

Fly Fishing Equipment Checklist (With Descriptions)

Fishing License (If applicable)

Licence Type	Resident	Non-Resident	Non-Resident Alien
Basic Licences			
Annual Angling Licence	\$36	\$55	\$80
One Day Angling Licence	\$10	\$20	\$20
Eight Day Angling Licence	\$20	\$36	\$50
Annual Licence for Disabled	\$1	\$55	\$80
Annual Licence for Age 65 Plus	\$5	\$55	\$80

Unless you are under the age of 16, the purchase of a freshwater fishing licence is mandatory. You must have it with you at all times when fishing. The license can be purchased online, and must be printed and signed to be valid. I recommend keeping it in a Ziploc bag to keep it from becoming water-damaged over the course of a season. When fishing in waters for certain fish, additional tags must be purchased. See the regulations for details.

Fly Rod(s)



Purchasing a quality fly rod, may be the biggest expense of all items listed; however, it is likely the most important item to ensure that you have reasonable quality. I am not saying that a beginner, who is not sure if they want to stick with fly-fishing, should rush out and drop \$300 - \$900 (or more) on a top-level fly rod, but it certainly is easier to learn to cast with a quality rod, than it is with a cheap one. If possible, see if a friend will take you out and teach you to cast with a decent rod. I have seen many turned off fly-fishing because they struggle to cast, and in several of these cases, it was a poor quality rod that contributed most to this. In reality, beginners can get a reasonable fly rod for \$150 - \$200 (or less if they catch a sale or pick up a used one). Fly rods come in different “weights” and this simply refers to the weight of line that they are designed to cast. You will want to ensure that your rod’s weight is the same (or one number lower) than the weight of the line(s) you purchase. Fly rods can be most commonly purchased as 2-piece and 4-piece units. The latter is generally more portable as they break down to fit into a shorter carrying tube that is easier to pack & carry.

Reel(s)



Some stillwater fly anglers will insist that a quality reel is essential. There are arguments in favour of this idea; however, most of the fly fishermen I see fighting hooked fish do so by stripping (rather than reeling) in their line (meaning their reel serves as little more than a mechanism to hold their line). If you are going to spend more money on **either** a rod OR a reel, I recommend the beginner make more of an investment in a better rod (as this will have a greater positive impact on fishing success). Reels come in different “arbor sizes” referring to the diameter of the reel. The best size for you can be determined at your local fly shop when you explain the type of fishing you intend to do, and the type of line you plan on using.. There are basically two categories of fly reel. These are based on the drag systems (the mechanism designed to adjust how easily the line can be pulled from the reel, and how quickly the line can be reeled in). The two main types of drag system are “click and pawl drag” and “disc drag”. There are arguments in favour of both, but for the beginner, I think that a decent “click and pawl” reel can be found at a very low price, and that the quality can offer good bang for your buck. Another option that can be cost effective, and convenient when out on the water is to buy reels with removable spools. Different lines can be put on the various spools, and easily interchanged. This can save having to buy multiple reels (one for each line purchased), and it is often much more convenient to change a spool than a whole reel).

Line(s) (extra lines may be on spools)



Fly lines are pieces of equipment that an angler should take great care to do his / her research before purchasing. Fly lines are designed to have more weight at the front. This weight is what allows the angler to cast out a light fly which by itself, does not have enough weight to pull line out while casting.

Fly lines come in different weights (as do rods). If you already own a fly rod, it is important to buy a line that is the same weight as the rod, or a line that is ONE weight level heavier than the weight designation of your rod). Fly rods are designed to work best with certain weights of line. The larger the number designated to a fly line, the heavier the weight of the line. For example, a 7-wt line would be heavier than a 5-wt line.

Though others may categorize lines differently, as far as I am concerned, there are 4 different categories of fly line. These include: the floating line, the slow sinking line, the fast sinking line, and the sinking-tip line. Each serves a different purpose for me, and collectively they allow me to fish in any conditions I may experience in interior lakes. Over time, I have purchased one or two of each type, but since they can be expensive, I certainly did not buy them all at once.

Floating lines (as would be expected) float along the top of the water. The colouring of floating lines is usually light with shades of white, light blue, yellow and light green being common. I have heard people say that this light colour is meant to camouflage, the line against the lighter sky when fish are looking up from below. Floating lines are ideal for fishing dry flies (which imitate adult insects on the top of the water), and for fishing under a strike indicator. This type of fishing is done with the line floating along the surface, and a small bright float (strike indicator) is attached to the end. A weighted fly is suspended almost straight down (beneath the float).

Slow sinking lines are not buoyant, so they sink; however, they are weighted in a manner that they will sink at a rate of about one or two inches per second. These lines are ideal for fishing patterns over shoals or shallow waters when the fly will be pulled in to imitate the movement of an insect. The slower sink rate will allow flies to be fished over weed beds without sinking right into the weeds, and causing snags. Slow sinking lines are also called intermediate lines, and are often coloured in translucent greens, and browns, and some even have camouflage patterns.

