Besides being a fun and exciting sport, fly fishing offers an indescribable feeling that no other sport can. From the beautiful scenery surrounding you, to the peaceful tranquility made by the sounds of the stream, or the feel of the cold crisp water as you stand apart from the busy world, fly fishing offers an experience rivaled by nothing else. Fly fishing does not require you to be an expert, have the best gear or require competition with others. Rather, fly fishing is a sport that works for you.

Knots
Knots are the insurance of an angler. Without a good knot, many lures and fish will be lost. There are two essential knots to fly fishing: the surgeon’s knot and the fisherman’s knot.

Surgeon’s Knot
Place the line and leader parallel to each other with an overlap of six inches and wet this area.
Create a loop with the two lines as if you are working with one line.
Grab the junction where the end of your line going to your rod and the leader meet. Pass this and your entire leader through the loop you created three or four times.
Take all four ends surrounding the knot and pull slowly at the same time. Once the knot is tightened, trim the extra ends.

Fisherman’s Knot
Take the line end and pass it through the eye of your hook, allowing at least 3 inches of line beyond the eye. Wrap the end six or seven times around the line toward your leader.
Next, run the line end through the first loop above the eye, then over the coils and through the large loop you just created.
Grab the line end and the line going to your rod and pull simultaneously, forcing the coils to form a tight spiral. Once tight, slide the tightened coils against the eye of the hook with your fingernail and assure the coils are in a uniform spiral, not overlapping each other. Clip the extra line end.

Brochure Sources:
http://flyfishing.about.com
http://www.glacieroyellowstone.com/basics/index.cfm
http://www.dickssportinggoods.com/info/index.jsp?categoryId=222874
http://www.hooked-on-flies.com/fly_fishing_knots.htm
Introduction

Fly fishing is considered a sport or a hobby by some, and an art form by others. Call it what you want, fly fishing is a pleasurable pastime built on the camaraderie of the anglers themselves, the oceans, lakes and rivers they fish, and the fish they pursue.

Some anglers are weekend warriors, happy to catch a fish or two on a holiday fishing trip. Others are die-hard’s, who spend most of their days tying flies and exploring the hatches and underwater traits of their favorite spots.

This guide will walk you through the basics of fly fishing. Hopefully, this guide will allow you to get your feet wet in becoming a more educated fly fisherman.

Species of Fish

Anglers fly fish for everything from largemouth bass to big-game saltwater species like marlin, tarpon and even sharks. The most common type of species fished for in the US is the trout, particularly rainbow trout. Other types of trout include the golden trout, steelhead trout, brown trout, brook trout and lake trout.

Flies

Fly fishing is a guessing game most of the time as with any fishing. A good fly fisherman will research the local fish’s diet and find flies similar to its insect population. There are countless types of flies and anglers often create their own to their liking. You might say fly fishing is a secretive sport due to anglers protecting their knowledge of the area.

Flies are used to fish the different zones as depicted on page 6. Flies can be broken down into two basic categories; floating and sinking.

A floating fly can be either dry or wet. A dry fly will ‘stick’ to the surface of the water and float on the top and is used in zone 1. These include dry flies, crackle back’s and other light weight flies. A wet fly will achieve a neutral buoyancy a few inches below the surface and is used in zone 2. These include nymphs, scuds, emergers, roe bugs and other medium light-weight flies that are not all feathered as the dry flies.

Sinking flies are used for fishing zones 3 & 4. This zone’s depth is achieved through a few options: bead heads on lures, weights on the line before the lure, or the actual weight of the lure itself. Lures include the bigger flies such as buggers and streamers. Playing around with the different weight arrangements will allow you to control the speed at which the lure sinks as well as what depth the lure fishes at.

Introduction

After casting your line out into the stream, your rod tip should end up around the 8-9 o’clock position pointing forwards and a little towards the water. Also, the loop of line should be cast out. This enables you to lightly re-grip the line with your rod hand index finger, as if you were pulling the trigger of a gun, allowing the line to easily slide through.

Now you’re fishing! Setting the hook is another ‘feel’ technique of fly fishing. It is one of the harder tasks in fly-fishing and can be frustrating at first when you lose a fish. Remember these few things when you get a strike.

The hooks in fly-fishing are small and sharp, so it doesn’t take a lot of force to hook the fish. The fish may actually end up hooking itself when it takes the fly. Also be aware that you can’t set the hook with slack in the line. Keep a little tension on the line with your line hand as you fish or you’ll give the fish time to release the fly and get away. You can do this by a technique called stripping. Take your line hand to strip, or pull in, the line slowly as it becomes slack in the current. Once you pull the line in up to just before the leader starts, you’ll have to recast and start the process all over again.

Once you get a bite, lift the rod from 9 o’clock to 12 o’clock as seen in the image to the right. At the same time, pinch the line with the index finger on your rod hand. You will need this lifting action to apply the force necessary to set the hook. Be careful not to set the hook too quickly or too slowly, both of which could cause you to lose the fish. A smooth quick lifting motion upwards will set the hook correctly and allow you to land the fish.

Reeling in the catch after you get a fish on the line is fairly simple although many fish are lost in this process. The main thing to remember is keep your rod tip up at 12 o’clock. This insures tension is kept on the line and the hook will remain set.

After lifting the rod and pinching the line, you can do one of two things; either pull the fish in with your line hand or reel in the fish. One of the problems with pulling the fish in is that you’ll have to re-pin the line every so often before you net the fish. Reeling allows you to keep constant tension on the line and allows for an easy transfer of the line hand from the line to the net as seen in the image to the left.
Techniques

An angler’s main objective is to find where the fish are feeding. This may sound easier than it looks. An angler will have to change lures several times to get to the strike zone of the fish. This strike zone can vary depending on the time of day, weather conditions or other factors.

