

# Nymphing (Short-Line or Czech)

by Lance Egan • Fly Fisherman Magazine, November 20, 2011 •



Call it Euro, Czech, Polish, or short-line nymphing—no matter what tag you apply to it, the concepts are the same. Suspension nymphing with a buoyant indicator has an inherent fatal flaw in that the indicator moves at the surface speed, while the “feeding water” near the bottom of the stream flows much more slowly. An indicator drifting at the surface therefore drags the flies unnaturally.

Competition anglers from Poland and the Czech Republic solved this problem by using a short, thin leader and weighted flies. They kept the flies close, and fished them on a tight line using direct contact with the weighted flies to lead the flies through a drift and feel the faintest pickup. This technique is still amazingly successful, although the rigging has been modified as fly fishers continually find new ways to improve the efficiency of the tactics.

While this type of nymphing had its roots in competitive fishing—as did the double haul and beadhead nymphs—the technique has been widely adopted in North America, so much so in fact, that most major fly rod manufacturers have recently introduced specialty rods exclusively for the purpose of Euro nymphing.



□ Sage ESN \$699 sage introduced its Konnetic Technology in late 2011 and with it, made two rod series—the ONE (see “Versatile Trout Rods” page 8), and ESN, which stands for European Style Nymphing. According to rod designer Jerry Siem, “Konnetic Technology allowed us to build a very small diameter shaft which enables better detection of takes while still being strong enough for a vigorous hook-set, which is ideal with Czech, Polish, French, or Spanish nymphing.” Konnetic Technology is Sage-speak for a mix of proprietary resin, a high-modulus aerospace-grade carbon fiber, and Sage’s Advanced Modulus Positioning System (AMPS)—a manufacturing process that aligns and positions the carbon fibers for the greatest blank strength with the least amount of material. And less material means less “dead stick” and more sensitivity between you and your nymphs, or more importantly between you and the trout. The 10’ 2- through 5-weights all clock in at under 3 ounces. Our tester first fished ESNs in practice sessions during the World Fly Fishing Championships on the Rienza River in northern Italy, and later on the Lower and Middle Provo rivers. “These are phenomenally light rods designed specifically for the kind of fishing I prefer,” he said. “They are physically light, but more importantly they are light in the hand, or well balanced, which really cuts down on hand/wrist/arm fatigue. The ESNs are the fastest of all the rods I tested, but they still have very sensitive tips. I fished the 2- and 3-weight versions with 18- to 24-foot leaders, and two-fly Euro style rigs and caught brown trout, marble trout, and grayling up to 18 inches. This is a superb competition rod with enough backbone to land sizable trout.” [sageflyfish.com](http://sageflyfish.com)

### **Where it Works**

Euro nymphing is best in rivers or streams small enough to wade. Anywhere you can get within 40 feet of the fish is ideal. When I first experimented with the technique, I found it only effective on waters where I could get away with large nymphs (#8–12). Now that I have a better understanding of long leaders, and how a well-designed leader can increase contact and the sink rate of the flies, I use Euro techniques everywhere I fish, even on picky tailwater trout with #16-22 flies.

My “breakthrough” rivers were close to home. The Provo and Weber rivers, which are both within an hour of my home, provided the best testing grounds for the techniques. Both rivers are small enough to cross at regular flows. Rivers this size allow you to approach the water from many angles and get close to the best holding water. Euro nymphing is now my go-to technique for subsurface trout in rivers of any size. I’ve used the tactic as far away as New Zealand and Lapland (Finland), and as close to home as the Green, Logan, Ogden, Provo, Weber, South Fork of the Snake, Henry’s Fork, Boise, Big Wood, Gallatin, Madison, Deschutes, Crooked, Metolius, South Platte, Roaring Fork, Fryingpan, Big Thompson, Poudre, Arkansas, White, Blue, Colorado, Eagle, San Juan, Nantahala, Ravens Fork, Tuckasegee, Penns Creek, Spring Creek, Little Juniata . . . you get the picture. It works everywhere.



