

# Fishing Vest Pack List: Loaded for Trout

John Merwin has spent 45 years learning what to carry in his flyfishing vest. Here are some of his secrets.

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Lee Wulff once told me his fully loaded fly vest could weigh 20 pounds or more. He was tougher than I am. Mine comes in at 12 to 14 pounds, depending mostly on what's for lunch, and it's literally an entire fishing expedition ready to grab-and-go. The contents are lessons learned the hard way, by trial and error over the 45 years since I first bought a vest. (There's generally a side for dry flies and a side for wet flies, which makes it easy to reach the right way.) Then there's the cost, which I'd hate to add up. Above all, an angler's vest is intensely personal. I feel about mine as Carl Perkins did about his blue suede shoes: "You can burn my house, steal my car," but keep your cotton-pickers off of my vest!

## RIGHT SIDE

- 1. STRIKE INDICATORS** - I prefer yarn-style indicators. The O-ring design makes for easy adjustments and you can coat the yarn in floatant for extra buoyancy.
- 2. DRYING POWDER** - Shake-type for taking care of soggy dries.
- 3. LEADER-WEIGHTING PUTTY AND SPLIT SHOT** - I use nontoxic weight for nymphing.
- 4. MILKY WAY** - Hey, it's easy to work up an appetite under the weight of a well-stocked vest.

- 5. STOMACH PUMP** - Use to check the stomach contents of a trout before release (hardly seems fair).
- 6. TINY FLIES** - I keep two small boxes of tiny flies for when the going gets tough, as it often does-- midges, tiny terrestrials, micro-mayflies, minute nymphs.
- 7. STREAMER BOX** - A collection of big ugly things that large trout love, but there are some smaller and more-imitative (of minnows) flies in there, too. Note: This is a loose-storage compartment box-- important because it lets a wet streamer dry without rusting the hook.
- 8. WET BOX** - This is where I stash an ample supply of tungsten beadhead Prince nymphs and Bread Crust nymphs (my go to caddis nymph). There are also a few mini muddler minnows--a fantastic but underused pattern that resembles all sorts of food.
- 9. LEADER GAGE** - Comes in handy when I forget what size tippet I tied on last.
- 10. FLY LINE DRESSING** - Use it once a week or so, something to do when the fish aren't rising.
- 11. INSECT REPELLENT** - I use 100 percent Deet, usually sealed in a plastic bag in case it leaks.
- 12. FLUOROCARBON TIPPET** - The low visibility of fluorocarbon makes it perfect for nymphing (since it sinks it does not work with dries).
- 13. SUNBLOCK** - SPF 30, waterproof, of course.
- 14. ADVIL** - The antidote for fishing with magazine editors.
- 15. BINOCULARS** - I use my Swarovski 8x20's to better see what the trout are doing, not to mention spying on the other guys.
- 16. MULTITOOL** - It will fix almost anything.
- 17. MIXED FLIES** - On your fishing day, go to a fly shop and buy a mixed dozen of whatever the guy says are working. Get a small box to put them in. You are then also entitled to abundant free advice over the counter.
- 18. CATCH-ALL DRY BOX** - For flies I use less often. I also put larger dries here because the box is deep enough not to crush them.
- 19. DRY BOX** - This is the working dry-fly box I reach for most often. Flies are organized to make life easier: Caddis dries are on the right (with a few terrestrials, too). All mayfly duns and spinners are on the left.

## **LEFT SIDE**

- 20. PERMANENT MARKER** - Use it to leave a note for a buddy or darken a fly body.
- 21. LED LIGHT** - Essential for changing flies at last light when I finally figure out what the fish are eating.
- 22. SAFETY PIN** - Just like Mom's: Fix your wader suspenders, make an emergency line guide or tip-top guide--the ultimate field-repair tool.

**23. PRESCRIPTION POLARIZED SUNGLASSES** - Expensive but well worth it, a must for old guys like me.

**24. DIGITAL WATER THERMO METER** - Confirms that water's too warm and trout aren't biting...or helps find that elusive cold spring-water seep, where they will bite.

**25. CHEAP STOGIES** - Perfect for sitting on the stream bank waiting for rises; also repels insects and other nosy anglers.

**26. HEMOSTAT-SCISSORS COMBO** - I clip this tool to the inside pocket flap where it won't tangle but is still an easy grab.

**27. LEADER PACKS** - These fit nicely in inside pocket.

## BACK

**28. NET** - A magnetic release hangs my net on vest-back D ring; elastic cord means I don't lose it while fondling a big trout. The key-chain-type carabiner clip makes it easy to remove the entire assembly for transport or storage.

**29. RAINCOAT** - Mine's of a PacLite Gore-Tex material that's less bulky than other types. Make sure yours will fit over your vest so all your flies don't get soaked in the rain.

**30. GRAB BAG** - Here I keep a lighter and candle stub (firestarting), paper towels (for when nature calls), tea and sugar and a tube of wader repair goop.

**31. REELS** - I carry a reel with floating line plus an extra spool with a fast-sinking- tip line, both for the same rod. These live in the vest when not in use. That way, when I go fishing, I know I haven't forgotten the reel.

**32. WADING STAFF** - This stays in the back pocket, too, so I don't forget it. You can fish without a wading staff if you want, in which case you'll not only be macho but also black-and-blue from falling on the rocks.



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