

You’ll still need some flies and a few other pieces of nymphing-specific tackle, but as long as you have the simple rod and reel setup, you’re ready to begin applying nymphing techniques. We have additional videos and articles on nymphing at Drifthook.com.
DRIY FLY FISHING

When novice anglers join the complex world of fly fishing, their ultimate aim is to catch a trout on a dry fly.

For many, the classic picture is of a fly angler floating down a river or wading through a stream. The rod bent over from a large fish that has taken your dry fly epitomizes our sport. With a few helpful tips, approaching dry fly-fishing will improve your fishing experience and increase your success.

Dry Fly fishing Conditions

Dry fly fishing is possible all year but is most productive in the early spring and late summer. This is the time of year when the hatches are most numerous, and the fish are most hungry. The fish warm up in the early spring and begin fattening up for the summer months. Late fall is a time when fish are preparing for winter and the autumn months, and as a result, they are more focused on feeding with dry flies.

Selection of Dry Flies

The most critical factor in effective dry fly-fishing is fly selection. When selecting a dry fly, size, shape, and color all play a role. According to the adage “match the hatch,” anglers must choose flies that are the same size as the insects actively emerging. During the hatch, fish become highly selective, with size being the most crucial factor.

The shape of the fly as it floats on the water needs to be considered. A dry parachute fly can easily be used to imitate mayflies. Caddis patterns can be reliably replicated using an appropriately sized elk hair caddis. Grasshoppers have an extremely distinct appearance, which even anglers may identify from a distance. The size and form of the dominant insect in your watershed should be emulated.

Color is the final consideration in the dry fly selection and is often more important to the angler than to the fish. Anglers and fish alike find it extremely difficult to track dry flies in broken water. Indicator or high-visibility dry flies allow the first two variables, size and shape, to seal the deal, while the bright color aids anglers in setting the hook. Change the body color of your caddisflies from tan or olive to black. Trout are aware of the distinction.

A dry fly is an adult insect that lives on the water’s surface. It will drop its eggs after mating or will finish its lifecycle. As a result, dressing your dry fly is critical for optimum results.

Aquel, Flyagra, and Shimishake are just a few of the numerous dry fly dressing items available. Before the casting starts, aquel is applied in small amounts with your fingers and reapplied riverside as needed. Flyagra is a liquid into which you dip your fly - so environmentally friendly.

This substance must be applied in advance for maximum effectiveness. Shimishake is a powdery desiccant into which you shake your fly. The shake is used directly to the water and must be reapplied often to retain high-floating flies.

Learn More at Drifthook.com
Trout have a curious eye, which needs long leaders and fine tippets to present a dry fly effectively. In highly pressured waters, such as many tailwaters, leaders longer than 9 feet in length and thin tippets are needed. Catch-and-release teach trout by requiring them to use additional stealth to entice a dry fly bite.

Accuracy is essential when wading or float-fishing. A few inches in the wrong direction can mean the difference between a hookup and a pretty drift. The drift, or how the dry fly floats on the water, is vital to its sailability. Only with meticulous mending both upstream and downstream can your dry fly be delivered with the illusion of truth.

Correctly timed mending allows the fly to remain unaffected by drag or negative water currents for the longest possible period.
GEAR FOR DRY FLY FISHING

Rod
When selecting a rod for dry fly fishing, it’s essential to consider the type of dry flies you’ll be throwing and the size of fish you’ll be catching. If you spend most of your time fishing smaller mountain streams, a 2- or 3-weight will suffice.

If you’re targeting big trout with mouse flies on larger rivers, you’ll want to use a 6-weight. These retain finesse but have the strength necessary to land those larger fish.

Fly Line
Another critical element of dry fly fishing has an excellent fly line. The best line for fly fishing trout and other species is a floating line. Although the weight-forward line will initially work, it will eventually draw the dry fly underwater, transforming it into an emerger or nymph pattern.

Leader
When selecting a leader for your dry flies, ensure that it is not significantly larger than your tippet. If the contrast is too great, the fish will notice and become less likely to strike. If you’re working with a 6x tippet, you can use a 5x leader.

Tippet
Tippet is another critical aspect that many anglers overlook while dry fly fishing. With nymphs and streamers, tippet is not always necessary. However, with dry flies, it is necessary. You’ll need a light line to help conceal your fly and hold it near the surface.

