

GALLOUP'S Nymph Rigs

KELLY GALLOUP

I LOVE DRY-FLY FISHING and spend a lot of time doing it. But I think nymph fishing, done well, is the most effective and challenging way to fish.

To fish a dry fly well, you must read riseforms and surface currents, detect drag, and identify and match the hatching insects. To fish a nymph well, you must do all of that, but, in effect, do it blindfolded. Certainly, throwing a bird's-nest-size indicator off the side of a boat and waiting for the "bobber" to go down is not very technical or interesting, but there are light years of difference between that and technical nymphing.

There are many types of indicators out

System Placement

AS A GENERAL RULE, rig your nymphing system with the indicator and the weight separated by $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the water depth. If the water is 2 feet deep, then the indicator should be 3 feet above your weight.

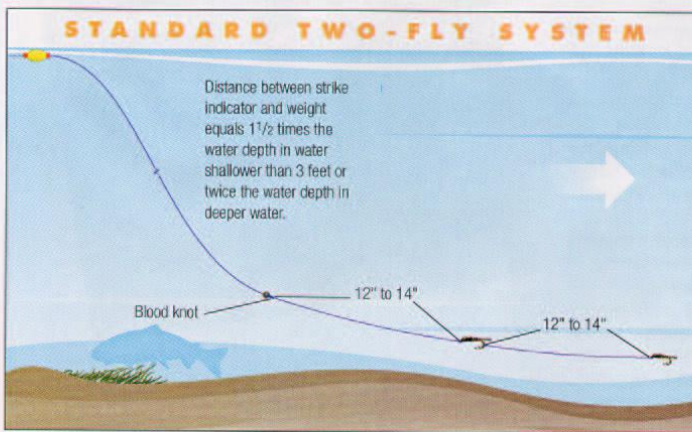
For water deeper than 3 feet, double the distance: 3 feet of water, 6 feet

between the weight and indicator. You should also double the distance between the indicator and the weight in fast water: 2 feet of water, 4 feet between indicator and weight. Of course, these rules are just starting points, and you should adapt them for your river and your style of fishing.

It is important that the distance is between the *indicator and the weight* and not the *indicator and the fly or flies*. The weight is what hits the bottom and communicates—visually, through the indicator—that your fly is where it needs to be. The right placement of your indicator in relation to your weight tells you if you are close enough to the bottom.

The weight. Just as the indicator needs to be movable, so does the weight need to be *adjustable*. Too much weight and you snag bottom too frequently; too little weight and your fly is not in the strike zone.

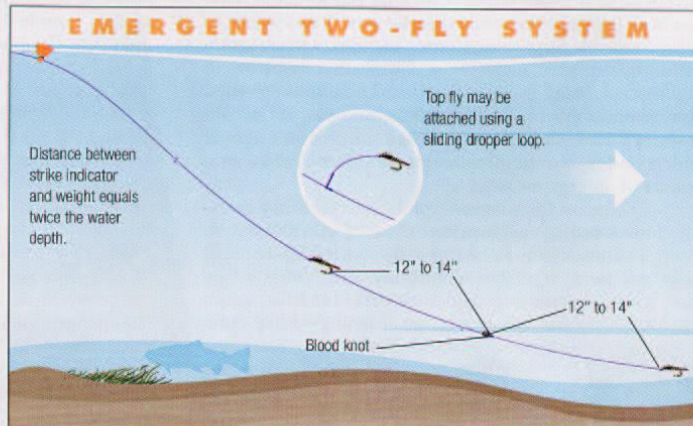
In most river systems the overall depth is relatively constant, but finding the strike zone can mean changing weight often to fish deeper or shallower in the water column, depending on where the



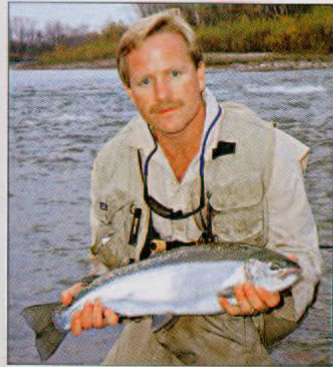
there, and ways to use them, and they all have a purpose in particular situations. I am not a fan of suspension indicators—though they have their place.

I prefer an indicator I can pull through my guides. It does not have to float. The indicator should be thought of more as a communication device. If it sinks, that's fine—as long as you can see it and determine what is happening under the surface.

To fish an indicator well, think of it as a dry fly. You are working to eliminate drag on the indicator, so that you know the flies underneath it are floating freely in the unseen depths below. Being able to visualize what the flies are doing under your indicator, without seeing them, is the hallmark of a skilled nymph angler.

