

# Under the Alders

*With Ralph and Lisa Cutter*

## Tips

(As previously seen in California Fly Fisher)

About fifteen years ago, Lefty Kreh sent me a set of handbooks titled *Lefty's Little Library of Fly Fishing*. One of the books in the library, *Lefty's Little Tips*, somehow got orphaned on our bookshelf behind rows of yellow magazines that have always seemed a bit too nice simply to read once and toss in the recycle bin. No one has ever gone back to reread any of them, but that's beside the point.

Upon discovery of *Lefty's Little Tips*, I started idly thumbing through the pages and not too long after that found myself a cup of tea and read the entire book. It was great. Some of the tips aren't much use to me (wrap a rubber band around your pack of cigarettes to keep them from sliding out of a pocket when you bend over), some are now so common as to have become clichés, rather than tips (hold your fish close to the camera so that it looks bigger), and many I already knew. What was refreshing, though, were how many tips, including some really good ones, I didn't know or perhaps used to know, but had forgotten due to the ravages of altitude-induced hypoxia, old age, and other such wonders.

Here are 45 tips that I do remember and that have actually proved to be useful. Most I've picked up off the street over the years and there are even a few I dreamed up myself. I hope some will be new and helpful to you.

1. Permanently identify the weight of your fly line with a Sharpie. A wide band (maybe one inch) equals five and a narrow band equals one. A 3-weight line would have three narrow bands, and a 7-weight line would be coded with a single wide band and two small bands. On freshwater lines, I code line a few feet from the tip, and on saltwater or tropical lines, I code 20 feet or so up the line. Toothy critters have a habit of nipping the colored bands if they're near the tip of the line.
2. Never put your rod on the roof of the truck. Set it on the hood so you won't drive away without it.
3. Don't leave your reels in a hot trunk or glove box.
4. Color the underside of your hat brim with a black felt pen to reduce glare.
5. Don't put wet rods or rod socks in a sealed rod tube. Screw the lid on loosely so humidity can escape and not swell your rod seat or have mildew glue the sock against the rod.
6. Carry a microfiber cloth. Buy the multipacks of 16 -inch towels from Costco or one of the marts, rather than spending the same amount of money for a four-by-six-inch "fisherman's towel." They are great for cleaning fly lines, slimy cork handles, and greasy sunglasses.
7. Trap the line with the finger of your casting hand and strip line from behind the finger.
8. Uncoil pretapered leaders when they come out of the package. Don't just hold one end, let go, and expect it won't become a tangled mess.
9. Don't fight gravity. If you point the rod in the air without the fly anchored, your line *will* come slithering back down the guides. When stringing a rod, lay the reel (handle up) on something soft (not soft as in sand or mud) and string the rod at a 40-degree angle, rather than at 90 degrees. Even easier is to lay the rod flat on a table.