□ G.Loomis Max Czech GLX \$650 The manufacturer describes these rods as “extra stiff”—and that’s saying a lot coming from a company known for its fast-action rods. But the narrow-diameter tips of both the 3- and 4-weight 10’ rods are extremely delicate, setting up a rod made for quick accurate casts with a short line—often just the leader—and weighted flies. Our tester flexed the rods on tough Rocky Mountain tailwater trout, taking beefy trout up to 20 inches on light tippet. “The 3-weight is a truly sensitive instrument, perfect for picking apart pocket water with #10 and smaller patterns in skinny to mid-depth water,” he said. “The 4-weight handled heavily weighted #6-10 stoneflies and #14-18 beadhead droppers. Tracking and accuracy were phenomenal with both GLXs.” [gloomis.com](http://gloomis.com)

If you normally use indicators, and want to give Euro nymphing a go, leave the split-shot and indicators home. This forces you to make Euro techniques work. Remember that, like most new techniques, it takes some practice.

Nowadays there are several variations of the original technique. Generally speaking, the biggest differences between the two major styles are leader design and the weight of the flies. Polish- or

Czech-style short-line nymphing was the earliest technique. Anglers from France and Spain then adapted these weighted-fly techniques to their relatively shallow, clear streams, and long-line tactics—with dense yet lightly weighted flies—were born. Most fly fishers today use both styles, and decide which setup is most efficient based on current local water conditions. [See George Daniel’s story “Nymphing Skinny Water” in the upcoming Feb-Mar 2012 issue for details on the latter technique. The Editor.]



□ Greys Streamflex XF2 \$245-\$340 Howard croston is captain of the Team UK fly fishing team, and also chief rod designer for Hardy and Greys, which put him in a unique position to create competition-style nymphing rods. Streamflex XF2 is a complete lineup of 17 trout models, but the 10-and 11-foot light line weights were created specifically for Euro techniques. “The normal casting performance requirements of a high-performance fly rod are in many ways secondary to the requirements of a technical nymph fishing rod,” he said of the rods he designed. “The ability to project a long compound tapered leader with a relatively light nymph—as used in French style nymph fishing—requires a rod with a limber tip that is almost capable of loading under its own weight.” This ultralight philosophy created rods that protect the finest tippets, and are super sensitive for detecting strikes. Our tested used the 11' 3-weight and called it a “roll-casting machine” that excels with dries and lighter nymphs in shallow water, but he said it’s a little on the limber side for the heavier flies associated with Czech nymphing and deeper, faster water. [hardynorthamerica.com](http://hardynorthamerica.com)

Euro nymphing is incredibly effective due to several factors. First, the techniques allow you present nymphs at feeding speed. Water near the bottom of a river is moving much slower than the water near the surface because the rocks, logs, and depressions along the bottom all slow the stream flow. This buffer of slow water is a sanctuary for trout where they can use less energy and feed on the drifting subsurface food items passing by.

Trout see drifting nymphs traveling at the slowed current speed of the riverbed all their lives, and are conditioned to see food moving at this pace. When we present flies near the bottom that are being towed by a strike indicator floating on the surface—and are drifting at the speed of surface water—we have created an unnatural drift.

While Euro nymphing, the flies are not influenced as much by the surface currents since the rigging doesn’t include a floating strike indicator. Instead of a floating indicator you use a “sighter,” which is a visual aid you hold above the water. The thin tippet between the sighter and the flies cuts through the surface water, allowing the flies to move naturally along the bottom. You often see the surface current moving twice as fast as your sighter. When this happens, you know your flies are down in the slower layer of water near the bottom, and your flies are moving at the correct feeding speed.



