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A SIMPLE TROUT LEADER SYSTEM

For more than 25 years I have used a simple system that Lefty Kreh espoused. First, everything is **looped** together. Nothing is tied to anything, except the fly to the tippet. The tip of the fly line has a short loop of the braided core or one of heavy mono or braided mono. Both ends of the main or base leader have loops, as does the butt of the tippet section.

All loops are interlocked by passing the loop closest to the reel through the loop of the segment being added; that is, "**reel through.**" The rest of the leader segment being added is then pulled up through the "reel loop," and then the two are pulled snug to form a **square knot**. Any other knot formed by the interlocking loops will fail. For most loops, I use a triple surgeon (except on the butt of a new leader—use a double), as it is a 95%+ knot 95% of the time they are tied. All loops should be about 1" long. Be sure to closely trim the tag end of any loop that "faces" the rod tip to preclude it snagging tiny debris in the stream or the rest of the leader system during casting.

I use a 7½' knotless, tapered leader about 98% of the time; its tip is always **one size larger** than the heaviest tippet I expect to use that day. For most Eastern trout fishing that is usually a 7½' **3X** leader; 0x for Great Lakes steelhead or salmon. The tapered leader is looped to the fly line loop. The tip of the new leader is doubled back several inches, and a triple surgeon loop is made. A length of tippet is selected, and another triple surgeon loop is made in one end; the tippet is then interlocked to the main leader. The tag of the tippet loop could be used for another fly, if long enough, or for split shot (add an overhand knot to keep it from slipping off the tag).

When first starting the use of this system, the tippet should be of the **same brand** as the main tapered leader to avoid differences in flexibility and strength. The tippet needs to be at least one size smaller and more than 10% weaker than the main leader but can be up to 3 times smaller (e.g., adding 7X to 4X). If more than 3 times smaller, just loop in a 5–10" segment of intermediate size (e.g., 5X looped between 3X leader and 8X tippet). The length and size of the tippet are based mostly upon the size of the fly and presentation desired; the wind may also be a factor. I generally use a tippet of about 35–45" for most dead drift presentations, 20–25" for small streamers, something in between for most nymphs and wets. In dealing with very fussy trout, I have used tippets up to 60" in length. The longer the tippet, the more drag free the presentations. Short tippets turn over more easily but are more likely to break than long ones, so they should be no shorter than 18–20" from their loop knot to the fly. Thus, for most trout fishing I am using a leader system that is 9½' to 10½' long, occasionally up to 12–13' and sometimes as short as 9'. In the darkness of an evening hatch, there should only be three knots to be felt from the fly to the butt of the leader—any more and you have a wind knot!

To remove a shortened, weakened or wrong-sized tippet, cut only **one** side of the **tippet** loop and pull the uncut side from the leader loop. To reuse the tippet, push the loops apart. The loop on the main leader tip should last for 5–20 days of fishing. Two or three additional loops can be made before the main leader is discarded or another extension of the same size is added to again make it the same length. Thus, one is only changing the tippet to accommodate different fly sizes and presentations. The tippet material comes from the spools, so that one is not chewing up the tip of a tapered leader. This system is never to be used with any sinking lines (see back page end note). **Check the tippet** constantly for abrasions and wind knots, as both weaken the tippet by 50% or more. With just a little practice, the tippet and fly can be replaced in 3 minutes or less. Try it, you'll like it!

SIMPLE BASS OR SALTWATER LEADER NOTES:

The previous page refers only to tapered leaders for use with floating lines for trout. They are very sensitive to line splash and to micro drag on dead drifts. Most warm water sport fish such as smallmouth and largemouth bass, all panfish, pike, perch, as well as nearly all saltwater fish (stripers, bluefish, etc.) are not particularly leader shy. A very simple leader is all that most fly fishers for these fish will need when fishing surface or shallow waters with a floating line: take about 30–35" of 20–25 lb. mono and tie it to some 12–15 lb. mono of about half that length. Use a double surgeon knot to join the two segments. Tie small surgeon loops at each end of this base leader. Loop the heavier end onto the end of the floating fly line. Take a third spool of even lighter mono in the 6–10 lb. range to form the tippet section, which is also looped onto the end of the base leader. A tippet of about 20–25" is usually sufficient for most fishing with poppers and large streamers. The total base leader should be about 45–50" long, so the total leader and tippet sections is usually less than 6' in length. Be sure to use a short section of wire, such as single-strand & blackened or coated stainless, if chasing really toothy quarry, such as pike or bluefish. The wire should be connected to the eye of the hook and not be more than about 4–6" in total length. The other end of this wire section also has a loop twist or nonslip loop knot. A very short section of heavy mono (e.g., 20-lb.) is joined to the wire using the Albright knot or another nonslip loop knot; it has a short loop at the other end to loop onto the actual leader tippet to change the fly or popper. Do not use any shiny swivels or similar connectors, as the predator nature of these fish may cause them to slash at the glint from such material in the water.

One final note: all of the above are for leaders attached to **floating** fly lines. When using a sinking line, the fly should be attached to a tippet of 18–30" of appropriate strength. The tippet should be looped to a short loop attached to the end of the sinking fly line. I usually use 6" of 14–15 lb mono for this loop connector on the end of the sinking fly line to connect the tippet. Using a long leader on a sinking line negates the sinking line, as the mono resists sinking and will hold the fly up higher in the water column. All fish seem to be totally unperturbed by any lines, leaders or other material once they are below the surface of the water.

SOME SOURCES FOR FLOW INFORMATION TO MARYLAND TROUT STREAMS

These levels are my estimates of when the wading becomes very difficult (max.) or few trout remain in the remaining pocket water (min.). The estimates are in cubic feet per second (cfs) for optimum fishing on these streams. At flows above these maxima, one can expect to see less and less surface activity, as the cost for a trout of rising to the surface is more than the energy it usually obtains from a small insect on the surface. The two web sites to check for water flows are the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) (www.nab-wc.usace.army.mil/wc/index.html) and the US Geological Survey (<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/md/nwis/rt>). These have links to the current flows and releases on such rivers as the Savage, North Branch, Youghiogheny, Casselman, main Patuxent (Unity), Gunpowder (nr. Parkton) and Little Patuxent (Savage) and many others. At a few sites, the USGS also gives stream temperatures(*). The two COE sites for Savage River Dam and Jennings Randolph Dam on the North Branch also give pool level, inflow and out flow information. If the reservoirs are near full and you arrive just as a large rain storm ends, you may find those rivers in full flood. Call 410-962-7687 (Baltimore COE office) for a tape recording of current and projected releases at Savage River Dam and on North Branch @ Jennings Randolph Dam.

Gunpowder @ Parkton: 25–200 cfs
Gunpowder @ Glencoe: 50–300 cfs
Patuxent @ Unity: 15–130 cfs
Little Patuxent @ Savage, MD: 35–250 cfs

North Branch @ Barnum: 80–300 cfs (##)*
North Branch @ Luke: 100–400 cfs (##)
Savage River @ Bloomington: 40–150 cfs*
Casselman R. gage ht: 1.0–2.8'

##--For floating these two river sections, the "minimum flows" are considerably higher than the minima listed for wade fishing, unless the fisher plans on spending a lot of time pulling or pushing his craft over the rocks.