10. If you insist on fighting gravity, push a loop of fly line through the guides, rather than the tip of the leader.
11. When possible, walk with the rod pointing behind you. This will help avoid jamming it into a tree trunk or waving it over a wary trout when you arrive at the scene.
12. Don't reel the leader all the way in. It will get buried in the line for certain. Instead, leave a couple of inches hanging loose and jab it back through one of the reel's vent holes.
13. Horseshoe magnets are great for holding a rod against the side of your truck as you are wading up. Don't use the magnet for holding the rod when you're wading down, though. (See Tip 2).
14. Carry Chapstick. You can lube rod ferrules, revitalize O rings, and use it as fly floatant or as a deicer for the rod's guides. It even treats chapped lips, and in a pinch, it makes a passable sunscreen.
15. Magnetize your scissors and hemostats by rubbing them with a strong magnet for 30 seconds. (This doesn't work on aluminum.) They're great for picking flies out of a box and for sweeping the floor for lost hooks.
16. When cleaning fly bins (or picking up a box of spilled flies off the floor), cut a square out of pantyhose, then rubber-band that over the end of a vacuum and suck.
17. Learn the string-jerk technique for removing hooks. Loop a piece of string around the bend of the hook, push down firmly on the hook eye and jerk the string with a quick and decisive pull. This doesn't work well with soft, rubbery skin such as eyelids and earlobes.
18. A battery-powered shop blower makes a great portable raft inflator.
19. Fill a pill bottle with steel or copper wool and drill a hole through the lid. When you're done using your bodkin, stab and store it in the wool. It keeps the point sharp, and you'll never have to clean dried head cement again.
20. Clip the boat's drain plug to the key ring or motor start rope. It will remind you to avoid making the world's most common dumb move at the boat ramp.
21. Detect leaks in Gore-Tex waders by wiping rubbing alcohol on the inside of the waders. Leaks will announce themselves as a temporary dark stain. Mark the stain, and when it dries, wipe a dab of Aquaseal over the hole.
22. Toss an old pair of ski goggles in the boat. They'll save your eyes for fishing when making extended runs or gunning through a midge hatch. They're way better than glasses.
23. Learn the Uni Knot. You can tie it quickly by feel, and it is very strong and versatile.
24. Leave an extra set of socks in the boat or truck. Even with the most breathable waders, your socks will be soaked with perspiration by lunch. Your feet will thank you.
25. Never use rubber leader straighteners. The friction-generated heat will weaken the mono. Simply stretch the leader by hand and hold it stretched for a moment.
26. Never wash your hat. It's bad luck, plus people will look at you funny.
27. Always dry the inside of your waders first. Mildew is the leading cause of delamination in coated and multiply fabrics.

28. Smash hook barbs by laying one jaw of your pliers on top of the hook *parallel* with the hook shank and roll the barb over with a pinch. Avoid crimping the barb with pliers held 90 degrees to the hook. Far too often, the barb will break, leaving a ragged edge that invites rust.
29. Mount a magnetic kitchen utensil strip on the wall of your tying room. Store scissors, bodkins, and bobbins out from under the mess.
30. Put a no-pest strip wrapped in a dryer cloth in your tying materials kit. Wrap it with some tape or a rubber band. It will keep out bugs and stop static cling.
31. Don't post a picture on Facebook of every fish you catch.
32. Use a tippet ring on your leader. Tie the tippet to the ring. The knots are not only stronger than mono-to-mono, but your leader will last forever (almost).
33. Introduce a tiny size 10 (35-pound) SPRO swivel into your leader when fishing big dries that tend to helicopter.
34. Sharp hooks, good knots, fresh tippet.
35. Replace monofilament tippet at the start of every season.
36. Even if you religiously practice catch-and-release angling, brush up on the regulations when visiting a new water.
37. Keep your rod tip under the water when reeling in line. It provides even tension and avoids wrapping line around the rod due to tip bounce.
38. Reel with fingertips on the handle and the palm of your hand over the center of the reel to avoid rod-tip bounce.
39. Play fish by holding the rod out to your side, rather than straight up in the air.
40. When landing fish in a river, point the rod directly upstream of you, and the fish will almost glide into your net.
41. Target the edges, sedges, and ledges.
42. Foam is home. Bubbles in any way, shape, or form hold trout.
43. The difference between a good nymph fisher and a great nymph fisher is an extra split shot.
44. Secure a pea-sized piece of yarn about three feet from your fly by making a simple overhand knot with the leader around the yarn. It will become a permanent visual aid for finding your fly. Because the overhand knot is buffered by the yarn, it doesn't weaken the line. The yarn is soft and will easily pop through your guides and stay stored on the reel.
45. Most strike indicators such as Bobicators don't stay in place on the monofilament leader. Using a Uni Knot, tie a thin piece of old fly line on the leader on the fly side of the indicator. This bobber stop can be slid up and down the leader with your fingers, but has enough grip to prevent the indicator from moving it.

And finally, bonus tip number 46: Luck is better than skill. Usually however, the more skilled you are, the luckier you'll be.