When fishing for trout, a tippet size of about 4-6x will work well. Use monofilament line as it floats on the surface more than fluorocarbon.

Reel
Dry fly fishing is typically done with the same reel as other fly-fishing forms, except the reel will be spooled with a floating line and a small section of leader and tippet.

A good assortment of dry flies in different species and sizes will optimize your success on the water.
STREAMER FLY FISHING

Learn More at Drifthook.com
STREAMER FLY FISHING

Big fish need a lot of protein to live and will attack big flies if given the opportunity

Streamer fishing is a form of fly fishing involving a streamer, a submerged fly. A streamer is designed to resemble a “bait fish,” or a smaller fish that larger fish, such as sculpin prefer to eat. Leeches, crayfish, and other aquatic morsels that larger fish prefer to eat can also be taken by streamer flies. The fly’s size can range from small and simple wooly buggers to complex articulated flies stretching the length of your hand.

Since streamers are fished with an active retrieve, they need more focus than a typical dry fly or nymph rig. This suggests that the angler stripping in line to draw the fly back for another cast is the primary cause of their movement.

When it comes to why you should use a streamer instead of a different fly set up, the main reason is simple: big fish need a lot of protein to live and will attack big flies if given the opportunity. For various reasons, including hunger, territorialism, or just basic instinct, aggressive fish will often attack meaty snacks.

Streamers are also an ideal way to cover a wide body of water in a limited period. An angler can cover entire pools effectively and sometimes competitively by using the cast-and-retrieve methods described here.

Streamer fishing is one of the most exciting types of fly-fishing because it requires a lot of effort and often results in violent strikes when a fish decides to take the fly. Every angler remembers the first time they felt or saw a hungry fish strike their streamer.

Fishing streamers vs. floating nymphs has several advantages, including catching fish that aren’t actively feeding. Reactionary strikes in predatory fish such as trout, bass, and other large aquatic game are famous...
while streamer fishing. A reactionary strike happens when your fly flies past a hunkered-down fish, and the fish swipes at it out of sheer primitive instinct rather than a desire to consume it.

Anglers spend their entire lives striving to perfect a graceful and precise cast. We see tightly held loops floating through the air in an ideal world, perfectly landing the fly on the water elegantly and gently. However, with streamer fishing, you’ll need to change your casting to match the weight of the fly.

Stand immediately upstream of the hole or current you’re attempting to fish while casting a streamer. Your casting method can vary depending on the weight of your fly. When using a smaller fly (size 16-10), for example, the traditional overhead, double haul cast would suffice; but, when using a bigger, heavier fly, different casting techniques will need to be explored.

The weight of the line is the force that propels the fly to the water in conventional casting. The angler must adapt to the shift in force distribution now that the fly is much heavier than the leader. When casting heavy streamers, keep the following in mind:

1. Choose a landing spot for your fly before making some sort of cast. Slightly upstream is always the best option because it gives your fly the most time in the water and allows it to sink.

2. It’s not even necessary to use a back cast. There will be enough force to send the streamer flying as long as there is tension on the fly before the push.

3. With enough line free, the fly’s weight can glide through the air with ease, riding the inertia of the load up, no matter how far away your target is.

4. Be sure to finish with your rod tip in the air at the end of the cast (approximately 120 degrees). This helps the fly to move farther and land more softly in the water without spooking the fish.
Throw downstream mend on the fly after it’s in the water for about 2-3 seconds. This will cause the current to pull the fly down the opposite bank’s side organically. This should attract any fish hiding beneath the banks or scanning the side walls for incoming prey.

As soon as the fly starts moving downstream, lower your rod tip to the lowest position possible. The more regular the fly looks when stripping in line, the closer the tip is to the water. The streamer would also be able to remain deeper throughout its retrieval as a result of this.

Start stripping in line once the fly is well sunk and reaching the top of the pool you're aiming, depending on the water. Usually, small 4-6" strips will suffice. Some anglers like to wiggle the rod a little here to produce erratic movement that drives fish crazy. Continue to strip in line until the fly is approaching the end of its drift.

When the fly reaches the end of the drift, it will begin to swing across the pool, returning to the shore. This is when the bulk of strikes are most likely to occur. Continue to conduct short, quick strips while retaining tension on the line, and watch the line straighten out through the pool. During this time, the fish sees their prey starting to speed up or run. For fish, it’s now or never... and they almost always choose now. Continue to shake the line while maintaining tension sporadically, if the fish strikes, you don’t want to skip it.

