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Choosing The Proper Fly Fishing Leader and Tippet

By Cameron Larsen

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Selecting the correct tapered leader and tippet for the type of fishing you are about to do is crucial. Nothing can spook fish quicker than an oversized tippet for the particular situation. On the other hand, and undersized tippet can result in the fly fisher losing their trophy before they even get a photo opportunity. We will start at the very basic of leader and tippet selection and then get more specific, and hopefully conclude with enough information so we'll always have the proper leader and tippet for all upcoming fishing scenarios.

What is leader and tippet

Leader and tippet is the final connection between the fly fisher and their fly. It is the section of line after the fly line and before the fly. It's purpose is to transfer energy from the fly line down to the fly, allow for natural presentation of the fly, and then be strong enough for the fly fisher to retrieve any fish that might strike at the naturally presented fly. Sounds simple enough, but this is fly fishing, and fly fishers have been around a long time. And as a group we seem to think about everything related to our sport a lot, and therefore probably have over complicated things a tad.

The leader in fly fishing is tapered. It is thicker at the butt section, then at the tippet section. It is usually divided into three sections, the butt is tied directly to the fly line, and is the longest portion of the leader, about 60%. The mid-section is next and its purpose is to taper down to the tippet without losing a lot of strength. The final section is the tippet, it is the actual section that is tied to the fly. It is the thinnest section, it needs to be strong, yet allow for a natural drift, without alarming the fish that your offering is connected to a person that will pull back.

Commercial leaders by and large achieve all this in one smooth product. Although there are still knotted leaders out there, by and large knotless leaders are the choice. It is possible to construct your own leaders and many people do. But that is the topic of another article. A fly fisher does, however need to know how to attach new tippet portion to the fly line, I prefer the double surgeon's knot, but the blood knot is also popular. Learn how to tie these knots before fighting that monster! A poorly tied knot will reveal itself at the most opportune times.

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X factor

Now comes the fun part. A new set of numbers to learn. Different numbers then choosing flies or fly rods. Fly fishing is overwrought with numbering systems, and unfortunately leaders and tippets you are just going to need to learn. They are sized on the X numbering system. So when you hear someone say they are switching to a 6X, you now know they are talking about their tippet. X measures the diameter of the leader minus .011. So a 6X would measure .005. A 0X would actually measure .011. One really only needs to remember the HIGER the X, the smaller the diameter. The other number worth noting the test, or breaking factor, a 4lb test leader will break when more than 4lbs pressure are applied. This is worth noting, and many a trophy are lost when violating that #.

There are many variable to consider when selecting the right X, but the two most common are the size of fish you are going after, and the size of fly you are using when going after them. A quick guide is as follows:

XFly

0	2–6
1	4–8
2	4–10
3	6–12
4	6–14
5	12–16
6	16–20
7	20–24
8	24 and smaller

Length

One must also think about the length of the leader itself. Leaders are sold these days anywhere from 4 feet to 15 feet. There are many things to consider when deciding on length, some are variable like wind and water clarity. Other variable are static like size of fish, current, etc.

Typically the easier it is to spook a fish, the longer the leader you will need to use. So The industry seems to have settled on 9 1/2 feet as a good all-around length. For everything from trout to steelhead to tarpon. It is a good length to handle for all levels of fly casters, and it gives enough distance between the splash down of the fly line and the fly as to not spook most fish under most circumstances.

From this standard we can then begin to think of reasons we might need to adjust. Spring creeks or spring fed lakes will probably require 15 feet of leader. Whereas sinking tip lines used in spring run off will use as leaders as short as 4 feet. A weed choked largemouth bass pond will require a shorter, stouter leader, and therefore you will be able to muscle your fish away from snags. But a trout caught in a spring creek will have the advantage because your leader will easily break off due to its lightness. Windy days might require one to shorten up a bit to ease in casting. When switching from nymphing to dry flies one might need to lengthen a bit.

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Summary

I hope this has clarified and not complicated things a bit. What all this means is one must carry a good assortment of tapered leaders and even more importantly tippets with them at all times. There are many times I switch sizes in the same day. If I am fighting fish deep in faster current during the day, I might go down one X factor, and then in the evening if I am dry fly fishing in shallow slow water, I'll go up two X factors.