□ St. Croix High Stick Drifter \$430 Kelly Galloup lives on the banks of Montana's Madison river—perhaps the world's finest laboratory for high-stick nymphing techniques. Fifty miles of endless riffles leaves a lot of space where trout hide in tiny pockets along the bouldery bottom, and much of the time, tight-line presentations are the best way to get to them. Galloup says he developed the High Stick Drifters with lightweight tips to reduce fatigue from holding the rod high during long periods of technical nymphing with or without indicators, and to provide extra sensitivity for better strike detection. St. Croix packs a lot of technology into its newest fly rod, with high-modulus SCv graphite, 3M Matrix Resin, REC Recoil snake guides, and a Fuji K Series Tangle-Free stripper guide. Our tester took the 10-foot 4-weight HSD for a bath on Utah's Lower Provo River in clear water with high flows. He said he was worried about the soft tip during his out-of-the-tube wiggle test but “on the water the High Stick Drifter came alive. Once I had a reel, line and weighted flies attached to it, the tip became an advantage for accurately casting weighted flies, and managing a long leader. I used mostly a two-fly Euro rig on an 18-foot leader, but the HSD also did a fine job with smallish dries, taking browns up to 16 inches.”  
stcroixrods.com

Euro nymphing also significantly improves contact with the flies. When nymphing with split-shot or other weight added to the leader, you are in contact with the weight, but the flies can be up or downstream of the weight, and there is often slack between the flies and the weight, creating poor contact and an inability to detect strikes.

European methods use weighted flies without split-shot, which make the nymphs the densest part of the rig. This puts you in direct contact with the flies, allowing you to feel and see many more strikes.

Euro nymphing casts are usually short, and most of the time you don't have any fly line contacting the water. Fly line has a lot of mass compared to a leader and tippet. If you have slack fly line on the water, it can tow your flies just as easily as an indicator. Also, slack fly line on the water reduces contact with your flies and your ability to detect strikes.





□ Temple Fork BVK \$335 BVK sTANDS for “Bernard Victor Kreh” and these are his signature rods for Temple Fork Outfitters. The BVK 8' 3-weight (\$225) is a fine 4-piece dry-fly rod but you can purchase a conversion kit for \$100, which replaces the butt section with an extra 24" and turns your 8' dry-fly rod into a 10' Euro nymphing rod. Our tester used the converted BVK on Utah's Provo and Weber rivers, casting tandem, weighted #10-16 flies and catching browns, rainbows, and whitefish up to 17 inches. He said the package is a great value since you can get two rods for the price of one, but he would not convert the rod onstream. “If I expect to do both dry-fly fishing and nymphing, I'd rather carry two rods for each purpose, or more likely just dry-fly fish with the converted 10-foot version. Many anglers overlook the advantage of a long rod for dries. Ten-footers mend more line with ease, high-stick with control at a distance, and move more line when setting the hook. I can't see taking the conversion kit with me onstream, but it's a great way to get a Euro rod at a decent price, and still have a little 8-footer for tight mountain streams and small trout.” templeforkoutfitters.com

Keep your rod high, and “walk” those flies through the slow water along the bottom. With a short line and positive contact with your flies, you'll find it easier to set the hook, since there's no slack line to take up.

This technique works best at close range. Most casts are within 30 feet, and in some larger rivers you may have to wade a little more than you're used to. Make your cast and allow the flies to descend to the stream bottom. Maintain contact with the flies by holding your rod high (a 10-foot rod helps with this) and watch your colored sighter to detect strikes, and to let you know how fast to lead the rig with your rod tip. When you detect a strike, a quick flick of the wrist sets the hook on the fish.

It's worth noting that many takes while indicator nymphing happen near the end of a long drift. This usually means you hook a fish that is downstream, creating the worst possible angle, and accounting for many lost fish.

Euro nymphing produces most of the strikes up- or across-stream which results in a positive angle to fight fish, and more hooked fish make it to the net.

A Euro rig allows you to fish several water types with a quick change of flies. By adapting the weight of the flies you can use the same rig to fish shallow, deep, slow, or fast water. Compare this to the adding or removing of split-shot, and constant adjusting of the strike indicator you must perform while indicator nymphing.

A Euro rig is quicker to adapt and allows you to fish much shallower water than an indicator. The Euro setup doesn't have a floating indicator, which can scare fish when it lands and drifts in shallow water. Shallow water is easy to fish with a Euro setup. Lighten up the flies and keep contact. Instead we again watch the colored sighter, which is above the water, and much less likely to spook fish.

European nymphing increases your efficiency and makes it easy to adapt to various water types. It's enjoyable to learn a new technique, and even more fun to hone and perfect it once you've mastered the basics. It also adds one more arrow to your quiver of techniques.

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