

Fishing – Fly Fishing



Winneshiek County Conservation Equipment and Recommendations:

- **Who:** 5th grade and up
- **What:** 25 rods, 15 fly-tying sets for 7th grade and up; staff trained in Fish Iowa! programming
- **Where:** Lake Meyer Park, Silver Springs Park, Trout Run Park, Trout Run Trail fishing access points. See *Resource - Winneshiek County Fishing Guide* or call 563.534.7145.

Introduction

The biggest difference between spincasting and fly fishing is that the line, not the lure or bait, provides the weight for casting. Fly line is much heavier and thicker than the line used in spincasting. In essence you cast the line, not the bait. Fly rods are commonly 7–10 feet long, longer than spinning rods. In spincasting, the line is cranked back into the reel between casts. In fly fishing, the line is left hanging or coiled on the ground between casts.

Why fly fish when spincasting works just fine? Fly fishing presents the challenges of learning about the insects you are trying to imitate, coming up with the right fly for the fishing conditions, learning a more complex casting technique, and ‘reading’ the water to locate the fish.

Remember, it is not necessary to cast a long way when you are first learning. Most fish are caught 30 feet away or less. Fly fishing is not just for trout. You can fly fish for any kind of fish in any body of water. To be successful, it is best to know the habits and food preferences of the fish you are attempting to catch.

A Brief History

Fly fishing has been around for a long time. The earliest written reference to fly fishing in America dates to 1775. The early American fly rods were anywhere from 12–20 feet long and made of three sections. Each section was crafted from a different kind of wood. During the 19th Century, the line was made of horsehair and then silk. Today, rods are commonly made of fiberglass or graphite, and line is made of nylon, which was developed during World War II.

Equipment & Supplies

- Fly rods (rigged with fly line, leader, and fly)
- Bait (selection of flies)
- Tackle box with basics (needle nose pliers, extra leaders, and line)
- Optional: Yarn (for casting practice on land)

Terms & Definitions

Many general fishing terms and definitions can be found in *Fishing I – General Information*.

backing – section of thick, braided string that attaches the fly line to the reel

density – choose the proper density of line so your line will float or sink as desired

fly – name used for the artificial lure used in fly fishing; flies are tied to imitate nearly any kind of food a fish might eat; can be purchased or assembled by yourself using bits of feather, fur, tinsel, hooks, and thread

- **attractor:** imitate nothing in the natural world, but still attract fish
- **dry:** designed to float on the water's surface and imitate the adult stage of insects
- **imitator:** looks like critters found in nature (insects, crayfish, caterpillars, small fish, etc)
- **wet:** designed to sink below the water's surface and imitate immature insects

fly line – heavier than spinning line, used to send the fly to the target

leader – tapered, fine diameter line attached to the fly line; usually 6-15 feet long and made of monofilament; nearly invisible in water

reel – stores the line when it is not being cast

rod – delivers energy from the angler's arm to the fly line; comes in different lengths and weights to match the line weight and flies to be cast

taper – how line varies in thickness throughout the length

- **double taper:** tapers evenly at both ends; versatile line used for shorter casts; line can be reversed once one end wears out
- **level:** thickness the same throughout; least costly; hardest to cast
- **weight forward:** short front taper, followed by a heavier body section, followed by a long, slender section; used for longer casts

tippet – thinnest diameter part of the leader; end of the line to which the fly is tied

weight – strength of fly line, measured on a scale of 0 to 14

Regulations

Fishing regulations in Iowa are set by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. For a complete list of rules, refer to the Iowa DNR website or the current Iowa Fishing Regulations.

A few of the basic rules include:

- A fishing license is required for any person age 16 and older
- You must carry your license with you when fishing
- Check length and daily limits for the body of water you are fishing
- When fishing by hook and line, you may not use more than 2 hooks per pole and 2 poles per person
- Make sure the bait you are using is legal for the body of water you are fishing
- Ask permission to fish on privately owned ponds and stream banks

Skills & Strategies

Knots

It is important to use an actual fishing knot when fishing. Other knots may result in lost flies because the knot slipped or the line broke. Keep in mind that line becomes weaker at the point of the knot.

Knots commonly used in fly fishing:

- **arbor/reel knot:** tie backing to the reel

- **improved clinch:** connect fly to tippet (*for diagram, see Fishing II – Spincasting*)
- **nail knot:** attach fly line to backing and fly line to leader
- **surgeon’s knot:** tie monofilament lines together

Casting

Casting is not about strength, but about timing. Begin practicing on land by tying a piece of yarn an inch or two long to the end of the tippet in place of a fly.

