

Fly fishing is fun and easy to get started with.



Why Fly Fish?

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Fly fishing seems a world away to many anglers because they don't know how easy it is. It is a shame that they don't know what they are missing.

Many people avoid fly fishing because they think "It is too tough to learn to cast a fly rod", "it is only for trout", "you can't catch big fish with a wimpy fly rod", "I can't be bothered learning the Latin names of little bugs", "I don't want to be seen as an elitist", or "it is too expensive" ...

All of these reasons to bypass fly fishing are common talk at sporting shows and in fishing circles around the country. What people don't realize is that fly fishing is easy, affordable and can be used to catch just about anything with fins and lips...and above all it is a ton of fun!

Fly fishing is simply a different method to get baits out to fish. In some cases it is a much more productive and effective fishing method, and like any other fishing method, in others it can be more challenging.

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Learning the Basics is Easy

Casting is not difficult, it is simply different. If you can drink your favourite beverage from Tim Horton's, you have the physical motor skills to catch fish with a fly rod. A nice thing about fly casting is that if you feel like you are working, you are not doing it right! Fly fishing is something I regularly introduce people to as a guide and instructor. Some people are ready to head to the river in just a few minutes, try being competent with a bait caster or even a spinning reel in a few minutes.

Fly casting is significantly different from operating a bait caster or spinning reel. For this reason many experienced anglers pick up a fly rod and struggle horribly and write off fly fishing as difficult and requiring too much "touch" for them.



The basics of fly fishing to enjoy the sport are easy to learn.

A high percentage of lessons and corporate events I have been involved with see people holding a fly rod for the first time and a couple of hours later landing and releasing their first fly caught fish.

Fly fishing is a great sport for both sexes. Women are especially adept at learning fly casting and seem to really enjoy the active nature of fly fishing and the beautiful river environments where it so often takes place. Fly fishing is often referred to as the "quiet sport" as it is easy to leave the stress of the office behind while standing in a river waving a stick.

Many anglers balk at taking lessons for fly fishing and prefer to struggle on their own. This is a big mistake that builds the reputation of fly fishing being difficult and not worth the effort of learning. Fly fishing is different...not difficult.



Ontario's Flyshop on the River...

Most anglers learn how to fish without knowing that they are taking lessons. How many people have been taken out for their first fishing experiences by a parent, friend, favourite uncle or scout leader? Just because you were not paying this mentor, don't think you weren't getting lessons! If you started fishing at a young age, how many years and fishing outings do you have under your belt with your favourite fishing technique? I bet you have forgotten about the early struggles you had when you were learning the ropes!

I have found that good anglers, regardless of technique, have an open mind and are humble enough to learn from people more experienced than they are. They tend to watch, listen and ask questions.

If you can not find a mentor locally to help show you the ropes, take advantage of a fly fishing club or a lesson from a professional fly fishing instructor. Hands-on learning under the guidance of someone who knows the pitfalls, bad habits and little tricks to help with success can save years of struggling on your own or worse yet, writing off fly fishing as not for you.



Yes, even musky are easy to catch on a fly, with a little knowledge and a good guide.

Trout and Beyond

There are fly rods designed for everything from small streams where an 8" trout is a big one, to the open ocean where sailfish, marlin and tuna of a couple hundred pounds are sought after by people flinging "flies." I enjoy chasing musky with 12" long offerings and chasing small stream trout that are smaller than musky flies with light tackle and everything in between. Small-mouth bass and steelhead are a favourite of many fly anglers I know.

Fly Fishing is Affordable

Outfitting yourself for fly fishing does not have to break the bank. To get basic, quality tackle and a selection of flies to go out and enjoy fly fishing can be done with a pretty modest budget. Expensive equipment is not necessary to have fun fly fishing. But, there are a couple of areas where you should concentrate your budget.

A good fly rod is a joy to cast, but you don't have to reach for the most expensive rod on the rack to get a good one. Fly rods involve a lot more thought and technology in their construction and are made in smaller batches than spinning or bait casting rods meaning that good starter rods start at about the \$100 level. North American made rods start at about double that price and go up from there. The nice thing is that rods made by a reputable fly rod company will cast better than the person holding them when they are matched with the right fly line. In addition, they usually come with a warranty that sees the rod replaced if you happen to have an accident with it.

