

FEBRUARY FIX-IT

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February is one of my favorite months because fishing slows down a little and it gives me a chance to get my equipment together to clean and repair it. It also gives me a chance to review the past year as I go through my fishing logbook and relive the past year's angling adventures and that always generates a few new ideas to try in the upcoming year. Plus it gives me an excuse to get into my fly fishing gadgets!

The first items to clean are your **lines** and the best way to do that is to fill the kitchen sink with water and a mild detergent and then strip the line into it and just let it set for about 30 minutes. If you were lucky enough to get into your backing last year, strip that off also and leave it in the sink. After 30 minutes, give it a rinse and take a soft cloth and wipe off the water and let it air dry. After it dries you can put it back on your reel. When you are running the line through the cloth, be sure to check for nicks in the line and repair or replace the line if any are found. The easiest way to repair the line is to get out your fly tying bobbin and simply wrap the nicked area and then top it off with a whip finish and some quick drying glue. Be sure to check the connections between the line and backing and line and leader and replace if necessary.

Hopefully, you have been rinsing and cleaning your **reel** after each fishing trip into the salt water. Now is the time to give it a thorough cleaning and again the easiest method is to fill the kitchen sink with water and mild detergent and let it soak for 30 minutes. I like to combine cleaning the line and reel since I am soaking them in the same water. Remove the **spool** and soak it also and after soaking, rinse them off and take out and dry them both with a soft cloth and let air dry. When they are completely dry, get out some light machine oil and lubricate all moving parts and the shaft that holds the spool. If you have multiple reels and spools, be sure to clean and lubricate them all.

You probably have been rinsing off your **rods** after each trip, but now is a good time to give them a thorough cleaning. Probably the easiest way is to simply break them down and take a shower with them. No, I haven't gone kooky on you, just clean them thoroughly, wipe them off with a soft cloth, and set aside to dry. Be sure they are dry before putting them back in their cases.

Now is a good time to inventory your **leaders** and **tippet** material. I like to use 9' knotless tapered leaders. I start the season with a 20 lb leader and after retying a few flies I have cut off a couple of feet of the tippet resulting in a heavy butt section that I can use for quite a while by tying in a double surgeons loop and adding tippet material to it by loop to loop connections for the rest of the year. I inventory my leaders to make sure I have a good supply along with tippet spools in various pound tests. I commonly use 10 lb, 12 lb, 15/16 lb and 20 lb tests, so I make sure all of these spools are full. You also want to make sure you store your leaders and tippet spools away from the sun. If any of them have been exposed to the sun for an extended time, replace them.

Sharp hooks are essential to hooking and landing any fish. Now is the time to make sure all of your **flies** are holding a sharp edge. Probably the easiest way to do this is to take a box of your flies and while you are sitting in front of the TV, simply sharpen them. You can also take inventory at the same time to see if you need to tie up a few to replace any you may have lost. I read about a really neat way to keep track of your sharpened flies in one of my fishing magazines. After you sharpen the fly, simply color the hook point with a red permanent marker. That way you can tell at a glance if you have sharpened the hook. You can tell if the hook is sharp by seeing if it catches on your thumbnail. If it does, it is sharp, if not, it needs some attention.

While we are talking about flies, you might ask yourself what patterns you need. If you are new to salt water fly fishing, just go back to fly fishing basics 101. You will need flies to fish the surface and the bottom and the water in between. A good selection of flies in various sizes and colors that allow you to fish the top, bottom, and the water in between should be good enough. If you want to know what patterns work in this area and how to tie them, the club has published a two volume set of 'Flies of the Chesapeake' listing the popular patterns and providing step by step instructions for tying them. You can purchase either volume at one of the monthly club meetings.

I mentioned my **logbook** and how I enjoy reviewing the past year and reliving the fishing adventures, but you need to have a log book and keep it to be able to review it. If you haven't been keeping a logbook, I strongly recommend starting one. You can buy one for \$12-\$20 or you can make your own from a simple ringed notebook. Just make sure you have the following headings: date, time of day, location, tides, wind, weather, moon phase, water temperature, types of fish caught, flies used, techniques used, depth fished, and other items to cover anything else you want to add to the log.

You should routinely review your logbook for any trends and after a few years of keeping one, you should be able to start to predict when you have the best chances of having 'good luck' out on the water.

You might also want to dust off some of those old fishing books and magazines and reread them. You will be amazed at the material you have forgotten.

There you have it, some simple and easy tasks that will make sure that your equipment will work right out of the bag on that first outing of the year and that your equipment will last for many years.