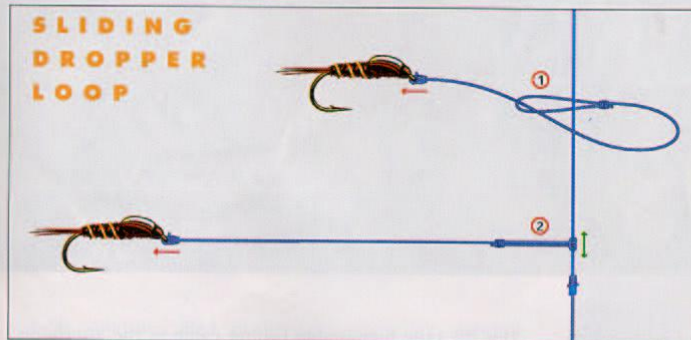


How to solve modern nymphing challenges



fish are feeding. Of course, conditions change and fish adapt their feeding to exploit insect movements, and you should also adapt your rigs to fish the right depths.

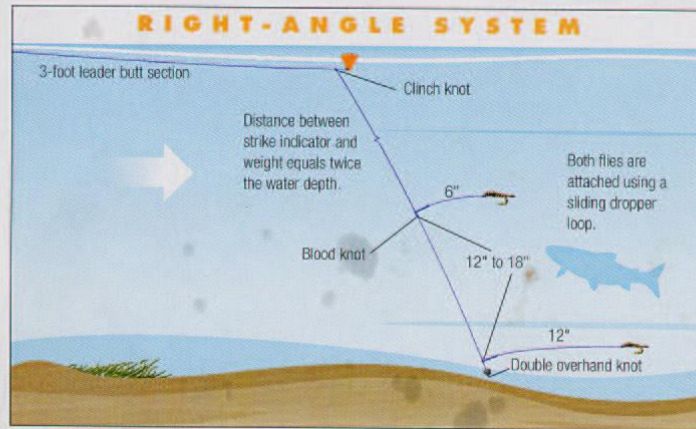
One final point about weight: The finer the leader/tippet between the indicator and the weight, the less weight you need. For example, if you use a knotless tapered 9-foot leader, you



likely to tangle. Add the first piece of tippet where you want the weight to be. Use whatever knot you prefer—I use a blood knot. The knot prevents the weight from sliding down toward the fly.

The Systems

STANDARD TWO-FLY systems are the most basic, and probably the most used today. They are also the least



likely to tangle. Add the first piece of tippet where you want the weight to be. Use whatever knot you prefer—I use a blood knot. The knot prevents the weight from sliding down toward the fly.

From the weight to the first fly, add 12 to 14 inches of tippet. Then add a second piece of tippet—usually about 12 to 14 inches—tied either to the eye or off the bend of the hook.

Emergent Two-fly System

THIS IS SIMILAR to the standard system but is designed to fish flies at two different levels in the water column. When I fish this system, I always go with twice the water depth for indicator placement so I can fish the entire water column.

Place the first fly 12 to 14 inches above the weight. This can be done two ways. In the first method, tie the tippet to the eye of the first fly and then tie the next 12- to 14-inch piece of tippet—going to the weight—off the bend of the hook.

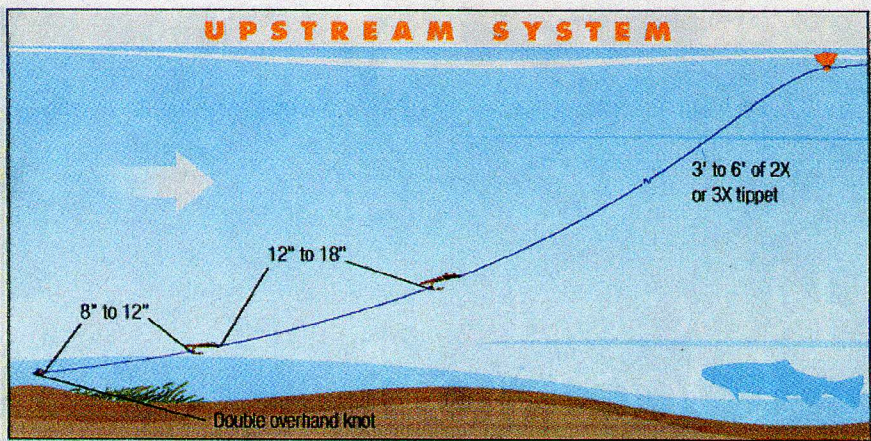
Use a blood knot to attach a second piece of tippet, to which you tie your point fly. Add your weight above the blood knot between the two flies.

When using the emergent system, your weight should bounce along the bottom with the lower fly below or at the same depth as the weight. The fly above the weight imitates an emerging insect.

The other way to build this system is to attach the top fly with a sliding dropper loop. To do this, make a double overhand loop at the end of 10 inches of 4X or 5X monofilament tippet. Wrap the looped tippet around the standing part of the leader and thread the tag end through the loop. Tighten it to form a girth hitch around the leader, and use a blood knot in the leader to keep it in place.

I most often use the sliding dropper loop because it lets the upper fly ride a little more freely. However, it creates more tangles. You can reduce the frequency of this problem by making the dropper loop less than 6 inches long when you tie on the fly.

