

A Quick Guide To Fishing Streamers

I am no expert at fishing streamers. It is something that I have only started to do over the last few years and I am still in the learning stages. I have no set rules for fishing streamers, I am just using my experience and confidence gained over the last 30 years of flyfishing to fish them where and how I think will work...

Set-up

Like every aspect of my fly fishing I like to keep it simple. I always use a fast action, 9' #5 rod. If I'm going purely streamer fishing, because conditions dictate, e.g. high and coloured river, then I will use a full sinker, almost always a Di3. If I'm just 'going fishing' and I decide to fish a streamer during the day, I leave my floating line on and attach by loop to loop a 10' 5ips Poly Leader. In both cases my tippet is around 5' of 8lb Fulling Mill V2 Fluorocarbon* and that's it.

I have recently started to fish streamers upstream, with some success, including one very memorable day when I caught well into double figures on a very low and very clear river. My catch included two fish over 2lb. If I'm fishing upstream I use a floating line only (no sink tip) but lengthen my leader to about 8' to 9'.



Two brown trout both over 2lb caught on streamers in a very low & clear river

I would also advise that you buy some stripping guards* for your index finger. If you are going out to purely fish streamers you will be doing lots of stripping. The combination of this, wet hands and tiny pieces of grit on the line can wear a groove into your finger. I've had this many times in the past when fishing streamers, bonefishing, rainbow trout, fishing from boats and bank fishing on Scottish lochs, and I can tell you it is unbelievably sore and painful!

Where?

Virtually anywhere from slow, deep, pools to fast shallows and pocket water, and anything and everything in between. Streamers are great for exploring water that you'd generally ignore with nymphs and dries. It opens up completely new areas of river. They are also an option when the river is high and coloured, so they open up the river on days when you might not have bothered in the past.

When?

It's been difficult so far to draw any conclusions from fishing streamers, but if there is one thing that appears to help, it's when there is something that makes it slightly harder for the trout to see your fly. Be it a coloured river, the edge of darkness, fast, broken water, etc, all appear to increase your catch rate. But that is not 100% - as I said above, I have had exceptional days in low, clear water, with nothing affecting the trout's vision.

How?

On rivers I will cast my streamers virtually anywhere. I like to cast across the fast water at the pool necks, particularly when the river is low, and I've had quite a bit of success doing this. I'm mainly looking for a bit of depth, somewhere that I think is likely to hold a big trout. All the usual places... around boulders, tree roots, overhanging branches, etc. I will fish across featureless pools if they have enough depth - it's surprising how many times a trout will rise from the depths to intercept or at least slash at your fly.

I have no set rule for how I fish them, it depends on the topography of the river in front of me. I cast 90° across the river where it's slow flowing and retrieve pretty quickly. If I'm fishing down a faster pool I'll revert more to down and across, say 45°, but I'll still retrieve to give added movement over and above the natural swing of the line. Sometimes I'll put in small upstream mends to slow down the swing, but still stripping the line for added movement. I will let the odd cast just swing naturally to ring the changes.

Sometimes I'll stand in the riffle immediately upstream of a pool and cast straight down the pool, retrieving the streamer slowly up through the current. This I usually do where there's a fast flow into a pool which quickly drops into deep water. Other than this I just drop my streamer into any likely spot and strip. I like to look at streamer fishing for trout as though I'm fly fishing for pike or any other predator species. I think the same principles apply. I'm simply looking for places where I think a big trout (think big pike) is likely to be sitting.

So in a nutshell do what feels right. Cast your streamer where you think a trout will be sitting in wait and fish it like it's a small fish. You can cast and fish it 360°.

Striking

A note on striking... DON'T! Just keep retrieving until the fish is firmly hooked and then lift your rod, like lure fishing on a reservoir. If you are using suitable tippet (I use 8lb Fulling Mill V2 Fluorocarbon) you won't break on the biggest of trout. Also, it will help your hook-up rate if you retrieve with your rod tip up, say 2'-3' above the water's surface. This builds a little bit of slack into the system, which allows the trout to hit your fly and turn down with it before the hook sets. If you have your rod on the water's surface, as you would if you were lure fishing for rainbows, you will get hits, but the fly will be pulled from the fish's mouth before it gets hooked. This is good advice when fishing for wild brown trout in lakes and lochs. If you are interested, Stan Headley's excellent book, "The Loch Fisher's Bible", explains why this is so. It is related to the way brown trout feed.

Don't worry too much if you keep getting takes but no hook-ups. You could try another fly, but in my experience it is usually just small fish doing this.



A 3lb 10oz brown trout caught on a streamer from the River Eamont

*Available to purchase from the streamers section of my website...

8lb Fulling Mill V2 Fluorocarbon: https://www.yorkshire-dales-flyfishing.com/streamers.htm#fulling_mill_fluorocarbon

Stripping guards: https://www.yorkshire-dales-flyfishing.com/streamers.htm#stripping_guards