

OUT AND ABOUT

Fly Fishing in Michigan

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Finding Peace on the Water

Whether on a dock, in a boat or wading through a river, there's something mesmerizing about watching fish move through the water, and it's even more thrilling when one takes the bait. In Michigan's scenic streams and rivers, fly fishing offers a way to catch fish and blend into the flow, gently casting and practicing the kind of patience that quiets the noise of everyday life.

In Michigan, the most common type of fishing is spincasting, where the line is lightweight and the lure is weighted. In contrast, fly fishing uses a weighted line and weightless dry flies called lures. Both spincasting and fly fishing are enjoyable ways to fish in Michigan, and both require licenses through the state for anyone over 17. As with any hobby, equipment can be basic and low cost or go to extremes.

Fly fishing equipment and techniques are specialized, so beginners should seek expert instruction for the best foundation to learn the sport as well as taking ample time to use and understand equipment before purchasing. A very basic fly rod, fly reel, line, leader and a few flies can be purchased new starting around \$200. Fish are usually caught, admired and quickly released back into the stream as there is an emphasis in fly fishing on conservation.

Flies, often hand-tied by the angler, mimic the anatomy of an insect at a particular time in its life cycle. Fly fishing isn't just about the fish being caught, it is also about what the fish eat. Fly fishers pay close attention to the underwater world of aquatic insect lifecycles and the behavior of the fish consuming those insects at different life stages. The fly used needs to match that day's fish food for the best chance to catch a fish. Hand-tied flies can be made by the fly fisher or purchased from a fly shop close to the fishing source for the most accurate flies for the area.

"Fly fishing is a great way to understand more about a stream and habitat," Chris Adams, Copper Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited president, says. "It's relaxing, takes you to beautiful places and it's challenging."

Adams is the owner of a fly fishing and fisheries consulting business. He says fly fishing in the Upper Peninsula, where he works and lives, has a few differences from fly fishing in the Lower Peninsula.

"You don't run into other people very often, there are abundant cold water streams and a lot of exploring to do," Adams says of the U.P. "Waterfalls can be side adventures, and there's a chance to catch-and-release a native coaster brook trout that spends part of its life in Lake Superior."



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Michigan's Lower Peninsula's most notable streams and rivers for fly fishing include the Boardman River in the Grand Traverse Region, the Pere Marquette River which flows east of Baldwin to Ludington into Lake Michigan and the Au Sable River in northeastern lower Michigan which flows from Grayling to Oscoda into Lake Huron.

"I think a lot of people fly fish because there are so many facets to explore," Josh Greenberg, Anglers of the Au Sable president, says. "They start to fly fish, then they start tying their own flies. It occupies them with the sport, then occupies them through winter. It's a sport and hobby you can sink into."

Greenberg, who owns a fly fishing lodge on the Au Sable River, explains that fly fishing is a highly immersive experience. Anglers wear waders to step directly into the water, and because casting requires about 40 feet of clear space, standing in the middle of the river helps avoid snagging the line on trees or brush along the banks.

"When people think of fly fishing, they think of being in the water in a river," Greenberg says. "You experience the feel and sound of the water;

you feel the wind, which can affect casting. Not only are you feeling the wind, rain and sun, you are reacting to them to be successful, and you are using a fly to imitate an insect while at the same time trying to blend in for a fish to react to an artificial lure."

According to Greenberg, Michigan is one of the best states in the country to fly fish due to year-round fly fishing for an abundant number of species. The best way to know when and where to fish for a particular species, such as steelhead, brook trout, brown trout, smallmouth bass, muskie, pike and many more, is to download the Michigan DNR Hunt Fish app or fishing guide, talk to fly shop owners or hire a guide.

There may be easier ways to catch fish in the beautiful streams and rivers of Michigan, but fly fishing tends to be a more meditative method. It's the act of trying to blend into a stream as if you aren't there and delicately placing an artificial fly mimicking what's crawling or flying around in order to entice a fish to bite. Fly fishing is a lesson in patience and the perfect way to put a pause on any to-do list. ☐

FROM ALDEN'S MILL HOUSE

Broiled Trout



This recipe also works well by cooking the fish any way you desire: broil, fry, grill or bake.

Set fish fillets out and sprinkle with Alden's Mill House Steak and Fish seasoning and a small dash of Miracle Blend and Garlic Lovers Delight (or seasoning of your choice).

Sprinkle a small amount of Dill Weed across the top.

Let stand for at least 10 minutes.

Before cooking, sprinkle the top with Panko bread crumbs.

Broil for about 15 minutes or longer based on fillet size. Try not to overcook, as it will dry out the fish. Serve with a side of rice.

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