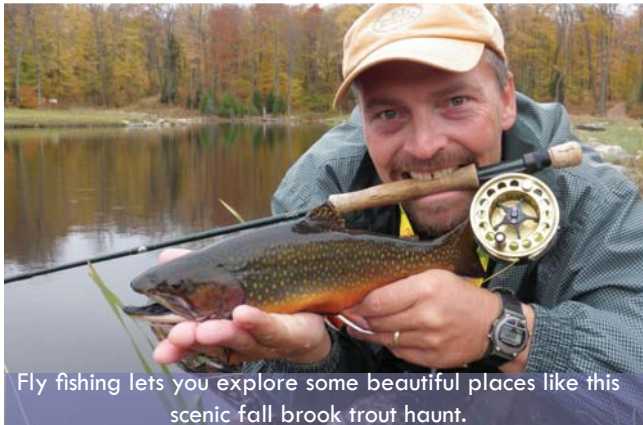
Many people are tempted by the great "deal" in a fly rod combo from a mass retailer. Or a "fly pole" they see at a garage sale. These deal rods are often poor choices for beginners and often responsible for people finding the sport difficult simply because this cheap equipment is very often not up to the task.

A store that knows fly fishing gear can make a big difference in getting you equipment that will help you get started properly.

Fly lines are tapered and built in various densities with special coatings that help you cast better. This technology adds up at the cash register. Expect to pay \$40- \$100 for a good fly line, but it is worth it. Even the most expensive fly rods will not work well with a poor or mismatched fly line.

So, fly rods and fly lines cost more than their spinning counterparts. On the flip side, flies are a lot cheaper than soft plastics or crank baits. You can make your own flies for a few cents each and buying premium flies in a fly fishing specialty shop is still a lot less expensive than a trip to the aisles of your favourite tackle store.

More good news is that most fly fishing takes place in rivers where a set of waders is the best way to access good fishing. No need for a fishing boat, motor and trailer. Even the best waders you can buy are a lot cheaper than a rigged fishing boat and you don't need a 4X4 pickup truck to carry a fly fishing vest full of fly boxes and a few gadgets.



Fly fishing lets you explore some beautiful places like this scenic fall brook trout haunt.

Getting suited up with a quality rod and reel, a solid pair of waders and a good selection of flies, leaders and a few other useful pieces of useful fly fishing equipment can be bought for between \$500 and \$1000. This stacks up pretty good compared to gearing up for activities like golf, hockey, canoeing and other affordable recreational pursuits.

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Even if you do look for a fly fishing boat, they are usually oar powered or small and simple. Many fly fishers really like small inflatable float tubes or pontoon boats that are comparable to the cost of a weekend fill up for a tournament bass boat.

Don't Be Afraid of Bugs

Many people are intimidated by the tradition of fly fishing and the knowledge of insects that some fly fishing zealots exude. I have yet to meet a fish that could spout off Latin names like some of these streamside entomologists. And if you don't want to learn a dead language, the good news is you don't have to! Fly fishing is about fooling creatures with pea sized brains. You don't need a graduate level university degree to do this.

If you look at your surroundings, watch the fish and look for the food available to them you can usually figure out how to catch them. Look in your fly box for something that is close to the size, shape and color to the naturals. Then try to get it in front of the fish in a natural manner. Do this and you will be in business nine times out of ten. If you don't have a fly that matches the bug you encounter don't worry, something that looks alive and edible will often do the trick.

A word of warning, many people get deeply involved with imitating these insects at home through the art of fly tying. This allows you to become really immersed in the sport. I won't apologize for this as it is a lot of fun.

I can think of many anglers that obsess in their chosen type of fishing. Try talking to a bass tournament angler, match carp fisher, musky fanatic or dyed in the wool steelheader. They all take their fishing very seriously and can be intimidating to talk to.



Little white bug... little white fly...bugs solved!

Fly fishing is perfect for someone who wants an all encompassing hobby because there are so many opportunities to specialize and hand craft things. You can handcraft all of your equipment used in fly fishing. Making flies is very common, many anglers make their own rods or nets and even furl their own tapered leaders.

Fly fishing can be a life long pursuit. Whether you are a fly fishing junkie or get out once every few years, the sport allows you to go out and have fun with a reasonable expectation of success with a small amount of training. So don't be afraid to give this unique method of sport fishing a try.

Where a Fly Rod Really Shines



Since fly fishing is simply another method for getting a bait in front of fish, as with any technique there are times and places when you should reach for the fly rod and others when you might want to leave it in the car.

Small bug time

Small streams and rivers with productive insect hatches are the forte of fly rods. Nothing can present small weightless insect imitations to fish as easily and naturally. This is especially true when the insects are hatching and the fish are eating them off the surface. This is what fly fishing dreams are made of.