Fast sinking lines have much heavier cores, and sink at a much faster rate (6-7 inches per second). They are often dark colours (dark brown, black, forest green, etc), since they are fished in deeper waters with lower light. These are ideal for fishing flies in deeper water since the weight of the line will reduce the wait time while your fly is sinking to the desired depth.

A sink tip line is basically a floating line with the last 12-15 feet composed of a heavy core (like that in a fast-sink line). These are useful to fish in similar conditions to an intermediate line; however, I find that there are times when I like to retrieve a fly very slowly, and this line does not continue to sink deeper and deeper.

If you are going to buy your first fly line, I recommend a floating line. Others may disagree, but with a floating line, you can fish deeper water with a longer leader and a weighted fly (with or without a strike indicator). I feel that the floating line allows the most options. As for choosing a second line, personally, I would choose a fast sinking line. If you already have a floating line, adding a sinking line will allow you (once you learn the various techniques) to fish the greatest number of conditions with only two lines. After you have these two, I would then choose either an intermediate (slow-sink) line or a sink-tip line. Many anglers do not see enough of a difference between these two. There are, however, differences, and once you gain more experience, you will be able to decide which of these will best suit your needs (or if you feel it would be beneficial to have one of each).

Leaders



As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of a fly line is to provide the weight necessary to allow the line to be cast out (since the weight of flies is too light to do so). Subsequently, the thickness and colour of a fly line make it impossible to attach it to a fly. This is where the leader comes in. Leaders are composed of clear (monofilament) line that is tapered (thicker where it attaches to the fly line), and thinner where it attaches to the fly. This clear line is barely visible to the fish, and is very thin near the tip, making it easy to tie on your preferred fly pattern. The tapering allows the line to “roll over” when cast, so that the leader lands straight out as an extension of the fly line when cast correctly. Leaders come in varying lengths, with 9 foot, 12 foot & 15 foot being the most popular. If a longer leader is needed, anglers will often attach tippet to the end of a leader (see below).

Spools of Tippet



As mentioned above, leaders are tapered, and get thicker as you near the fly line. Imagine a long day on the water, where you are frequently changing your fly to try to figure out what the fish will take. Cutting off all of your flies, and tying knot after knot to attach all of the new flies will quickly result in having to tie flies onto the thicker portion of the leader. As the end of a leader becomes thicker, tying on flies becomes very difficult (if not impossible), and will result in the fly being attached to line that is far easier for fish to see. To prevent this problem, anglers often attach a few feet of tippet to the end of their leader. Tippet is very thin (as thin or thinner than the tip of your leader), and is not tapered. It is purchased on spools, like the ones pictured here. By attaching tippet to the end of a leader (using a blood knot or surgeon’s knot), anglers can attach and remove fly after fly, and they will not remove any of the leader. As the tippet becomes very short (within a foot of the leader, it can be removed, and replaced with a few more feet. This prolongs the life of your leader, as very little is removed, and very infrequently.

Strike Indicators



Fly-fishing using a strike indicator is a very popular method on stillwaters in the British Columbia Interior. Strike indicators serve a dual purpose – they operate as a float to help suspend flies at a specific depth, and as their name suggests, they offer a clearer visual signal that a fish has struck your fly. Fishing with a strike indicator is done as follows, once the approximate depth where fish are feeding has been determined, the strike indicator is set on the leader with enough line below it to reach that depth. For example, if the fish are feeding at 10 feet, you should position the strike indicator 9.5 – 10 feet from the fly on the end of your line. Using a floating line, cast the strike indicator out directly over the area you would like to fish, with a sinking fly attached. Wait for the fly to sink straight down from the strike indicator to the desired depth. Often the bobbing up and down of the strike indicator will provide sufficient movement to the fly below. When a fish takes your fly, the highly visible indicator will move subtly, yet in a different manner than was caused by the water ripples, or more often it will be pulled under the water. Set the hook quickly after the indicator makes an irregular movement, and hang on!

Flies in Box(es)



This is a fairly simple one. Anglers need a place to put their flies where they can easily be accessed. The only limitation, surrounds the number of flies you are able to take with you. Anglers with boats, who drive into lakes and / or streams often keep their flies in one heavy (and more bulky box), while fishermen who work out of float tubes or walk into lakes and / or streams often take much smaller boxes, as they are less bulky and easier to carry and store while fishing. Fly boxes are available in a vast array of sizes and styles. My advice is to start with a box that is relatively small, is light, and inexpensive. You can always upgrade if the need arises.

