

Saltwater fly fishing may have started in the United States with an exotic, big tough fish image, but its appeal has now broadened to ordinary anglers who can fish the many local estuaries, beaches and rocky points close to



home here in Ireland. Some anglers have begun to fly fish only in salt water and often have no interest in trout, others use it to get a 'fishing fix' between trout trips, and many have come to realise that this is the most available fly-fishing we have. When you look closely, understand what you need, and realise what species you can target then quality saltwater fly-fishing is available in close proximity to all of us in this country. On an Island like Ireland it's a great natural resource readily available at close quarters.

This flourishing interest in saltwater fly-fishing inevitably brings with it a constant barrage of questions, many of which relate to local species and methods. These questions often cannot be satisfactorily answered by currently available literature. This has prompted me to write this 'Frequently asked questions' sheet to help 'would be SWFFishers' in their quest for information.

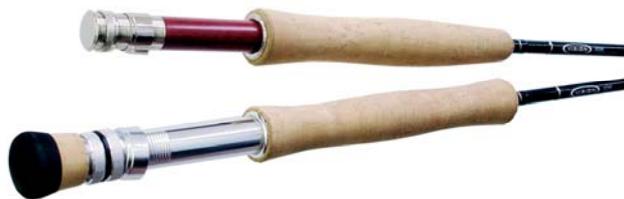
Can I use my freshwater fly-fishing gear?

Yes, you can start by simply taking your 6 or 7-weight trout rod down to the local estuary for a flick, or you can bite the bullet and buy a dedicated saltwater outfit. Corrosion is the biggest concern if you use your trout rod and reel, and drag and backing capacity may soon be tested on the reel, even by the most common species such as sea trout and sea bass. Be warned!

What sort of fly rod should I buy?

If you are looking for a multi-purpose saltwater outfit an 9-weight is probably the best compromise, but it really comes down to where you intend to fish and what goals you set in terms of available species and size. Do you wish to travel elsewhere in the world for destination species? Will you make the crossover to pike and Salmon?

If you live in Ireland there's a good chance sea bass and pollack are going to be your main targets in salt water. If you live inland then there is the possibility of pike fishing on the fly. Someone interested in trout and sea trout who is probably also going to chase estuary bass from time to time would do well with a good 6 or 7 weight. In the open sea you're more likely to encounter bigger saltwater fish so a heavier rod as an initial purchase is a better idea, perhaps an 8 or 9-weight. In many of the tropical destinations big GT's, tuna and many other hard pulling fish can turn up at any time so perhaps a 10 or even a 12-weight rod is more appropriate. These days' good saltwater fly rods with a decent lifetime warranty can be purchased for 200 to 300 euros—extraordinary value when you think of the quality available. The most expensive fast action rods are not necessarily the best starting point. Newcomers should look for a more user-friendly, slower action rod that will be easier to cast and more forgiving when casting a wide range of line densities and fly weights in a variety of situations and conditions.



Look for rods that have quality fittings—chromed stainless steel guides, quality stripping guide(s) and good cork grips (synthetic grips are best avoided). By all means shop around, compare prices and check out the fine print in relation to guarantees and availability of replacement parts (freight costs and time frame). In relation to specific brands, quality of service and value for money, don't be

afraid to ask for advice. Remember its easy to buy good equipment that costs a lot of money, its also easy to buy really bad equipment that costs the same.

Are big, expensive reels absolutely necessary?

No, no, no – The most important thing is the reel's ability to handle corrosion and this is what makes purpose built saltwater models more expensive. Simple trout reels can handle a few trips but salt will soon destroy them. Anodising and finishing as well as smoothness and attention to detail add costs.

Although you can literally spend thousands of euros on a top of the range imported reel like say an Abel, there are now some quite robust models at the cheaper end of the market to complete an inexpensive set-up for the less than frequent SWFFisher. Those coming from a trout fishing background are more



likely to be in the market for a relatively cheap, lightweight, multi-purpose reel, whereas the more dedicated enthusiast may be after something more robust.

Expect to pay 150-250 euros for an entry-level reel and 300-500 euros for something more robust and widely applicable.

