Vickie's Fall Fly-Fishing Tips:



Getting ready for fall fishing

I eagerly anticipate the beginning of the fall fishing season as I stock my fly box and complete an inspection and tune up of my rods, boats, and other gear. I will be heading out mid-September and return home once the lakes begin to ice over in November. If you need flies, fly-tying materials, or tackle for your fall adventures, my team is available to fulfill your orders while I am away fishing. Click here to shop at my online store.

Before hitting the road, I want to share the following five fall fishing tips to improve my catch rate. Have fun with your fall fishing adventures and I hope to see you on the water!

Vickie's Five Fall Fishing Tips

1. Leader Length: Check to ensure you have sufficient leader length. Adequate length is an important factor when executing a cast. You the line and leader to turn over smoothly and allow the fly to land softly on the water. I recommend a length of 12 feet. A shorter leader may cause the fly to splash into the water and spook fish which will negatively impact your catch rate. A monofilament leader stretches which helps absorb the impact and reduce breakoffs from hard-hitting fish. Add sufficient fluorocarbon tippet to the monofilament leader for a total length of 12 feet. I prefer fluorocarbon tippet due to its invisibility in water.

Check your leader and tippet for any wind knots. If you find any, replace the leader as they will significantly weaken the leader. You do not want to hook a beautiful fish only to lose it due to a break off because of a wind knot.

Although a 12-foot leader is my baseline, here are three conditions where I will adjust my leader length:

- If trout are feeding under the cover of stained water, algae, or off-colored water, I find a shorter leader length of 9 - 12 feet is sufficient.
- When fishing clear water under flat and sunny conditions, I increase my leader length to 15 feet. This is especially important when using a floating or hover line. Adding fluorocarbon tippet to extend total leader length increases the distance between the line and the fly and will help minimize line disturbance near the fly.
- When fishing with a fast sinking line and presenting the fly close to the bottom, a full 12-foot leader length is not as critical.

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2. Slow Down Your Retrieves: During fall, slow down all aspects of the presentation to allow trout more time to see the fly. Retrieve twice as slowly as normal, and possibly slow down even more. Use pronounced pauses between each of your retrieves.

When you see trout feeding on or near the surface, they are feeding on the pupa or the adult stage of aquatic insects. Slow the speed of the retrieve and incorporate a 5-second pause between each pull. Vary the speed of your retrieve and the length of the pause until you determine what the trout prefer. Focus on the pause and allow the fly to drop - this is the moment when fish take the fly. Takes will be soft so be prepared to set the hook when you feel the slightest resistance.

3. Fly Selection: At first light and at dusk, use a streamer pattern like my Grizzly Bug, Predator Minnow, Predator Leech, or Predator Bugger. Once you see rings on the surface, you know fish are feeding on aquatic insects. If so, change to a smaller pattern that imitates the pupa stage of an aquatic insect like my UV Midge Pupa and All-Purpose Nymph. When the water temperatures turn colder and diminish the availability of aquatic insects, my UV Midge has proven deadly.



The UV Midge was on fire and it was crazy how the fish went after it. It was great until I lost the fly. Then I caught less than 1/4 of of the fish! –Brian Cobos

In low-light conditions, trout will start coming back close to the shallow shoreline to aggressively feed. During these times, I switch to my Predator Leech, Predator Minnow, Predator Bugger, or my Grizzly Bug and fish those areas.



Trout caught by Toby Loftus on Vickie's Burnt Orange Predator Bugger

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4. Line Selection: Line choice is key to success because the line determines at what depth the fly will be presented. Careful observation of the water provides clues to the depth where trout are feeding. For example, when fish are observed on or close to the surface, select a line that will maintain the fly in the top few feet. I prefer the Cortland intermediate 7-foot tip.

When there are no signs of feeding fish close to the surface, I use the Cortland Clear Camo intermediate sinking line.

In late fall when cold water temperatures slow trout metabolism, trout become reticent to expend the energy chasing a fly. A floating line with an indicator can be a killer approach in attracting these reluctant trout. For more information on line selection, click here to read Line Selection For Stillwater.

5. Water Temperature: Optimal water temperature for trout is 45-65 degrees F. When water temperatures drop below 45 degrees, I find the best window for fishing moves to midday.

I always start my day by taking the temperature of the water. Probe shoreline areas where the water warms up first. If the water is below 45 degrees F there's no need to get on the water at first light. Wait until the shoreline water temperatures begins to warm.

For more information on how water temperature impacts trout feeding behavior, click here to read How cold water conditions affect trout feeding behavior.

Prepare your tackle and gear for fall fishing…don't start out with two left feet!



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