Many anglers make the mistake of immediately bringing the fly in for the next cast after it has completed its swinging. This is the act of removing your streamer in the middle of a game. Start larger strips and “jig” the fly once you’re nearly parallel to your shoreline.

This can be achieved by gently tugging on the rod to indicate a lurching bait fish or leeches. Continue in this manner, pausing periodically to present the fly as if it were an injured animal, and this method can be used in any part of the streamer fishing process. Do it until your fly has made its way up the bank and back to you.

Repeat the previous steps. Change small details like where you put your fly first, how long it dead drifts, and how soon you retrieve it.

While the above information is directed toward those who fish in rivers, the same guidelines apply to fish in still-water such as lakes. When fishing still-water, remember to cast as far as possible and let the fly sink as far as it can. When retrieving the streamer, work it back in sporadic strips. So, after every six strips, take a 3-second break to give the fly some life.

Streamers can be a lifesaver for those who are new to fly fishing. Although dry fly-fishing and nymphing depend heavily on recognizing particular insect patterns and hatches, streamer fishing enables the angler to concentrate more on how the fly is being fished rather than what fly is being fished.
STREAMER SELECTION

When it comes to choosing the right fly, it’s best to have a range of choices on hand. Here are several streamer fly patterns to look for, ranging from trout to bass:

Bait fish and sculpin are smaller fish that provide a reliable food source for larger fish and are also tied with more complex patterns. The muddler minnow, the conehead bunny muddler, and the S3 sculpin are all patterns to keep an eye out for. These streamers are suitable for trout and other river fish.

Articulated streamers: If you’re trying to get serious about your streamers and have a little extra cash, these are the ones to catch. Articulated streamers are made up of two or three sections bound together with a heavy line and sometimes a bead. These streamers’ nature allows them to jump and wiggle, making them more realistically resemble a real fish. When it comes to catching monster fish, these heavy streamers are often the best bet.

Picking a color: When choosing streamers, the only thing to pay attention to is the color. The color of the fly can have a significant effect on whether or not a fish will see it, depending on the color of the water and the amount of sun.

When streamer fishing, there are many things you can do, and the results will most definitely make you happy. Many of them make use of skills you’ve honed in other facets of fly fishing, such as dead drifting. Nymphs aren’t the only ones that enjoy dead drifting.

The pumped or jigged retrieve is a fantastic technique that works well on trout, salmon, smallmouth bass, and a range of other species. This retrieve is excellent for imitating bait fish–like minnows that are happily cruising the water in search of food, unaware of and unconcerned about larger fish interested in eating them. Still, it can also be used to imitate an injured and struggling bait fish.

Some anglers use the jigging retrieve with their rod held high, but try to use it with the rod held in the same place as when swinging the fly and regulating its speed in the water column. As a result, cast flies down and across with a particular run or lie in mind, then throw in the significant mend once it hits the water.
As the fly starts to swing into place, use a long but smooth motion to pump the elbow upstream and back down. As the fly passes through the target region, repeat this process with varying pauses in between pumps. Pump the fly up and down for the first time just before releasing it into the water where you anticipate fish to be slowing the swing speed by adding slack into the line and establishing control of the jigging motion.

Streamer fishing is all about swimming prey, but predators also see bait fish, sculpins, leeches, and other aquatic creatures in the water column that are either stunned or dead from an encounter with another predator. Simple prey, such as dead or stunned prey, can evoke a strong reaction from holding fish. Dead-drifting streamers may be dried in fast water, plunge pools, and other river turbulent areas.

Anglers who have had success with streamers also turn their attention to large flies. The explanation is straightforward: big flies attract big fish. Streamer fishing also gives you a thrill that you won’t get from other types of fly fishing. Streamer fishing varies from dry fly-fishing and nymphing in that it is more diverse and varied in its terrain. Unlike the other strategies, where following a few simple rules will lead to consistent success, streamer fishers must approach the water with a predatory, evaluative eye to achieve results.