Small river steelheading

Although hard for many centre pin anglers to believe, in small rivers where steelhead hold in pocket water you can keep a fly in the water and fishing productively for a larger portion of the day than with a roe bag under a float. Also, targeting the margins of the best pools can see you catching a lot more fish, I have said too much about this already...just give it a try.

River smallmouth bass

River smallmouth bass are largely ignored by anglers who pursue these fish by boat. River bass although much slower growing, are perfect for a fly angler. Small bass are fun on appropriate tackle, and there are trophies available to be fooled with fly tackle for many people who look for them on medium to large rivers.



Topwater bassing

With surface baits a fly rod offers many advantages, softer landings, baits with subtle natural movement and no need to waste time reeling your plug back to the boat...I doubt even Bob Izumi would take a lure versus fly topwater bass fishing challenge. Unless, of course, he had the flyrod in his hands!

Big lake mayfly hatches

During the large mayfly hatches on lakes like St Clair, Nipissing and Erie the fish get "lock jaw" in the eyes of many anglers fishing with traditional walleye gear and tactics. But, with a change of baits, anglers will find that the fish are actually gorging on the available bugs and matching the hatch can get you in on the bonanza on the surface and near the bottom with flies that match what these fish are gorging on.



Small streams

Small streams are fun to fish with a fly and as long as the stream is not too brush choked, a fly rod can be a good tool to lure trout out of small waters. Fly tackle offers a delicate presentation and natural looking imitations that work well in tight places.

Pressured waters

On many waters pressured fish are tough to catch with more popular methods and more common baits. Sometimes the subtle action of a fly or the delicacy of presentation that a fly fishing presentation can offer will crack the code of really tough to catch fish.

Wherever you want a more "you versus the fish" experience.

There are few places in fishing where you can observe the fish you are trying to catch and the foods they are eating then create an artificial lure that imitates the food in terms of size, shape, colour and action then take this fly back to the water and present it to the fish. With a bit of skill and some good fortune you can then fool, hook, land and release a fish entirely by your own doing. Some people even make their own rods from a raw piece of bamboo. You really can take the "you against the fish" to an extreme with fly fishing.



I leave the fly rod at home when I am trolling big water or fishing depths greater than about 15 feet. You can still fly fishing these areas, but there is other tackle and techniques that are more efficient. Saying that, my fly tying skills have been used to dress a lot of very effective jigs over the years and I do tie some for tournament bass pros...

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Gearing Up For Fly Fishing

Fly rod

These are set up by a standardized number system the smaller the number the lighter the rod. A #4 is a good side for trout, #8 is a heavier rod good for bass or pike and a #15 will pull your truck out of the mud or a tuna from the ocean. Whatever rod you get make sure it is matched with the right line that makes it work properly.



Fly reel and fly line

These are usually a line storage device. I often call them rod jewellery. As a guideline, look at your watch. If you wear a Timex, stick to the solid reliable no frills model for \$50-\$100. If you like nice cars and watches there are beautiful reels for a lot more that \$100 out there for you! Your line on the reel is actually more important than the reel in most freshwater fishing situations. Get a line that matches wll with your rod (these cost between about \$40 and \$90)



Fly fishing vest

This is your tackle box and storage device. Get a comfortable one with a good number of pockets that work for you. Some may have too many pockets and you will need a road map to find all of your stuff. Vests can also be a fashion statement so get one you like. Another option is a waist pack or small backpack, go with something where your gear is accessible and comfortable to wear.



Fly box & flies

This is your tackle box and direct connection to the fish. Save a good portion of your budget for quality and proven flies. Lean on local knowledge to find out what flies are popular in the waters you will be fishing. Remember without good flies you won't be fooling many fish. A mix of a couple dozen or more generic streamers, dry flies and nymphs should get you hooked up with a variety of fish in many situations.

Line cutter, pliers, shot, indicators & floatant

These gizmos will help you trim line, remove hooks, get your flies deeper, make your fly float or let you track where your fly is. You will learn how to use these indispensable gizmos from an instructor or time on the water.



Hat & polarized glasses

These will help you spot fish and avoid tripping on underwater obstructions when wading, The glasses can stop an errant cast from hooking you in the eye, enough said. They are required equipment in my books.

Leaders and tippet

These are your fish foolers. Tapered transfer the energy from your fly line to the fly to get it in front of the fish. Tippet is tied to the end of the leader to match fly size and save you money buying new tapered leaders.

Waders and wading shoes

When you are walking on the unstable bottom of a river having a pair of wading shoes with good support and traction is important. Modern breathable waders with layers of fleece underneath will keep you dry and comfortable.