



A Sisterhood of Anglers.

Fly Casting

Though we will cover fly casting through an article, there's no better way to learn than by being under the wing of a great instructor. For those looking to practice or get a jump on instruction before attending a Women on the Fly event, pickup a casting video such as "The Complete Cast" by the Fly Fishing legend, Lefty Kreh.

The difference between fly fishing and conventional fishing is when you're fishing with a conventional rod (spinning rod), you're using the weight of the lure to cast your line out. In fly fishing, you're utilizing loaded energy stored in your rod created by the casting stroke, to propel the fly line during a cast.

It's best to learn to fly cast in a large, open, grassy area. Obviously, don't practice with a fly or hook on your line. Tying on a piece of colored yarn to your tippet using a cinch knot will suffice and likely save any passerby's or yourself from a new piercing! Pull out about thirty feet of line and mark it with a marker so that you know you have a sufficient amount of line out to load the rod as you begin casting. You can also bring along a plate or another item to use as a target when working on accuracy.

A couple concepts to remember during your introduction to fly casting:

*When casting, you're *unrolling* your line. During the cast a loop is created in your line and your goal is for that loop to unroll and straighten out as it reaches your target.

*Keep your elbow at your side, imagining it's on a shelf. You want to keep it on that shelf without moving it up or to the side.

*What's the most efficient way from point A to point B? Of course it's a straight line. So as you start casting, keep in mind that if your rod tip moves in a straight line, your fly line will follow.

Gripping the rod-

The most common grip used is the "thumb on top grip": Hold your rod with a relaxed grip, thumb on top and above your index finger (where your thumb points, is where your rod tip will go). For relatively short casts which account for most North Shore river fishing, you'll want the tip of your thumb just about to the top of the cork on your rod. If you need to make greater distance casts or are casting heavier loads, you can move your grip down the butt of the rod. You'll also want to identify which finger on your gripping hand (most prefer pointer) you're most comfortable handling your line with. When retrieving or stripping line in, the line should be lightly pinched between your index finger on your rod hand and the rod grip. When you start casting, remove your finger from over the line and hold the slack with your opposite hand. The only time you use your reel in fly fishing is when you're landing a fish or when you're

done fishing so figuring out line control and what's most comfortable for you, it an important but often overlooked point.

The casting stroke-

A good, efficient casting stroke has nothing to do with your physical strength. If your joints are getting tired or you feel as though you're throwing the fly line, you're not casting correctly. As soon as you start lifting your elbow too high or bending your wrist, you'll create curves in your line and waste energy.

As you cast, maintain a relaxed grip remembering your thumb should be behind the cork and pointed at your target, keep your elbow low by your side on the imaginary shelf and keep your wrist immobile, not allowing it to break from that position during the stroke. Regardless if you want to use the vertical cast or horizontal cast, the elbow and wrist principles are the same. You're using your forearm movement and torso to pivot through the cast, allowing the energy created by the stroke to transfer through the rod thus carrying and unrolling the line.

With an open stance and about thirty feet of fly line out in front of you, your cast should start at approximately eye level with a smooth acceleration carried through until reaching maximum speed just before stopping abruptly at the same degree behind you. You've undoubtedly heard about the 10-2 o'clock positions but we want to avoid thinking about it as a curve. During the cast your rod should be following a *straight* path of travel with the rod tip *slightly* dropping at the stop, allowing the fly line loop to pass over it before unrolling. This motion should be fluid throughout, not jerky. Never "throw" the line in an effort to make greater distance. Distance is achieved by increasing the acceleration of your stroke, not hammering the rod forward. On your final casting stroke, your stop should be with your thumb (and therefore rod tip) approximately at eye level in front of your target.

Your backcast is following the same principles as your forward cast. Smoothly accelerate through until your stopping position, pausing until your loop has unrolled and then proceed into your forward stroke. It's VERY important that you don't start your forward cast until the backcast is finished unrolling, otherwise the rod is unable to load and properly convert the energy created into your next stroke. Eventually you'll get a feel for the rod "loading" on your backcast but if you're a beginner, the best thing to do as your learning is to watch. Stand slightly sideways and cast low and parallel to the ground so as you cast forward, you can watch your line unroll at the abrupt stop of your stroke. Now complete your backcast doing the same, stopping completely between each forward and backward cast, watching the line and paying attention to the loop your line creates during the strokes and how the rod feels as the loop completely unrolls. Once you get a good feel for the rod loading and your loop formations get tighter, you can start false casting forward and back, keeping your line in the air at a low side arm level moving up to a 45-degree angle and then vertically. Your forward and backward casts should mirror one another. Remember, patience is key here. You must wait for that loop in the line to unroll before starting your next stroke.

As you watch the loop in your line, it should resemble an elongated C-shape during the cast before unrolling. Just as a C would turn into an O if you were to close the open gap, you want your loop to be open. If the top leg of your loop drops and crosses with the bottom of your loop as your line unrolls, you end up with a "tailing loop". Tailing loops are the cause of what you'll often hear referred to as "wind knots" in your line. A good tip for beginners is to throw slow loops. Starting out slow and being mindful of your line will help you develop good fundamentals on which to build.

Earlier we mentioned keeping your rod's path of travel in a straight line. When you're ready to practice casting, locate your target directly in front of you. Now turn and choose a visual target that is directly behind you so that you can line-up your front and back casts. Another option would be to string out a long rope and stand in the middle of it so as you cast, you can visually focus on keeping your loops over the rope.

The Roll Cast-

Anglers who fish North Shore Rivers will quickly realize that there's very little open space behind you for backcasting. If you're planning on fishing here, learning the roll cast is imperative. In a roll cast, you're using the tension of your fly line in the water to make the cast. Once you're line is in the water out in front of you, lift your rod up and slightly behind you so that your rod and line create a "D". From that position, smoothly accelerate forward and stop as you would during a normal forward cast allowing your loop to unroll and drop to the surface.

Practice, Practice, Practice-

Easier said than done when you're talking about a 9-ft fly rod and 30+ feet of fly line, right? Luckily for those that lack that kind of space, there are companies that make some AWESOME practice rods that are simply short rod blanks with yarn attached that can be used where space is limited. We use them in our Minnesota Steelheader and Women on the Fly Intro to Casting events and most of us personally own a couple to help us keep our skills sharp even during a MN winter! They really do work and we highly recommend them. Check out Temple Fork Outfitter's Bug Launcher Office Rod for the perfect compact casting practice rod which includes an instructional video by TFO's Lefty Kreh!