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Right-Angle System

USE THIS DEDICATED system when you are not worried about having to quickly switch to a dry fly. It is the most effective rigging method for fishing fast water because it allows you to get to bottom quickly with little weight. My good friend Andy Burk of Truckee River Outfitters introduced me to it on California's Truckee River—a fast mountain stream with short pockets and large trout.

To construct the system, start with a 3-foot leader butt section and use a clinch knot to tie on a 2-inch piece of indicator yarn. After you knot the yarn, fluff it, fold the ends together, trim evenly, and dress it with floatant.

Above the indicator, clinch-knot on a piece of 2X or 3X tippet about a foot less than twice the depth of the water. Then use a blood knot to attach 12 to 18 inches of tippet, and use a sliding dropper loop to attach the first fly above the blood knot. Tie a double overhand knot—a “stopper” knot—in the end of the tippet and add the weight above it. Add another longer, 10- to 12-inch dropper loop for the bottom fly a few inches above the weight.

Upstream System

IF YOU ARE NYMPH fishing upstream with a standard system, there are several considerations. The weight is the heaviest—and therefore the slowest-moving—part of the system. That means that as they drift, the flies get pushed downstream of the weight because they are lighter and drift faster.

When you cast upstream, your indicator floats downstream of the entire system. Thus, as your rig drifts, the weight is the farthest thing upstream; the indicator is the closest to you; and the flies are somewhere in between.


What this means is the fish could conceivably take your fly and have to swim upstream past your weight before you realize you have a strike. You can eliminate this problem with a system designed to keep the flies downstream of the weight yet in direct communication with your indicator. I use fly-line indicators and long leaders for the upstream system, because I am usually casting to visible fish in shallow water.

Add from 3 to 6 feet of 2X or 3X tippet to a regular 9-foot tapered leader. At that point, either add a blood knot (for a dropper loop) or tie on your first fly. If you are using a blood knot with a dropper loop, leave 12 to 18 inches of tippet below the knot to attach the second fly. If you are going in-line from the fly, tie the same length of tippet off the bend of the hook.

Off the point fly, add 8 to 12 inches of tippet with a double overhand knot in the end. Pinch the split-shot onto the tippet above this knot.

Using this system, the weight is upstream and the flies are *downstream of the weight*, ensuring immediate strike detection. You can also try a weighted or bead-head fly for the point fly and no split-shot, which is similar to a Czech nymph rig. Just make sure that the heaviest fly is on the bottom.

These systems were designed for a purpose, and all involve some give and take. The key is to get familiar with the system that best fits the needs of the water you fish.

Tangles and lost flies are part of the sub-surface game. You should be comfortable with your knots and know that nymph fishing requires many of them. Remember, with nymph fishing, the difference between a fair day and a great day is about 6 inches between your fly and bottom snags. 

KELLY GALLOUP OWNS and operates Galloup's Slide Inn (slideinn.com) on Montana's Madison River with his wife Penny.

PROJECT HEALING WATERS . . .

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these were lost, fishing stopped. Each veteran was allowed to fish an unlimited number of flies. Scoring was based on which team member caught the trout, and the numbers and lengths of the fish taken. A volunteer stream monitor witnessed and measured the fish to keep score. All trout were released.

At the end of the day, just before a big barbecue feast with bluegrass entertainment, the winners were announced: William Heresniak and Staff Sergeant Russell Martin, U.S. Army (retired), captured first place; John Gay teamed with Sergeant First Class Jake Kessler got second; and Paul Ricciuti and Captain Eivind Forseth took third.

The winner of the nonvet team was John Bass, a superb quadriplegic fly fisher from North Carolina guided by his friend Bill Nuckles. Bass has been supporting PHWFF with time and money since its inception, and is a role model, inspiration, and counselor for young soldiers who rely on wheelchairs. Bass has been in his wheelchair for more than 20 years.

PHWFF has chapters in seven states. Retired Navy Captain Ed Nicholson, a Vietnam vet who operated river boats in the Mekong Delta and commanded a destroyer and a frigate, is its founder and president; Chief Warrant Officer John Colburn (retired) is the VP; George Gaines of TU's National Capital Chapter is treasurer; and the board chairman is Douglas Dear, who opened his Rose River Farm and stocked more than 5,000 rainbow trout for the event.

Navy Captain Phil Gay (retired), who owns Trout & About Fly Fishing, is a highly decorated officer. He flew combat missions in Vietnam and commanded the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy during the first Persian Gulf War. Although taken aback by the severity of their injuries, he was struck by the determination of the vets.

“I immediately saw that they just wanted to learn to cast,” he said. “They weren't thinking about their missing arms and legs. I was really impressed with their incredibly positive attitudes.”

Support for the Two-Fly and other events comes from FFF, Trout Unlimited, Orvis, Temple Fork Outfitters, Frontiers International Travel, Simms, Winston, Jim Teeny, RIO, Scientific Anglers, and others. Local businesses, numerous individuals, American Legion chapters, and others also gave time and money for the event; more than 240 attendees contributed to and otherwise supported the effort. More than \$53,000 was raised at the event, but it's not enough yet to hire a full-time executive