

Tips

Catching trout is a little different than catching other species. Once you find some species, you can be pretty well assured that you will be able to catch some fish. With trout that is not necessarily true. There are also differences between trout species about what they eat and what habitat is favored.



This fisherman is in a great spot on the Madison, River in Montana. The main channel is funneling water into him and the channel behind is creating an eddy in front of him.

You have to not only find where the trout are located, but discover what they will take, present it in the right manner, and be in the right position. The “Flies” section of the website identifies my favorite patterns and what has caught fish in many locations. I spend most of my trout fishing time fishing nymphs. If I am fishing a river and there is a hatch, I will switch to dry flies. When fishing a lake I will never switch to a dry fly. The reason is simple. Lake fish are always eating nymphs, and that is true even when the hatch is on. In fact, they become much more active under the surface than what you see on top. So when they are gulping insects on the surface, they are also gulping nymphs under the water. I may change flies if the hatch is different than the nymph I am fishing. I generally start with a caddis or stone fly nymph of various sizes and when the damselflies began to hatch (which usually happens in the afternoon) change to some color of damselfly nymph. I have found that the size of fly is sometimes as important as the pattern. I usually carry four different sizes of each fly pattern. I have caught 75% of all of the trout I have caught on one fly pattern. I fish it in four different sizes and it really works. It is a fly I tie called a Will Bug and it really works in the lakes of the western United States. It can represent a caddis or stone fly depending upon the size being used. Check out the nymphs section of “Flies” for a picture.

Presentation makes big difference to taking fish. When fishing rivers and streams it is usually best to present a nymph in a dead drift with as little friction on the line as possible. You need to get the nymph rolling on the bottom like it has just been dislodged from its hiding place. This is a killer technique if you have chosen the right pattern. This generally means casting upstream or slightly upstream and catching up on the line as it comes toward you. I set the hook on any movement. I don't use indicators so any movement is either a hit or a rock. I have been on rivers where doing all of the wrong things worked. After getting a couple of hits throwing a stone fly upstream and letting it drift down on the Payette in Idaho, I made a change. I saw fish working downstream so I decided to use a downstream retrieve. I didn't retrieve the fly until the line had run all of the way down in the current. When the line became tight downstream, I began the retrieving. There was an immediate hit and a nice 12-inch rainbow. I caught a lot of fish that day using that method.

There are times when terrestrials work. I have fished the Firehole River in Yellowstone several times and in late summer grasshopper imitations work. Hoppers drop in the water close to the bank and casting to deep undercut banks can produce some nice fish. I have also had success with hoppers on the Snake River in Wyoming. There aren't many undercut banks on the snake, but in several places the tall grass grows close to the river and hoppers do get to the water. Being observant to the terrain around the river and the insects that live in those areas has helped my fishing success.

I mentioned earlier that I usually don't add any action to the fly when fishing rivers and streams. When I am tubing in a lake I always give the nymph some action. A couple of quick jerks periodically during the retrieve seems to work. Nymphs do swim around usually in a jerking motion. Leeches are an exception, but slower jerks seem to work for them. My experience is that imparting motion to the nymph when lake fishing catches more fish. The majority of big fish I have caught have been from lakes except Steelhead and Sea Trout.



This is the Holaa River in Iceland and is one of the best rivers I have fished to catch inland Arctic Char. You would think that 1-3 pound Char would like large flies, but this was not the case for all of the inland Char in Iceland. The most common aquatic is a small caddis fly and an imitation of this nymph is what the Island Char wanted.

The greatest challenge to tubing is wind. The fish are still there, but too much wind makes tubing unsafe and you have to get off of the lake. The west is famous for having windy afternoons and you have to get off of most lakes, or find an area that is protected from the wind. This year in Utah I was blown off of the lake on consecutive days. Each day there was a storm in the afternoon that lasted a couple of hours with whitecaps on the lake. It is not possible to tube in whitecaps.

The greatest tip is to keep your line in the water. Persistence does pay off. It is also good to give the fly you are using a fair chance. In river fishing, I will use a fly for at least 15 minutes before changing. In lakes it is usually 30 minutes. It is easier to identify fish locations in rivers and streams than in lakes. With more water to fish, it sometimes takes a little longer to find the right depth and speed of retrieve in a lake. That is not the flies' fault.

The length of leader and pound test (diameter) does make a difference. I use heavy leader when I fish the western lakes. Usually, nothing less than 8-pound test line when fishing the western lakes, and it is not unusual to get some break-offs with that size leader. The fish hit hard, have fair weight and the initial strike can break the leader if the hit is straight away from the rod. In western streams I will go down to 6-pound test leader for dry flies. I see many people fish 2 and 3-pound test leaders, but many, many fish are broken-off. I get some break-offs on 6, 8, and 10-pound test leaders but that is reduced.

I put as much backing on each fly reel as the reel will hold. Every western trout fishing trip I have been on has had at least one fish strip line well into my backing. Twice I have had all of my backing stripped from the reel. Steelhead have taken all of my backing and I have had to chase them downstream. It is not possible to have too much backing on a fly reel.

There is a chapter on each fish in the book or e-book **Trout Adventures – North America** that has more information on how to catch each type of trout. I have found out many things over many years of trout fishing. I hope it is all on the website and in the book. The book will be available in 2012 and published by Wilderness Adventures Press. Their website is www.wildadventurepress.com and they specialize in fly fishing books.