The world of swimming prey is the subject of streamer fishing. It floats, whether it’s smaller trout, bait fish like minnows, sculpins, or leeches, or something else entirely. And imitating a swimming creature necessitates a different set of skills and approaches than imitating one that is drifting or floating. Beginner streamer anglers often try to apply the rules of dry fly and nymphing fishing to streamer fishing, only to be disappointed when the results aren’t as planned.
WHEN A TROUT TAKES YOUR FLY

Learn More at Drifthook.com
Rivers are constantly evolving, with varying water levels, heights, insects, fish behavior, and more as you ride from spot to spot. On top of that, environmental patterns, seasons, your physical position in the river, insect hatches, and other variables are constantly changing. Don’t be the person who never alters his rig, fishes the same flies all day without success, or never leaves the first hole he finds while fishing in a competitive setting like this. Adjust your depths, split shot, flies, and indicators to better suit the environment by moving around.

Most instructors do not focus at all on the hit, assuming that a new fisherman will automatically know when a fish is going for their fly. In this chapter we are going to break down the three times you will have a hit and how to know the difference between a hit and when your fly is simply dragging on the bottom or when a fish has a refusal because he is not satisfied with what he is looking at.

**Nymphing Hits**

We will start with nymphing hits, because that is when you are going to catch the majority of your trout throughout the year.

If you watched our introductory lessons or have nymphed before, you know that you have to position your nymph rig upriver continue to mend your line as it goes down past you.

What you are looking for is any unnatural movement in your indicator. What would be considered an unnatural movement? It could be a dip, a wave, a slow-down in the pace, or a speed-up in the pace.

When I first started out, I found that I was not setting my hook as often as I should have. Even the smallest of takes can go unnoticed so even if you don’t think it was a hit. Set the hook. 9 times out of 10 it might have been a drag in the line or a bump on a rock. But that tenth time will reap huge rewards when you hook into that MONSTER.

How do you set the hook? I have spoken about setting the hook after you get a hit or “take,” so let’s break down what that is.

**When you see your strike indicator make any unnatural movement in the water, you are going to want lift your rod over your shoulder and downriver.**

The reason you are lifting downriver is because the fish are always facing upriver when going at your fly. This will set the hook in the top lip of your trout, giving you the optimal location for control when it takes off. You will be able to control the fish by keeping pressure on its head. We will go into detail about bringing in your catch in the chapter, but for now just remember: lift up and downstream.
Dry Fly Hits

When dry fly fishing, it’s a lot easier to tell if you have a hit or take. When you dry fly fish, you don’t have an indicator. Your fly is the indicator, so make sure that you are casting at a distance where you can visually see your fly.

When you make that perfect cast and you see the head of the trout come up to take the fly, try and keep calm. Beginner fly fishermen lose more fish by not waiting until the fish has taken the fly in their mouth and end up yanking it right out of them.

Watch the trout come up and silently count a short “one-one thousand” before lifting your rod downriver and setting the hook.

As soon as you set the hook, the fish is going to take off because it is already actively feeding and will be ready to run. So be ready to run with it if need be.

So what if you see the trout come up but it does not take the fly? This is referred to as ‘fly refusal.’ Why does this happen? **It could happen for a few reasons...**

1. **The presentation was off.**
   Before changing out flies, make sure that your drift is natural. You might have had drag on the line or the fly shifted in a manner that was not natural. Try casting again with additional slack in the leader to assure a dead drift.

2. **The trout was not actually rising, but chasing emergers.**
   You can tell this by when it comes to the surface; if you’re not seeing the whites of his mouth, then it’s possible he is merely chasing emergers and catching them before they get to the surface. In the Intermediate videos, we will show setups that will combat both of these situations to help you land more trout.

3. **The trout has come nose-to-nose with the fly but still refuses it.**
   This typically means that you have the right pattern and size, but the wrong color. Because of the clarity of water, trout do not actually see the color of the fly until they are right up on it. If they refuse your fly at this level, try swapping it out for a different color of the same pattern. Also keep the same size, because the trout obviously liked what it saw before it came up to the surface.

Swapping out your fly will also give the fish time to rest and get ready for the next meal you place in front of them.
Streamer Hits

Streamer hits, in my opinion, are the second-most exciting hits on the water. You’re mending in your line, and all of a sudden it feels like your fishing buddy is messing with you on the other end of the line and tugging at it.

Most of the time when this happens, your fly has been set. But you should still lift your rod in a downriver motion (as you do with nymphing and dry fly fishing) to make sure the hook is set.

