



HOOKED ON NATURE

Learn Fly Fishing

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LIFESTYLE | Hooked on Nature: Learn Fly Fishing

Michigan is an outdoor paradise, with over 4,000 miles of hiking trails, dozens of nature centers and protected areas, and more than 3,000 miles of water trails across inland lakes and Great Lakes shoreline. If peaceful hikes and paddling appeal to you, fly fishing might be the perfect next adventure.

One of the best ways to learn fly fishing is from someone who not only loves the sport, but also knows how to teach it. Nationally recognized organizations like Fly Fishers International, Trout Unlimited and Project Healing Waters offer instruction at the local level.

Specialized groups such as Flygirls of Michigan hold classes on all facets of fly fishing for its members. The Carl T. Johnson Hunting and Fishing Center, located within Mitchell State Park in Cadillac, offers one-day fly fishing seminars and two-day fly fishing clinics throughout the summer, and the Michigan DNR Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program offers fly fishing as one of its instructional choices in its multi-day educational program.

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SMALL PHOTOS | DAVE LEONHARD

Another avenue for learning is through established outfitters. Owner Niall McCarthy of Motor City Anglers in West Bloomfield has been fly fishing since age 10, and an important part of his business is teaching others.

"In our Intro to Fly Fishing class, we talk about the parts of the rod, the line and work on very short casts — like a half cast," McCarthy explains. "Within 45 minutes to an hour of casting, people usually pick it up. It's easy to pick up with proper instruction."

McCarthy's classes tend to teach ages 15-75, and are small, with just six people learning at a time, which allows for one-on-one attention. The class is held outside for four hours and equipment for learning is provided. Motor City Anglers offers many other classes, including several for tying flies.

If learning online before you try is more your style, the website HowToFlyFish.Orvis.com has many short videos that focus on every imaginable topic to learn about fly fishing, including the latest innovations. This particular site may be the best way to get your feet wet without leaving the couch.

Streamside Orvis in downtown Traverse City offers five two-day schools held at The Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme. Day one is classroom training, day two is spent on the Boardman River and all equipment is provided.

"We believe the people completing the two-day school will be self-sufficient on the river. Our training is that comprehensive," Streamside Orvis owner Dave Leonhard says. "You won't need a guide, and you won't have to have someone holding your hand in the river."

In addition to the Orvis fly fishing school in Acme and the expert online videos, Streamside Orvis offers free, two-hour in-store classes typically held in March and April. Topics include Fly Fishing 101, the Bug Class, and the Leader and Tippet class. Classes fill quickly, so you'll want to contact the store for more information.

Learning to fly fish means diving into more than just casting. It involves understanding the sport's history, local fish species, river currents and entomology, along with the necessary equipment, knot-tying techniques and casting methods. Equally important is knowing how aquatic insects influence fly selection, as well as learning the rules, ethics and conservation practices that protect fish species and their habitats.

"You don't hire guides to teach you," Leonhard explains. "Guides want you to catch fish. The best way to learn is to attend a school. You hook 'em and you hope to land 'em — sometimes you do and sometimes you don't. That's why it's called fishing."

A great introduction to the sport for people interested in learning more about fly fishing is to attend the Fly Fishers International Flyfest 2025 in Grand Rapids at the Sheraton Airport Conference Center, September 26-27. The event will include expert speakers discussing casting, fly tying, fly fishing skills, conservation and more. Visit FlyFishersInternational.org/FlyFest for more information. □



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