While destination fishing with bigger, faster fish in mind, a good saltwater reel will need to have a counter balanced spool, so the reel runs smoothly and does not vibrate itself to pieces. A relatively simple drag mechanism will do provided the reel has an exposed rim so judicious hand pressure can be applied if necessary. Large arbor reel

configurations offer considerable advantages in terms of line capacity, more constant drag pressure, and faster line recovery.

How much backing do I need on my reel?

The vast majority of inshore fly fishing is done by hand and the backing is rarely required—even large sea bass rarely demand a reel with more than fifty metres of backing. When anglers talk about how much backing they can lose to a fish, few realise that 100 metres of backing is the full length of a rugby field from try line to try line.

Allowing for the occasional very big fish, the everyday SWFFisher should not need more than 75-100 metres of backing. More expensive, gel-spun polyethylene line can increase the backing capacity of a reel by almost two thirds when



compared to the older dacron, which encourages the use of much smaller, and lightweight reels.

What type of fly line is best for saltwater?

Saltwater fly lines do require a little more thought, and investment, beyond the standard floating lines used for trout. For a start, again when destination fishing the heat of the tropics renders cold-water fly lines un-usable very quickly, and lines made for the tropics are like fencing wire in colder Irish waters.



Floating fly lines can be used in salt water, particularly in shallow estuary and flats fishing situations, and they are the best lines if you are learning to cast. However, a clear intermediate line is far more versatile in terms of fishing the fly near the bottom and/or keeping it down

during the retrieve. The latest clear sink-tip lines offer a further advantage when wading because the floating running line is less inclined to tangle around your feet.

In salt water, the ability to explore a range of depths is often more important than being able to cast a long way. With this in mind, most fly-line brands now offer models with interchangeable tip sections—usually 15 ft in length the tips range from floating to clear intermediate, sinking and fast sinking, making it easy to change lines and explore different depths without carrying spare spools or reels.

Are the knots & leaders really complicated?

I used to think so but no, knots and leaders don't have to be fancy. You can get started with a two or three-piece leader and some basic trout fishing knots. For any rod less than a 10-weight, a nail knot is adequate for joining the leader butt section onto the fly line. A double uni-knot or double blood knot (whichever you tie best) can be used to join leader sections, bearing in mind that the uni-knot is better for joining lines of widely different diameters. Always lubricate knots with saliva before pulling them tight, and take extra care when using fluorocarbon, knots can generate heat. Knots must be pulled up fully tight to be effective, and for heavy lines you will need to use pliers. Experiment by tying and testing knots at home, not on the fish.

The leader used will ultimately be dictated by how shy the fish are, the depth of water being fished and the accuracy and delicacy required. Keep it simple and stick to these basic rules.

Shy fish — then fish a longer leader.

Fish with teeth and sharp fins — then fish a tougher thicker leader.

Deep water — then fish a shorter leader if using a sinking line;

Deep water – fish a longer leader if using a floating line and weighted fly.

Big fat surface fly – fish a short stiffer leader

Accuracy required—tapered leader.



All this can be made simpler by a visit to my fly fishing shop where purpose built saltwater leaders are available to cover all eventualities—even coated wire for Pike and the like. A large fly moves better when tied to the leader with a loop knot. Lefty's improved loop knot is superior in this regard, retaining high strength, which is vital when using finer tippets.

What do I need to know about saltwater flies?

As with trout fishing, fly selection in salt water can be as simple or complicated as you like to make it. You can buy off the shelf, order on line, or tie your own. A



few Clousers, Surf Candies, Crazy Charlies and Deceivers will get you started. In the tropics carry some Pink Things and variations. Not too big or heavy at first until you have the casting fully under control.

Is distance casting as necessary as they say?

If you were to keep to the lighter end of the spectrum, saltwater fly-casting is no more demanding than trout work. If you can throw a heavily weighted nymph and an indicator then you will not be troubled by small weighted Clousers and the like. However you will be very limited in your fishing.

You can't learn casting from a book. You must do it. The more you practice the better you'll become. Practice on a lawn or pond. Casting while fishing is not practice. Practice allows you to focus on casting fundamentals without distractions.

