

Following a simple equation can make fly fishing fun and easy

What was once stigmatized as a form of angling catering only to society's upper crust who were members of private angling clubs that leased stream-side property, fly fishing now takes on a different perspective.

If you wet a line in the headwaters of a stream hosting residential trout or a Lake Ontario feeder watershed that has migratory runs of steelhead or salmon or even a pond with largemouth or small-mouth bass, chances are you'll see some anglers waving their fly fishing wands in pursuit of their prey.

It's a sport that now caters to anyone who has an interest in it.

For anyone who has entertained thoughts about trying their hand in this time-honoured sport, there's a suggested guideline to follow.

Bob McKenzie, the Canadian sales representative for Sage, a world-renowned fly fishing company, compares it to solving an equation.

"To fully appreciate the sport begins with the selection of properly balanced equipment," he notes. "Then you need to understand how the parts come together to function as one unit."

From there, it boils down to the commitment one gives in mastering the mechanics of delivering a fly.

McKenzie suggests purchasing fly fishing gear is no different than buying any other piece of sporting equipment.

Don't go the cheap route, he warns. "A good, basic fly rod, reel and line outfit will require an outlay of at least \$150, he estimates.

"If you buy a good piece of equipment at first you will still use it 10 years from now. If you buy something that's cheap chances are you won't continue with it very long," he says.

In choosing an outfit, McKenzie strongly suggests going to a store that specializes in fly fishing. In York Region, one such store exists in Concord-based Angling Specialties, located at 2104 Hwy. 7 West.

"They'll have someone who knows something about the subject," McKenzie says with assurance.

Without the luxury of a specialty fly shop or advice from someone in the know, McKenzie says there are some guidelines that can be considered.

The most important piece of equipment to purchase, he pointed out, is the rod.

Fly fishing poles are no different from spinning or baitcasting models in that they come in varying lengths and different compositions.

In selecting a fly rod, McKenzie says a couple of considerations must be factored. These include the type of species you will be pursuing and physical size of the body of water you will fish.

"For example, if you're going after small trout in small streams you will want a rod that can handle a 3, 4 or 5 line weights.

"If you're going after steelhead in a bigger river you will need a rod that can handle 6, 7 or 8-weight lines," he recommends.

Associated with the purchase of a rod, possessing the proper line weight to match the rod is the second most important item to consider.

If, for example, you're purchasing a rod that is designed for a 4- or 5-weight line, those are the lines that should be used for that rod.

"When you're fly fishing, you're not casting a lure like in spinning or bait casting which takes your line four-



Mike Hayakawa

McKenzie notes. "In fly fishing it's the line you are casting out that delivers your fly.

Fly lines also come in different varieties. For beginners, McKenzie favours lines with a weight forward characteristic.

"With just a bit of line out you can load your backcasts quickly and feel the dynamics of it," he says of weight forward characteristics.

As well, fly lines come in floating or sinking tip characteristics. McKenzie recommends novices go with floating tip lines to begin with.

"Sinking tip lines," he says, "can be considered down the road for special purposes."

In the selection of a reel, McKenzie says it should feel balanced weight-wise with the rod.

"With the amount of casting you do, balance is important. With no balance you will get discomfort in your wrist, elbow and shoulder," he warned.

Another factor to consider when buying a fly reel is its drag system, which comes in two different forms. The click-paw system is basic while a disc drag format is more elaborate.

The drag system you want will depend on what species you are fishing for along with the conditions.

"If you're going for steelhead you

want a good smooth drag system because these fish will make long, determined runs," he said from his past experiences in pursuing these fish. "With a pike, bass or muskie, they will make short, slashing runs."

Before spooling your fly line onto the reel it will require the application of backing line, which can be monofilament or dacron. McKenzie notes each reel manufacturer will supply specifications in its instructions as to how much backing should be applied.

Selecting a leader to attach your fly is the final and simplest part of the equation to be solved.

The purpose of a leader "is to take a large diameter of line (fly line) down to a small diameter to achieve a smooth transfer of energy from the fly line to the tip of the leader when presenting a fly."

Once these items are matched, McKenzie says you should have a unit that feels like it's just one piece.

With your equipment now in place, it then becomes unequivocally important that an angler learn how to properly use the equipment. McKenzie suggests first timers take a course in flycasting.

Learning to cast properly, he says, is a lot like trying to learn how to perfect your golf swing.

"If you don't learn how to do it you won't progress to the fun part."

McKenzie says it doesn't hurt to begin fishing in a controlled setting area, such as a stocked trout pond.

But he notes "that's not the objective of the exercise."

The eventual goal is to use your equipment in a natural environment where anglers might face casting obstructions strategically placed by Mother Nature and fish that inhabit natural surroundings.

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