Fly fishing popularity growing around Upstate

There are probably more books written about fly fishing than any other tactic to catch fish. Writers wax poetic about high-dollar bamboo rods used to make the perfect presentation of hand-tied dry flies in order to match the hatch for majestic river-run trout. This type of fishing conjures up visions of "A River Runs Through It."

While this type of fly fishing maintains a tremendous following, much of the water accessible to Upstate anglers doesn't fit into that category.

Subsequently, anglers tend to consider fly rodding a trout-specific tactic. However, as many fly-casting fans have discovered, just about any type of fish species that can be caught on conventional tackle can be caught on fly tackle.

Moreover, fly casting can be one of the most successful tactics for taming one of the most aggressive and numerous species of fish in the state. That's why around the full-moon periods of this month and into June, you'll find both novice and veteran fly casters working the local lakes with a fly rod in hand.

With the growing popularity of fly fishing over the years, tackle manufacturers began putting less expensive and more user friendly fly rods and combos on the market. A quality fly-rod combo can be purchased for about the same price as any baitcast or spinning outfit. Like spinning and baitcasting, it takes a bit of practice to learn to effectively handle a fly rod.

The trick to casting a fly rod is to remember that you're casting the line, not the lure. Trying to push the rod forward into the cast — as is done with baitcasting and spinning tackle — won't allow the fly line to lay out and present the bait to the fish.



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These scrappy bream fell to a popping bug that was cast into a bream bed on fly tackle. Look for larger-sized bream to head for the bed toward the middle of this month.

For bream fishing, small popping bugs and flies provide almost no weight, so the weight of the fly line has to be used to propel the bait forward. Another aspect of fly fishing for small species of fish is that the fly reel's primary purpose is not for fighting fish, but for storing line. Retrieving a bream on the hook is much easier to do by stripping the line in, rather than using the reel.

Fly rods are sized based on line weights. A good panfish or trout-sized rod is in the 3-5 line weight range. Rod length is a matter of personal preference, but rods don't need to be overly long for bream fishing.

A road measuring between 7 and 9 feet will meet most needs. As mentioned, the fly reel's basic function is line storage, so there's little need to buy one with lots of bells and whistles. A basic fly reel that is of decent construction will service the bream angler for many years.

Fly lines come in a variety of styles. Weight-forward line has become the industry standard, and floating line is preferred since water depths of bream beds seldom exceeds 4 to 5 feet deep. From there, the angler can get as fancy or as basic as he or she wants. A monofilament leader can be made with a rod length of 4 to 6 pound test mono line, or the angler can buy fly fishing mono leaders that taper from 10-pound test down to 4-pound test. These can be purchased in most retail stores.

As with any lure, match the size of the bait to the size of the fish. Bream have small mouths and bugs and flies with smaller hooks in the size-10 range will hook more fish. Larger baits with larger hooks are acceptable for the biggest bream and the not-so-occasional largemouth bass that shows up.

Locating a bream bed is more than half the battle.

Typical bedding habitat will be muddy or sandy bottoms in shallow water around structures such as docks, brush or rocks. Once a bream bed is located, it's important to keep at least a cast's distance off the bed.

Using a trolling motor or positioning a boat too close to the bed will scatter the fish, and you may have to wait a day or at least several hours for the quality fish to return.

Look for beds to be located in the shallow, flat areas in the upper reaches of most lakes. If an area contains a large bream bed close to shore, or if fishing without a boat, a good idea is to walk the bank or wade in the area and cast to the fish.

Care should be exercised not to let your shadow cross the bed to keep from spooking fish.

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