Zone 1: Surface

The surface of the water is not the best place to fish for the most part. Only about 10% of the time fish are hitting this area. This will be evident when you can see boils or a lot of jumping.

Zone 2: Just Below Surface

The first 2 to 3 inches is for the most part the same as zone 1. Fish consume about 10% of their diet here.

Zone 3: Middle of Stream

You might think that because this zone has the most water it would be the best for fishing. This zone contains about 5% of the fish’s diet because of currents and little shelter.

Zone 4: The Bottom

The majority of the fish’s diet ends up on the bottom where the fish feed 75% of the time. This zone requires heavier lures or weights to be fished.

Equipment Overview

Fly fishing equipment includes a variety of things, although the fly rod, reel and line have always been a staple in fly fishing. To help you select the fly rod and reel that is right for you, ask yourself these two questions:

1: What type of fish are you fishing for?
2: How much are you willing to spend?

Depending on the type of fishing, fly rods and reels can run anywhere from a couple hundred dollars to upwards of a thousand dollars, not to mention all the extra amenities that go along with the sport. Starting out you will want to get a rod that is comfortable to you and that you can handle. Below are some terms and how they affect the rod’s characteristics.

Action

This refers to a rod’s stiffness and how it will flex when you put it under stress when you cast or fight a fish.

- Fast: Stiffest, bend more in upper third, longer & crispier casts helps in windy conditions
- Medium: Bend in upper half, can handle many conditions
- Slow: Least stiff, bends uniformly throughout rod, more accurate casting for better fly presentation

Material

- Fiberglass: Less expensive, durable
- Graphite/Composite: Lighter, casts better, more fighting power

Line Weight

Range from #1 - #15: lower line weights are for smaller flies and fish, higher line weights are for heavier flies and fish, trout is often #5-#7

Rod Length

Three ranges: 8’, 8-9’, 9+: Longer rods give more action, shorter rods are geared for tight situations such as narrow streams

Beginner’s Buying Guide

If you are a beginner, you should consider buying a pre-packaged combo. This assures you of getting a balanced system necessary to increase your chances of catching fish and enjoying the sport.

If you want an all-purpose combo, look for 5- or 6-weight rod and reel, with an 8-9-foot rod, and a rod with a medium to medium-fast action. This combo will tackle nearly all of the fly fishing situations you may encounter.

Other Gear

Anglers often use other equipment when fishing. The vest is a fly fishing “must have” to some. Anglers keep flies, string and other necessities in their vest so they don’t have to get out of the water to change lures or restring line. Although some fish from out of the water, most fly fishermen will fish standing in the water wearing hip boots or chest waders. This allows them to get as close to the fish as possible and fish from a good position. Along with this, a net is an essential part of fishing, allowing the angler to secure their catch.
Casting Overview

The easiest way to describe fly casting is to compare it to spinning. In spinning, the weight of the lure pulls the line off the reel. In fly casting, the weight of the line carries the fly to the fish. You must learn to use the rod to cast the weight of the fly line. Every angler has their own special way of casting. These steps will get you on the right path of becoming familiar with fly casting, and with a little practice will have you fly fishing in no time.

Step 1: The Rod Grip

The first step in learning how to cast a fly rod is your hand orientation. If this is off, it will throw everything else off down the line. This grip uses the thumb facing towards the rod tip and the wrist stays straight and fixed.

Step 2: Starting Position

You will not be able to cast well with a slack line. Orienting the line where it is straight will maximize your casting stroke energy. Do this by letting line out downstream or straight out in front of you and pointing the rod tip in the same direction down at the water.

Step 3: Hand Placement/Movement

Before pulling the line back to cast, pull a loop of line out (4 to 5 feet) with your line hand and hold it under your index finger with your rod hand as shown in the rod grip image. This loop of line will be released while casting to increase the cast distance of the fly in step 5.

Movement of the hand and arm holding the rod is critical to a good cast. The arm should move with the elbow as a fixed pivot while keeping the wrist fixed. The 10 o’clock to 2 o’clock motion (as seen in the images to the right) should be repeated until thorough muscle memorization. After mastering this hand-arm motion, casting should come easily.

Step 4: Loading the Line

This step involves pulling the line off of the water. When you do this the line will have some resistance due to the ‘sticking’ effect of the water. To overcome this, pull back on the rod from the 10 o’clock position to the 2 o’clock position. The pulling force required to load the line is mostly trial and error the first few times you try it. If the line is slack too long, you aren’t pulling hard enough or you are hesitating. On the flip side, if the fly snaps back fast, you are pulling too hard. Once you get it right and the fly is just about to come off of the water, the fly will make a little bubble or pop as it breaks the water’s surface. As the fly comes off the water, stop your back stroke and start to return your rod hand to 10 o’clock. Do this keeping your arm moving forward at a smooth and steady pace. This will ensure that the fly lands softly on the water, not scaring the fish.

Step 5: The Release

As your arm moves forward to the 10 o’clock position from the 2 o’clock position, let go of the 4-5’ loop of line held with your rod hand’s index finger. Releasing the line at or slightly before the 10 o’clock position will allow for the loop and additional line to be pulled from the reel letting the fly travel further. This technique is all about timing and will take some practice before getting it down.

TIP: Fly fishers seldom need to cast more than 50 feet. You should learn to cast short (30 feet) first and then practice at greater and greater distances.