

Intro to Fly Fishing

A beginner guide for your first outing

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Rendezvous in the Ozarks · Natural State Overlanders

A fly rod gives you another reason to slow down and enjoy the water. Use this guide to remember what the gear does, choose a fly, tie it on, and practice a short cast. You can fly fish for bluegill and bass as well as trout.

How the gear works

The fly line supplies the casting weight and carries the fly. The rod helps move the line; the leader and tippet connect it to the fly.

Part	What it does
Rod	Bends under load and helps cast the line.
Reel and backing	Hold the line; backing provides extra reserve.
Fly line	The thicker line that provides casting weight.
Leader	A tapered connection from fly line toward the fly.
Tippet	The thin end of the leader; added tippet replaces length lost when changing flies.

A simple starting kit

A matched 9-foot, 5-weight rod, reel, and floating line is a useful starting outfit for modest trout flies and panfish. A 6-weight can help with larger warmwater flies; big bass bugs may require heavier gear. Rod weight is a line-size category, not pounds.

Add a 7½- to 9-foot tapered leader, spare tippet, a small fly box, nippers, forceps, glasses, and a hat. A rubber landing net helps with fish release. For modest trout flies, 4X or 5X tippet is a starting point; larger flies usually need thicker material. Higher X numbers mean thinner tippet.

Choose a fly for where fish are feeding

- **Dry fly:** floats on the surface, often imitating an adult insect. Example: Elk Hair Caddis.
- **Nymph:** fishes beneath the surface, often imitating an immature aquatic insect. Examples: Pheasant Tail or Hare's Ear.
- **Streamer:** suggests moving food such as a small fish or leech. Example: Woolly Bugger.
- **Foam bug or popper:** a surface option for bluegill and bass.

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This guide is free for class attendees and will also be available later at PostFamilyPilgrimage.com.

Skills for your first outing

Tie the standard clinch knot

The **tag end** is the short free end. The **standing line** runs back toward the rod. Practice first with cord and a hook-free ring.

1. Pass the tag through the hook eye, leaving several inches to work with.
2. Wrap the tag around the standing line about five times. Keep the small loop beside the eye open.
3. Pass the tag through that small loop beside the eye.
4. Moisten actual fishing line, draw the wraps together, and seat the knot against the eye. Trim the tag, leaving a small margin.
5. Give the knot a firm pull test. Retie it if it slips or the wraps bunch poorly.

Make a short pickup and laydown cast

Remember: smooth stroke, stop, pause. Practice on open grass with yarn on the leader and no hook. Wear glasses and clear the space in front and behind you.

1. Start balanced with the rod tip low and 15 to 20 feet of fly line beyond the tip, laid straight ahead. Remove slack and hold the line with your free hand.
2. Lift and accelerate smoothly into the backcast. Stop the rod high rather than sweeping it far behind you.
3. Pause so the line can straighten behind you. Watch the backcast if helpful.
4. Accelerate forward smoothly and stop. Lower the tip as the line unrolls and the yarn settles. Reset before casting again.

Keep casts short. If the line collapses, check your pause and stopping position. If it tangles, shorten the line and reset. Learn the roll cast next for limited backcast space.

Turn a cast into fishing

Watch before casting and fish nearby water first. Look for current seams and pockets for trout; banks, shade, vegetation, and cover for bass and bluegill.

Let drifting insect imitations move naturally with the current. A **mend** repositions fly line to help the drift. For a streamer or popper, retrieve with short pulls called **strips**, adding pauses and adjusting to the fish's response.

Before you go

- Confirm legal access, current rules for the exact water, a fishing license, and any required trout permit. Check tackle restrictions and harvest limits.
- Check weather, water levels, and upstream dam releases. Begin from a stable bank; stay out of unfamiliar or rising current. Take shelter for thunder or lightning.
- Wet your hands before handling fish. Support them gently, avoid the gills, and keep released fish in the water as much as possible.
- Respect other anglers. Pack out clipped line, flies, and trash, and leave the bank and streambed as you found them.

Your next step: Practice short yarn casts, then try an accessible bluegill pond. A local fly shop can help match flies and tippet to your destination.

Free lessons and knot demonstrations: howtoflyfish.orvis.com
Arkansas rules and licenses: agfc.com