You can do that quickly by **following five basic principles of good fly-casting:**

1. The line (and fly) goes in the direction you point the rod tip during the cast.
2. Good fly-casting is not strength-related; it is timing-related. Thus you must practice the timing of the cast to become a good caster. How much practice? At least 15 minutes a day to become a good caster in a month.
3. Proper stroking and stopping of the rod are fundamental to good fly-casting. The caster loads energy into the rod during the casting stroke. The rod releases the energy into the line in the cast. The caster loads a little energy (a short, low-energy stroke) into the top of the rod for short casts; he loads a lot of energy (a short, powerful stroke) into the middle and bottom of the rod for a long cast.
4. Casting arcs (the arc the rod makes in the air during the cast) are small for short casts and large for long casts.
5. Stopping the rod after the casting stroke is critical to forming the casting loop, and it allows the rod to unload, thus casting the line.

Will I need to learn some new retrieves?

Retrieves impart life to the fly, and developing a good repertoire is an important aspect of saltwater fishing. Some pelagic species demand a very fast retrieve but other fussy eaters insist on no retrieve at all. The clues are in the speed at which the fish are feeding and the nature of the food which the fly is meant to represent.

The figure of eight retrieve used so often in trout fishing is a valuable retrieve in the salt water to just tick flies across the bottom. The single strip retrieve is the normal retrieve, with the line passing under the fingers of the rod hand. You can strip fast or slow with the line hand, but allowing a pause between strips is often important, causing the fly to sink and rest momentarily before darting off again. At times a double strip retrieve, with rod tucked under the arm, is needed to get the fly moving fast enough to interest fast swimming predators. Continuing with the same retrieve makes little sense when you are not catching fish. Mix your retrieves up until you find something that works.

Are saltwater fish hard to hook and land?

Because of their predatory nature saltwater species tend to often hook themselves, especially when fishing with the strip strike.

A stubborn or large fish should not be fought with one continuous pulling direction. Alter the pulling point constantly—pull it from below, then pull it from the left, then the right. Try to roll the fish over and upset its swimming pattern or you will be there all day. **ALWAYS TRY TO LAND A FISH AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO MINIMISE STRESS AND OPTIMISE THE CATCH AND RELEASE CHANCES.**



Extra care must be taken to avoid breaking a rod tip when a heavy, strong fish is almost ready to land—remember to keep the rod tip low and avoid 'high sticking'. Be careful when handling spiky and abrasive fish, and pinching down the barb on hooks is recommended to minimise damage to flies, fish and anglers alike.

Should I take special care and maintenance of my tackle?

Trout anglers should be aware that tackle maintenance is a much bigger issue in salt water, irrespective of the quality of the gear being used. Flies need special care and storage to prevent rusting and used flies should not be placed back in with new ones until thoroughly cleaned and dried. Lines used in the salt require



regular cleaning in accordance with manufacturer's instructions—casting is always much easier with a clean fly line. Fly reels need extra attention. Avoid dunking reels in salt water as much as possible and keep them out of the sand. Reels and rod fittings should be washed down in fresh water and dried after each outing if possible. Reels should be thoroughly cleaned and lubricated between trips.

Do I need special Clothing?

If you own neoprene boots and a good waterproof jacket then these will get you started. One of the keys to success in saltwater fly-fishing is to keep moving hence in warm weather breathable jackets and waders become almost essential. These items will ensure you stay comfortable and not 'cooked' at the end of your session.



Where can I catch fish?

Places to go are only limited by your imagination; you don't have to live in a foreign country to enjoy saltwater fly-fishing. Garfish, whiting, bream, mullet, salmon, bass, sea trout, and wrasse—they all present worthwhile challenges, perhaps even more so than the

voracious tropical fly eaters.

Get the right gear, study the tide charts and you will soon be catching fish close to home. Local tackle shops are good places to acquire some much needed local knowledge, and the growing membership of dedicated saltwater fly fishing guides reflects ever increasing interest in this aspect of the sport. If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me at the following



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Thank you.