Not having the correct tippet can handicap one's ability to land fish, either by breaking off if too small, or spooking them if too large. It is a nominal expense compared to the rest of your equipment, and a bad place to start watching that fly fishing budget. So make sure you're well stocked for every imaginable situation before you hit the water. I guarantee you at some point you will be glad you are.

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Techniques of Wet Fly Fishing

By Brett Fogle

Many anglers who are new to fly fishing consider dry fly fishing the "traditional" way of catching trout. Well, that's not entirely true. Wet fly fishing dates back hundreds of years, well before dry fly fishing came around.

Wet fly fishing is one of the best ways for anglers to get introduced to sub-surface fishing. Unlike nymph and dry fly fishing, where skill, practice and precise imitations are needed to effectively take trout consistently, wet fly fishing can provide rewards quickly – even to beginner anglers. Unlike dry fly fishing and nymph fly fishing – when using wet flies, the angler is not attempting to precisely imitate any particular insect.

Wet Fly Fishing : Basic Overview

Instead of looking precisely like a particular type of insect, a wet fly is more an imitation of a stage of life of aquatic insects. Many wet flies imitate a struggling nymph as it attempts to reach the surface of the river. These same wet flies also suitably imitate dead or drowning insects. Either way, one thing about wet flies is that they generally imitate aquatic insects in motion (moving to the surface, drowning in the water, etc...) - not just floating merrily along in the current, completely helpless (although that is done, too!).

Unlike dry fly or nymph fly fishing, wet fly fishing can also be very rewarding to beginner anglers. Perfect, or even good technique, is not needed for new anglers to hook some nice fish. And the reason for this is because of the way most wet fly fishing is done - neither requiring perfect casts nor

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split-timing when setting the hook.

When fly fishing with wet flies, anglers frequently will use 2 or more flies together. By using two or more flies together in a dropper setup (described later), an angler can improve their chances of finding biting trout.

So, let's take a close look at how wet fly fishing works, what is used and why any angler should give it a try - even on those rivers that are normally the dry fly fisherman's playground.

There are many different types of flies available for wet fly fishing. Normally, most wet flies have soft hackling.

The reason for this is because this type of hackling has fibers in it that move around in the water - sort of inviting the trout to take it in.

Additionally, unlike most nymphs, wet flies are designed to sink rather quickly, since wet fly fishing is generally done closer to the bottom of the river. For this reason, many wet flies tend to be a bit heavier and are tied in a wide variety of ways. Each way designed to sink the fly in a particular manner than the typical nymph.

Frequently, wet flies tend to be fished in areas that have fast moving water. Because of this, many anglers fly fish wet flies using a sinking tip line. While using a sink-tip fly line can definitely aid the fly in getting down to the right depth, an angler who only has a floating fly line should not despair. Generally, simply using weights on the leader or the fly line can do an adequate job of pulling down a wet fly to the right depth.

Wet Fly Fishing : Dropper Flies

As mentioned, wet flies are frequently fished in groups of flies - not just a single fly by itself. When a second, or third, fly is used, it is called a "dropper fly". A dropper fly, which is a very effective and rather ancient method of wet fly fishing, is a fly that is tied to the main leader.

When rigging up your fly fishing gear using a dropper fly, simply attach the first fly onto the end of the tippet as you normally would. Then, for the second fly, take a 12 inch of tippet material and tie it to the leader about 12-24 inches above the first fly. Attach the second fly to the end of that line. You now have a dropper fly set up.

Additional flies can also be attached - you are in no way limited to just using 1 or 2 flies. However, the more flies you have, the greater the likelihood of tangles occurring - both when casting and in hooking underwater obstructions. For beginner anglers, it is probably best to start with one fly, then go to two flies when comfortable with basic casting and wet fly fishing technique.

Either way, one nice thing about a dropper fly is that it allows anglers to test out flies at the same time. Thus, you can tie on one type as normal, then tie on a completely different looking wet fly as a dropper fly. It's a great way to quickly experiment around to see what works and what doesn't on a particular

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river (especially a new one you've never fished before). you may even be rewarded with having two or more fish hooked simultaneously.

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Brett Fogle is the publisher of Fly Fishing Secrets, an insiders guide to flyfishing tips and techniques of the pros. To sign up for free flyfishing tips and other articles, please visit

Techniques of Wet Fly Fishing
Gear Needed for Fishing with Nymphs
Fly Fishing Secrets for the Novice as well as the seasoned Angler
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