Net



A friend of mine (who does not share my passion for fishing), but enjoyed spending time with myself and others in our circle of friends used to come on fishing trips and would be the designated “netter”. After our trips, he would always claim to have “caught all of the fish”, and that all we did was bring them close enough to the boat so that he could do so. Though this may not be exactly true, a good net can make the difference between a successful day on the water, and a day filled with stories of the one (or more likely many) that got away. The most important aspects to consider when purchasing a net is that it will not be damaging to fish – especially those you intend on releasing, and that the length is appropriate for the type of boat (or water craft) from which you are fishing. A good net should be made of soft material with small holes. This will prevent damage to the fish’s scales before release. Also, the appropriate length of a net can vary depending on your fishing situation. When fishing from a boat, a net with a longer handle is often better due to the simple fact that you would likely be a greater distance from the water. If fishing from shore or in a float tube, a shorter net is easier to transport, and more practical to store when not needed.

Knife



It is my opinion that every fisherman should have a good jackknife with him at all times. Aside from the obvious advantages as an emergency survival tool, there are countless potential uses for a knife when you are on the water. Pick up a decent inexpensive one, and you will be able to make your own long list of reasons for having one. Trust me, this is a better list to compile after saying the phrase, “Thank goodness I had my knife because...” than it is to say, “Man, if only I had a knife, I could have...”

Nippers



The chips in my front teeth from biting off line after tying on flies is the only reason I will give you for having this inexpensive tool. Dental bill \$800.00. Nippers \$3.00. You decide.

Forceps



I will always advocate for the use of barbless hooks, and if you plan on releasing your fish these are a given. With that said, even barbless hooks can at times be very difficult to remove from a fish's mouth. A pair of forceps can make this much easier, and less damaging to a fish. A responsible angler will always have a pair of these handy.

Zinger(s)



Nippers, jackknives and forceps are useful tools, and are most often used while on the water. In the case of forceps, they are also used in unpredictable conditions (trying to remove a hook from the mouth of a flopping fish). The simple reality, is that these items are easy to drop, and they sink. This is where zingers come in handy. A zinger is a small cartridge that pins onto a fly vest. It has a retractable spring-loaded wire with a clip on the end. Clip this end onto the tools listed above, and you will not have to replace them as frequently (or maybe ever). These are certainly worth the investment.

Throat Pump (and viewing container)



Sometimes, when you are on the water, it can be very difficult to figure out on which invertebrates the fish are feeding. If you are lucky enough to catch a fish (of a large enough size) a throat pump can turn a slow day into a memorable one. I remember one day on one of my favourite lakes, I threw everything but the kitchen sink at the fish with no luck. Eventually, I managed to bring in a decent fish with a small leech. Using the throat pump properly (see the video on the website for the proper technique), I took a sample of the undigested contents of the fish's throat. I then put the contents into the viewing container, to see the valuable "intel" for which I had been waiting hours. The contents revealed dozens of size 14 maroon chironomids (similar to the "Cranberry Chironomid" that we tie). I put on my best imitation, and once I found the right depth, I was getting strikes on virtually every cast. Zero to hero in a matter of minutes, thanks to what looks like a miniature turkey baster.

Nail Knot Tool



When a leader is attached to a fly line, or the fly line is attached to the backing, a "nail knot" is most often used. This knot is so-called because it was often tied using a nail as a necessary tool to complete it. The tool pictured has replaced the nail as the device of choice to effectively and efficiently tie the nail knot. In the event that a leader breaks, or needs to be replaced while on the water, a nail knot tool is extremely useful.

Swivels



Several fly fishermen – especially those who like to fish under strike indicators using a floating line – like to use a small barrel swivel to connect their tippet to the end of their leader. The swivel prevents excessive twisting of the fly while it is suspended, and can prevent the fly line from twisting as it is stripped in. A secondary added benefit is that the swivel also adds a bit of extra weight to help the fly sink a bit faster to the desired depth.

Fly Floatant



When fishing the surface using dry flies, they can easily become waterlogged, and sink beneath the surface. To counter this unwanted occurrence, anglers will often use fly floatant. Floatant is a floating gel that helps the fly to resist becoming saturated with water. Squeeze a **very small** drop onto a fly, and massage it in with your thumb and forefinger. Allow the floatant to dry, and your fly will float on the surface cast after cast. Be careful not to get any floatant on flies you would not want to float.

Split-Shot Weights or Weighted Putty



Sometimes, you want to use a fly under a strike indicator that is not heavy enough to sink to the required depth (or it simply takes longer than one might like to reach this depth. Putting a small split shot (or a small ball of weighted putty on your line a few feet above the fly, can quickly remedy this. Make sure you have one of these options available (they are very inexpensive). **WARNING** – Many split shots are made of lead, which is highly toxic. I recommend buying the putty, as it is available lead-free, and can be rolled small, making the line easier to cast.

Vest (or tackle box)



Anglers who spend most of their time fishing out of a boat, will purchase a tackle box to hold the above items. Personally, I recommend purchasing a good vest – especially if you plan to fish from shore, in streams, or out of a float tube. A vest keeps all items safe and secure, and is much more practical to transport without a vehicle. It is also much easier to ensure that you do not leave anything behind (as all of your gear is in the pockets of a vest you are wearing

