FRESHWATER FISHING

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Fish & Game NEW ZEALAND

Fly Casting






Learning to cast a fly is less about strength and more about rhythm, timing, and allowing the equipment to do the work.

How to cast a fly

Fly fishing looks deceptively simple. A smooth back-and-forward movement sends a tiny fly out across the water, but unlike conventional fishing, you are not casting the fly itself. The secret is the **fly line** — and understanding how the rod and line work together is the key to learning to cast.

How a fly rod and line work

A fly rod is designed to be light, flexible and responsive. When you cast, the rod bends as energy is applied to it. As the rod straightens, that stored energy is transferred into the fly line, causing the line to unroll through the air.

This is different from conventional fishing, where the weight of a lure or sinker provides much of the momentum needed to cast. A fly is usually far too light to do this. Instead, the weight of the fly line is what you are casting.

Fly lines are specially designed with different weights and tapers. The heavier section of line carries energy from the rod and allows the lighter leader and fly to follow it. At the end of the line is a thin, almost invisible leader, to which the fly is attached.

Think of the system as a chain: the rod loads and releases, the fly line carries the energy, the leader transfers it to the fly, and the fly lands gently on the water.

The basic cast

The most useful cast to learn first is the overhead cast. Before beginning, make sure you have plenty of open space behind and in front of you. Keep the fly away from people, trees and other obstacles.

Hold the rod comfortably in your dominant hand, with your thumb generally positioned on top of the grip. Keep your wrist firm but relaxed.

Start with several metres of fly line outside the rod tip. Lift the rod smoothly and bring it backwards, stopping when the rod is pointing upwards and slightly behind you.

Pause

This pause is important. As the rod moves backwards, the line forms a loop behind you. Waiting allows the line to straighten before you make the forward cast. You should be able to feel the rod load as the line pulls against it.

Once the line has straightened behind you, move the rod smoothly forwards and stop it firmly with the rod tip pointing towards your target.

The line will continue travelling forward, forming another loop before unrolling towards the water.

The cast should come from the rod and forearm, rather than large movements of your whole arm. Avoid trying to throw the fly. Instead, think about moving the rod smoothly and allowing it to do the work.

Fly Casting *continued*

The importance of timing

Good fly casting is largely about timing rather than strength.

One of the most common mistakes beginners make is starting the forward cast before the line has straightened behind them. This causes the line to collapse or the fly to fall short.

Another common mistake is using too much force. A powerful, jerky cast can actually make casting harder. Smooth acceleration, followed by a crisp stop, allows the rod to load properly and transfers energy efficiently into the line.

As your timing improves, you can gradually increase the amount of line outside the rod tip. The longer the line, the more energy and control are required.

Putting it on the water

Once you can form consistent loops, your goal is to present the fly gently. As the line straightens in front of you, lower the rod slightly and allow the leader and fly to settle softly onto the water.

Remember: smooth movement, good timing and a controlled stop are more important than power.

With practice, casting becomes less about thinking through every movement and more about feeling the rod load and release. Once that happens, the fly rod, line and angler begin to work as one — and that is when fly fishing really starts to become enjoyable.