

Some Considerations To Ponder Before Dubbing A Fly

By Wayne Luallen

1. Proper selection of fiber length and diameter are critical factors when considering what dubbing material to choose for a given fly. Longer fiber dubbing will be harder to terminate on a small fly when finishing off. Shorter fibers will be harder to keep together on a fly with a thicker layer of dubbing on the thread. Coarse material will be springier and tend to push away from the thread and in turn stick out away from the fly. This may or may not be desirable especially when tying a small fly. Fine diameter fibers may not produce the speculated appearance desirable for medium to larger flies.

2. Well blended dubbing, natural or synthetic, is more desirable in most situations. The act of blending (whether done in a "blender", by hand, with carding tools, or in a jar of soapy water) allows the fur to have a multi-directional cross over that allows the blend to interlock better upon itself, and in turn with the thread. Dubbing materials blend better if the synthetic or fur pieces are cut into varying lengths. Non-uniform lengths will interlock and cross over with the end result of a more uniform blend.

3. When blending fur consider putting a few different colors together to get the ultimate hue desired. (Also remember that materials on a hook wet probably will look darker than when dry.) Few fish foods are of a consistent color overall, rather they are a combination of hues, mottles, and stripes.

4. Synthetic versus natural dubbing presents several factors to consider. Most synthetics are lighter reflective due to the faceted nature of the material, which in turn lends them toward producing more translucence. Most naturals tend to be less reflective due to the more rounded nature of the material, thus making them appear more opaque. Synthetics are generally long in fiber when we get them, whereas natural furs are limited in length. Synthetic dubbing is very slick and consistent in diameter, whereas natural materials have "scales" along their length that help to interlock the fur once blended. The latter allows natural furs to be applied to the thread and wrapped onto the hook with generally more ease (hinging on technique used) than the slicker synthetics. For synthetic dubbings that are hard to control, try adding some natural dubbing to the blend. The scales of the natural will help to hold the synthetic blend together. Another method that works quite nicely with synthetics was developed by Davy Wotton of Cwmbran, Wales. Davy simply puts a bodkin into the flattened thread and opens a loop into which he inserts his dubbing. The loop is then spun and wrapped around the hook as would be done with any other dubbing loop. The method is quick, less bulky than with a doubled loop of thread, and supplies wonderful translucency.

5. It has been said that "water animals" (i.e., otter, beaver, etc.) should be considered for dry flies and "land animals" (i.e., rabbit, squirrel, etc.) should be considered for wet flies. The premise is that "natural oil" within the "water animals" lends them toward better qualities of floatation. This, in my opinion, is dubious at best, but in this day of effective fly floatant, it is no longer a factor to even consider. Natural materials today

can even be purchased with floatant incorporated within that material (as McKenzie Fly Tackle Company has done by adding CDC oil to wool dubbing.) It is not unheard of to use liquid or paste fly floatant as a dubbing wax, thus incorporating floatant deep within the fly when it is tied. Also some will, after tying a set of flies, soak them in liquid water repellent, such as "Scotch Guard".

6. Synthetics that claim a specific gravity less than water ("1.0"), i.e., polypropylene yarn, etc., do not necessarily float a fly better than natural furs. The key to floatation is method of application rather than material used. Wrapping any material in a tight, smooth bond to the hook (including foams such as Evazote) will not allow a fly to float as well as a material, whether of low specific gravity or not, that when properly applied incorporates a spiculated or fuzzy appearance on the hook. A spiculated body allows some air trapping as well as better adherence of fly floatant. It also exhibits a more translucent appearance when viewed from the vantage point of the fish.

7. Dubbing wax can be useful, but it is generally not needed if the correct dubbing technique is used along with proper pressure when applying the material onto the thread and/or the hook. Wax can be detrimental if: a) too much is used, b) wax is placed onto the dubbing fingers so that the fur blend is waxed so much that the result is a glued appearance to the dubbing (unless that is the desired look), or c) the wrong type of wax (too sticky, not sticky enough, etc.) is used.

8. Technique in application is a critical factor. Loose dubbing will usually produce a fuzzier, somewhat translucent appearing fly. Dubbing applied tightly will produce a more opaque fly hinging on what materials were used and how thick the application is. Dubbing applied too thickly to the thread using almost any technique of application will not produce as durable a fly as when the fur is applied more sparingly and over-dubbed with additional material when it is appropriate to build up a body. For the right handed tier, twisting dubbing onto the thread in a clockwise direction (when viewing the hanging bobbin holder and thread from above) will produce a tighter body than will twisting the dubbing onto the thread anticlockwise. This is due to the fact that with every wrap of the bobbin holder around the shank, a single clockwise twist in the thread occurs. The reverse of this is the case for the left handed tier. Following this premise, twisting dubbing onto the thread anticlockwise will for the right handed tier produce a looser dubbing on the shank of the hook. Again the reverse is true for the left handed tier. Pressure applied to the material when putting it onto the thread, whether the thread and dubbing are held while wrapping around the shank or left to their own devices, has a major impact on the final appearance of the fly. Various dubbing methods (directly onto the thread, into a loop, a "noodle" in a loop, a "noodle" twisted around the thread and wrapped, a blend pulled out of the hand by the twist of the thread while wrapping the hook shank, etc.) all produce their own unique end product. Opaque, translucent, fuzzy, tight, swept, twisted, or whatever appearance is desirable, is possible with the proper application techniques. Fine diameter, shorter fibers are *usually* appropriate to smaller flies, with the reverse true for progressively larger and larger flies.

9. Think of dubbing as very expensive paint and control it as if the bobbin holder was a

paint brush. Less dubbing is usually better than more. Control placement of the dubbing using the correct initial dubbing technique appropriate to achieve the desired result. A thick application of fur usually ends up appearing too obese for the given food represented as well as not being durable. For flies that require more robust amounts of dubbing, it is far preferable to build layers of dubbing over one another when wrapping. If such layering on the hook is not appropriate and a thicker depth of fur is called for, it is also possible to place additional layers of fur over dubbed layers previously placed on the thread before wrapping. Building layers onto the thread generally works better than attempting to place the same amount onto the thread all at once.

10. Look at dubbing blends wet, on and off the hook, to see if the desired effect of translucence, opaqueness, sparkle, and/or fuzziness is present. Observe them in different lighting conditions, but always under natural light. Mix up different blends with and without synthetics or naturals. Always remember to write down the proportions of materials used, and keep the recipe with the chosen blend so that when it comes time to duplicate, it can be done easily.

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