1. **Grip:** Hold the rod above the reel on the grip with the reel hanging beneath the rod. Your thumb should be on top of the grip pointing down the rod toward your target. Keep the rod butt under and in line with your forearm, lock your wrist and bend your arm at the elbow. Your other hand will hold the line; don’t grip the rod too tightly.
2. **Stance:** Stand with feet shoulder width apart with the foot on the same side as the line hand slightly forward and aiming at your target.
3. **Overhead (pick up & lay down) Cast:** Pull 30–35 feet of line out of the reel. Gently wave the rod back and forth to slide the line out in front of you. Hold any extra line in loose coils in your off hand. These coils will be pulled from your fingers as you complete the forward motion of your cast and increase your casting distance. Check for clearance on the back motion of your cast – you need the same amount of distance for your back cast as your forward cast.
 - a) Begin with your rod tip horizontally in front of you. Gently lift just your rod tip to about the 2:00 position to eliminate slack and free line from water’s surface tension. Bend your arm at the elbow and keep your wrist locked.
 - b) Accelerate the rod back to just past the 12:00, or vertical, position. Stop abruptly and pause for just a moment. This part of the cast is the pick-up (or back cast). Watch your line over your shoulder.
 - c) Begin the lay-down (or forward cast) when your line is almost uncurled in the air behind you. Accelerate the rod forward stopping abruptly between the 1:00 and 2:00 position, or at about eye level. (At this point release any line held in loose coils in your off hand if you wish to lengthen your cast.)
 - d) As the line straightens out over the water, lower the rod tip to between the 2:00 and 3:00 position. Your goal is to have the line straightened out in front of you with all of its energy spent about a foot above the water’s surface. This allows your fly to settle naturally on the water with minimal disturbance.

Troubleshooting:

- Forearm tires quickly: using too much wrist action in your cast
- Line slamming into the water : too wide of a casting arc and not stopping your cast high enough; aim higher and stop your forward cast sooner
- Line collapsing on the back cast: bending wrist, causing line to hit the ground behind you on the back cast
- Not enough power on the pick up: start the back cast with a hard throw to make the rest of the cast work
- Whip-cracking sound on the forward cast: starting your forward cast before your back cast is straightened; wait longer on the abrupt stop before bringing your cast forward
- Casting too much line: use max of 30 feet of line for beginners, control is more important than distance

4. Roll Cast: pull 35–40 feet of line out of the reel and straighten the line in front of you using the overhead cast.
 - a) Gently raise the rod tip to just past vertical behind your head, tilt the rod slightly away from your body and allow the line to hang motionless to the side and behind you.
 - b) Thrust the rod down and forward by reaching with the arm and rolling with the hand toward the target to create a rolling loop toward the end of your line.
 - c) Stop abruptly with your rod parallel to the water.
5. False Casting: Allows you to change casting direction or feed line for longer casting.
 - a) Nearly identical to the overhead cast except that you make several casts in succession without allowing the line to touch the water on the forward cast. This skill is best taught after students have mastered the overhead cast.
 - b) From the forward cast, stop your rod tip at about 45 degrees from vertical.
 - c) Initiate another back cast in mid-air just before the line straightens on the forward cast.
 - d) After several (2-4) false casts, allow the line to land as in the overhead cast.
- a) Retrieving line: keeps you in control of the line and fly, keeps slack out of the line.
 - a) Once a cast is complete, grasp the fly line in the line hand and secure it at the rod with the index finger of the rod hand.
 - b) The line can then be stripped over the index finger by pulling from behind with the line hand.
 - c) The length and speed of line retrieval is controlled by the line hand. The index finger can apply pressure immediately if the fly is taken by a fish. The line hand can then strip in the line while playing the fish.

Safety

- Wear sunglasses and/or a cap while casting to protect eyes from sun and hooks.
- Be aware of overhead obstructions, and remember you will need as much length behind you as in front.
- If eating your fish, be sure the waters where you caught do not prohibit consumption due to contamination.

Extensions

Natural Sciences: Stream studies, water cycles, water quality and pollution, watersheds, habitat, aquatic ecosystems, invasive species, population management

Physics: trajectories, momentum

Math: population studies, graphing, percentages

Resources

- *The Students Manual of Fly Fishing*, by Shahab Farzanegan and Phil Genova, 2008
- First Cast: Teaching Kids to Fly Fish Curriculum (Trout Unlimited). <http://www.tu.org>
- Federation of Fly Fishers. www.fedflyfishers.org
- 4H Fish Iowa Responsible Angling Guide: Received as part of Fish Iowa! Training. Contact the Winneshiek County Extension Office at 563-382-2949 for more information.