

Fly Tying on a Budget ?

By: Tom Deschaine



Although I consider myself a rather serious fly tier who always has, at least, a few dollars in my wallet --- I will admit that the fascination of tying always has me on the prowl for materials close as hand. Being a rather impatient person, I hate waiting for packages to arrive in the mail. So, knowing where to get substitute materials, fast, has led me on a few creative collecting trips. I can't seem to walk around my house or garage, or for that matter go into any store without subconsciously keeping an eye out for fly tying materials. So let's talk about what's available around the house and local merchants --- we'll save you all those shipping and handling charges.

I have read in other similar articles that you can use dryer lint for body dubbing. The nice thing about it is that you can control the color by simply selecting what is put in the cloths dryer. I imagine lint is quite usable, but I've never been desperate enough to try it. Dog hair and human hair are also options. I've tried them. Personally I've found it not very suitable material and definitely not worth chasing the dog around the house for.

On a more serious note, there are a great many materials available near by, that are worth the time to explore. Let's start with your wife's sewing box. A veritable treasure chest! In there you'll find threads, needles and pins. Most of the thread spools will work with your standard bobbins. You'll also find many shades of threads that aren't available in the fly tying catalogs. For your wet flies and nymphs you'll find yarns and chenilles.



Sources for feathers include such items as old down coats, sleeping bags, old pillows, feather dusters and comforters. Fur and fleeces can be recycled from old coats and gloves as well.



Your medicine cabinet will give you items like dental floss and dental tape, which even comes in colors. Don't forget the cotton wadding that comes in aspirin bottles. Hair spray is a great source for lacquer, both for painting fly bodies and also for spraying your flies with, to make them more floatable. Even ChapStick can be used for dubbing wax.

Around the house and garage you'll find packing foams --- great for underbodies. Soda straws to replace hackle guards, Zip Lock baggies for wing material, magic markers to color floss with. Copper wire for ribbing, broom straw for body material and tails and Christmas tinsel for ribbing.



Valuable household chemicals can save you a small fortune. Bleach for your hair, fur and feathers. Nail polish for head coloring, superglue for head cement, nail polish remover for thinners. Don't forget Rit Dye and Kool-Aid for material dyeing. Even cooking oil for soaking quills. Your own tackle box will yield items like miscellaneous hooks and fishing line that can be used for tying.



How about those local merchants? Every time my wife goes to a cosmetic department, a hardware store, a fabric store or a craft store --- I tag along. Cosmetic stores give you tools like scissors, tweezers, nail clippers and a whole spectrum of colored nail polishes. Hardware stores present lacquers, thinners, glues and mothballs in bulk quantities. Fabric stores provide threads, needles, chenilles, foams and yarns. Craft stores surrender raffia, disposable artist's brushes, feathers, foams and pipe cleaners.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples to see what can actually be done. Have these flies been fished with? No. I tied them just for this article. Will they float? Yes. Will they catch fish? Yes, if used under the right circumstances. Normally you would not tie a fly with *entirely* materials found around the house. I never have, until the inception of this article. But, yes I do use household materials all the time. I've tied countless flies with underbodies of packing foam, to help them float better. I often use threads from my wife's sewing kit, to get that perfect head or body color I'm looking for. I actually have used Kool-Aid for dyeing feathers and other materials. The list goes on and on. If you're a tier, look around. Enjoy the craft!



Dust Bunny



Raffia Queen



Hook: Any dry fly hook
Size: 10-16
Thread: White, out of wife's sewing basket
Tail: Synthetic fibers from a vegetable brush.
Wing: Zip Lock freezer bag, cut & shaped
Body: Oral B, dental tape (floss)
Hackle: White, crafter's feather wrapped then trimmed to size.

Comment: Super Glue was used in place of head cement. It looks very much like a famous pattern called the "White Miller."

Hook: Any dry fly hook
Size: 10-16
Thread: Brown, from wife's sewing basket.
Tail: 3 Brown synthetic fibers from a hair brush, divided.
Body: Raffia, from a craft store
Rib: Copper wire from an old lamp cord, wrapped reverse.
Hackle: Brown, crafter's feather wrapped then trimmed to size.

Comment: Super Glue was used in place of head cement. It looks very much like the "Cross Mayfly" created by Reuben Cross.