If you see a trout chase your streamer but not hit it, take this as a refusal. It most likely means that the movement of your streamer did not meet the standards of that particular fish.

Try adjusting your retrieve and angle before swapping out streamers.

What happens if you feel a hit but when you go to set the hook, nothing is there?

This type of refusal is common with streamer fishing. Large predatory trout will bump out smaller fish for territorial reasons, acting almost like a stun on their prey. If you feel this, rest your retrieve for a second and then continue with your mend. I have had numerous takes on the second mend after a slight bump.
LANDING AND RELEASING TROUT

Learn More at Drifthook.com
The most critical step in landing fish is rigging. You must always set yourself up for success. Always rig properly for each fishing situation, tailoring it to the particular river, fly, and fish you’re after. It’s possible to lose a fish if your knots aren’t appropriately tied or you’re using too light of tippet.

You’re all set up and ready to go, and you’ve found some great-looking water to fish. Take a moment before you start fishing and consider where you would catch a fish rather than where you might hook one. And if you hook a prize trout, you’ll need to be strategic about how you play the fish to keep it under control.

Consequently, search for larger eddies, pools, or slower seams where the fish can be caught. Often, check above and below to see if there are any nearby rapids, and try to keep the fish away from these danger spots at all costs. Examine the area for any logjams or other structures that might cause the trout to escape quickly.

For obvious reasons, correctly placing the hook on a fish is one step to successfully landing a fish. A lousy hook set would generally result in the fish coming off quickly or not hooking the fish at all because the fish has already spat out the fly.

So, how to ensure a strong hook? It all depends on the situation in which you are fishing. In short, the hook set should be a simple affirmative action of raising the rod tip or stripping the line in to tighten the line, allowing the hook to be injected into the trout.

You’ve hooked the fish, and you’re ready to fight. Most fish are hooked if you still have a slackline in your stripping finger, but with smaller fish, stripping it in through your stripping finger can be a simple way to handle a fish. On the other hand, a larger fish can be more erratic and make strong runs out of nowhere. If you’re guiding the fish with your stripping finger, this can lead to a break-off.

So, after the first big run, try to regain control of the fish by reeling in your slackline and putting the fish on your reel. As a result, your reel and drag will help control the fish, giving you more control as an angler.

This move is linked to rigging preparation in that you should always set your drag to the correct setting before fishing. Each fish and fishing hookup scenario, however, is unique. Set the drag a little tighter when you hook a big fish so you can put the heat on the fish and keep it under control. When setting your drag, however, always remember the power of the tippet you’re using.

If you set the drag right, the reel will do some of the work, making landing the fish much more manageable. To set the drag properly for trout, tie your line to a chair and tighten down the drag. Then lift your rod and bring bend into the rod. As the rod has a curve, give the rod a quick pop with the opposite hand. If more line comes out, then your drag is set correctly. If the line does not come out, loosen the drag and try again. If your drag is too tight, the fish will break the line.
Now that you’ve got a fish on the line, the trout starts shaking its head violently as it thrashes back and forth, attempting to wriggle free. The rod serves as a shield, cushioning the tippet against the motions if you hold your tip high during these movements. When you have your rod tip low, and the fish shakes its head, the fish will also wriggle free because the rod has no flex to cushion or withstand the head shake.

Where there are obstacles such as rocks, trees, or other hazards, keep your rod tip high. The line would be less likely to get snagged by these obstacles. With the rod tip up, you can monitor the fish with an overhead straight-line link. Each pressure point that your line has with each rod guide adds friction to the battle when your rod tip is up. So hold that tip up, and your fly rod will add to the fish’s fatigue.

A fish may be broken off if there is too much pressure applied, but the fish can wriggle free if it is too little. Holding your rod at a 45-degree angle is a safe rule to obey in general.

In deeper pools with a slow to medium current, you want to fight your fish. Because of the deep pools, the fish can exhaust themselves by swimming against the current before you can begin to shift them to a landing spot. If you find small pockets of slow water behind rocks, these may be good places to lead your fish to gain an advantage. Stop rocks, stones, artificial barriers, and faster water at all costs, whether it’s below or above you. Examine a landing area: if you have a shallower side to a deep pool, this can be a perfect spot to land a fish.

