



Tips For Better Trout Handling

by Nick DelVecchio

photos by the author

How a caught trout is handled is a topic that generates plenty of lively debate on social media. Comments usually lead to genuine learning among the fishing community on how to handle a fish to give it the greatest chance of survival. Therein lies one of the core components of trout handling—the assumption that those wanting to know more about proper handling technique are looking to release the caught fish unharmed. Even fish being harvested should be treated with respect. But, for the sake of this piece, the understanding is that the end goal for trout handling is to release it back into the water unharmed.

One of the most important aspects of proper handling is the amount of time the fish spends out of the water. This is a big one, because none of the other tips matter if a caught trout is unable to breathe. Land the fish as quickly as possible, and don't play the fish to exhaustion. Be mindful of water temperatures. Handling trout at higher temperatures may lead to mortality. A net is handy. Once the fish is in the net, keep it down in the water as you grab a phone or camera from your fishing

vest or pack. The trout doesn't need to be outside the water while you fumble around looking for something to take a photo. Have everything ready so that when it's time for the photo, the fish is lifted out of the net quickly, and after a few quick snaps, it's right back into the water. If done correctly, the trout is only out of the water a few seconds.

Handling, in a literal sense, is the next important part of better technique to maximum the survival rate of released fish. Any time a trout is being handled, your hands should be thoroughly wet before touching the fish. Fingers and hands should never be inside the gill plate or touching the gills in any way. If it's a nice trout that requires two hands, gently slide both hands underneath the fish, one

near the tail and the other under its belly or head, to lift it up. Do not use a tight grip on the trout. Trout should never be “lipped”. The mouth and jaw of a trout is sensitive and soft.

When netting or taking photos of a trout, do not allow the fish to bounce off rocks or roll around in the mud on shore. Pictures should always be taken from a fairly low stance or in water, so the fish doesn't hit a rock if dropped. Trout should not be “beached” since that takes them out of the water unnecessarily, slides them against objects that aren't wet, and causes injury. Most nets are made of rubber webbing, which is safest for fish. If you're using a nylon rope net, update it.

Studies show that even trout handled perfectly sometimes die after being released. Catch and release anglers should know, understand, and respect this reality as a part of life. But, it's still important to help fish fight another day. Proper handling goes a long way in making sure the fish can swim again to make someone else's day. ☐

This angler is keeping the fish low to the water. If it flops out of his hands, it ends up in deep enough water to swim. Nets made of rubber webbing are safest for fish.





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