Moving around when fighting a fish is an aspect of battle, an underappreciated fishing method, but highly successful. Let’s say you hook a trophy trout, and it runs downstream, and you stand there watching it peel offline and then wiggle away because you were too far upstream. If you had traveled downstream with that fish, you would have been able to maintain a closer link with it and, ideally, land it.

Take the battle to your feet as soon as you hook a fish and begin to shift around to remain closer to the fish so you can retain control. The added power of the downstream current, mainly if the fish makes a run downstream, adds to the fish’s difficulty coming off. When float fishing, you can see the clear advantages of battling the fish from the boat. You will gain an edge over the fish by strategically tiring them out.

However, if the rower is a novice, some fish may be lost, or if you hook a fish in swift water, it may be challenging to keep the boat slow enough to remain with the fish. Now let’s talk about what you were waiting for – landing the fish. The tip is always to scoop the fish headfirst, as this gives you more leverage and helps you lead the fish into the net headfirst. If you scoop the fishtail first, the fish will always swim forward out of the net.

The second tip is to be confident and stealthy. Step forward when you see a chance to land the fish and completely commit to doing so.
It’s time to take that rewarding photo and then release the fish back into the water.

When you finally land that MONSTER TROUT, it’s time to take that rewarding photo and then release the fish back into the water so others can enjoy the thrill that you just experienced. When you hook into a fish, try not to over-exhaust it. Try to reduce the amount of stress the fish incurs by bringing it in as quickly as possible.

As soon as you get the trout close enough, a good net will come in extremely handy, which we discussed in a previous lesson. I recommend a rubber net versus a mesh one. Rubber nets are tremendous! Your flies don’t get tangled up in them, and they are less abrasive on a fish’s gills when you scoop them in. As soon as the fish is close enough to scoop up with your net, ensure that you wet your net before placing it in the water.

Fish have a layer of mucus that protects them from diseases. Contact with dry surfaces, such as your hands, a dry net, boat bottoms, or land, can remove this protective slime and make fish more susceptible to diseases. So if you don’t have a net, make sure you wet your hands before handling a fish.

Place the net in the water behind the fish and scoop it forward as you bring its head to the surface. Keep the net in the water after you have the fish in your net. This will keep the fish well oxygenated while preparing to take out the hook.

Congratulations! You have landed a MONSTER! Please take a moment and enjoy it. These are amazing creatures, and after all of your hard work, you should take it all in. After you have had your moment of glory, now it’s time to make sure there is evidence of your adventures.

Let’s start by removing the fly. Make sure that you grip the trout carefully. Fish have sensitive internal organs, so hold them lightly without squeezing. Avoid placing your hand over its mouth and gills, which would obstruct breathing. With larger fish, grip the tail wrist with an ‘A-Ok’ finger formation and gently support the body under the front fins.
Ensure you carry easily accessible pliers or other hook-removal tools to enable quick and careful hook removal. Take your pliers and locate the fly in the fish’s mouth. Grip the fly with the pliers and push/pull in the opposite direction of the hook. Your fly should pop right out.

**Now that you have removed the fly, it’s time to photograph that MONSTER!**

When at all possible, photograph the fish in the water. If you wish to take the fish out momentarily to get the quintessential trophy picture, start by keeping it as close to the surface as possible and fully submerged. When ready, let the photographer call the shots—1, 2, 3—then raise the fish out of the water, take the picture quickly, and then get the fish back into the water. This will let the fish get a quick breather in between shots.

Like humans, fish experience exercise-induced stress, causing them to tire and have diminished muscle function. To recover from being caught, fish need to be in the water so they can breathe and pump oxygen into their system.

You can reduce these health effects by keeping a fish’s mouth and gills fully submerged in the water as much as possible during handling.

After all the excitement—not only for you but for the fish, too—the fish might be exhausted and need a little reviving. This can be done in a river by submerging the fish and holding its head facing upstream so that the water runs into its mouth and through the gills.

In still water situations, move the fish in a figure-8 pattern to simulate this effect. Avoid pulling a fish backward or pointing it downstream, as water moving in the reverse direction can harm fish.

The trout will let you know when it is ready to go. It will swim off willingly most of the time, but if it’s just hanging around, it’s probably because it has to catch its breath first. Let it relax for a little bit, then give it a gentle touch on the tail, and it will most likely be on its way.