

# *Microwave Dyeing*

*By Tom Deschaine*

For those of you who haven't yet tried dyeing your own materials, you're missing a wonderful aspect of fly tying. Granted, it's not an everyday activity, but once or twice a year I need some special shade or color of material that the tying suppliers just don't have. It also provides a great feeling of satisfaction. It's fun and it's simple to do.

I'm not writing this article to be a comprehensive piece on dyeing, but rather to get the beginner interested in trying it for the first time. For the experienced dyer I'm offering a new technique and a short cut that I think you'll find valuable.

I'm going to discuss two different types of dyeing in this article; Kool-Aid dyeing and Rit dyeing. There are many other commercial and non-commercial dyes available, but for the sake of brevity that's all we'll be discussing.



**Kool-Aid Dyeing.** I know that sound funny, but it not only really works, it's inexpensive, fun and much safer to use than some of the commercial dyes. The only problem I've encountered with Kool-Aid dyeing is that when you are trying to mix different colors to achieve a certain shade or color, Kool-Aid doesn't always follow the color wheel rules that we're use to so be sure that you experiment before you start using expensive necks. Actually you can use any of the drink powders. I've tried several and have had reasonably good luck with all of them. I must also admit that I've never used the pre-sweetened ones. I stick with the unsweetened mixes, so I can't comment on how the others will work. When using Kool-Aid, my formula is one package (6.2 grams) per one cup of water.



**Rit Dyeing.** For those who dye on a regular basis this is an old friend. For those of you who are new to the dyeing experience you'll find this a very predictable and dependable product. One word of caution, this is a commercial dye and it will do it's job. Please be careful if you're a first timer --- this product will dye most everything it touches. I use only glass or enamel pans when working with Rit. When mixing colors (shades) you'll find that Rit follows the color rules very well. You can even go on line at: [www.ritdye.com](http://www.ritdye.com) and find a color mixing chart. When using Rit dye, my formula is ¼ teaspoon per one quart of water.

Let's start the dyeing experience. You will be using the very same technique for both dyes. The only difference will be the mixing of the dyes with the proper amount of water (see above formulas).

I need a special shade of light blue for a series of dry flies that I'm in the process of developing. I do not anticipate tying many since they're nothing but an experiment. So I have decided to use an Indian Neck and 'Ice Blue Raspberry Lemonade' Kool-Aid.

I also need a bright yellow general purpose dry fly hackle. I use a moderate amount of this so I've decided to use ½ of a grade #1 neck and 'Golden Yellow' Rit dye.



Indian Neck

Before we proceed any further let's talk about dyeing hackle in general. Each process that you place fur and feathers through places a strain on the material. So rather than to bleach out my hackle I choose to use either cream or white. Quality hackle is expensive. So if you only require small amounts of a particular hackle, I prefer an Indian Neck.



Grade #1 Neck

For hackle that I require large quantities of I'll use a half or whole neck. Once again I stay with white or cream and let your wallet dictate what quality to use. In this case I have chosen to use half of the neck. A simple procedure is all that's needed. Turn the neck over and cut down the middle with a scalpel or razor blade.

**Step #1** Gather all the tools and equipment you'll need. Mason jars or glass or enamel pots and pans, tongs, measuring spoons, dyes, dishwashing soap, vinegar, plastic wrap, stirring spoons, a colander and some old newspapers.



**Step #2** Any materials to be dyed must be soaked in a soapy warm water. This allows the material to be softened, to better absorb the dye and it also serves to remove any dirt and/or grease from the material. Do not skip this stage --- or you're asking for disaster! I use about 2 tablespoons of dishwashing soap per quart of water. Let the material soak for about 2 hours.



**Step #3** Remove the neck from the dish water solution and rinse it well. All the soap must be removed. I'll usually let it soak in clear water while I'm preparing my dye mixture.



**Step #4** Prepare your die mixture, add enough to a mason jar (or container of your preference) to cover the material. Cover with plastic wrap, secure with a rubber band. Using a toothpick poke a hole in the plastic wrap. Microwave on high for one minute. Remove from microwave, add one tablespoon of vinegar and stir. Vinegar is used as a 'fixer' which burns the color into the material and makes it 'color fast'.



**Step #5** Now place the dry fly neck into the solution. Replace the plastic wrap, place in the microwave for one minute on high. Remove and rinse. If it is not the desired color, place the neck back into the solution and nuke for another minute. Repeat again for up to a total of four times. By the end of the fourth time maximum color will have been absorbed.



**Step #6** Rinse one final time and place it on newspaper to dry, remembering that when your necks are finally dried they will be one shade lighter than it now appears. You can speed up the process by using a hair dryer if you choose. The neck will still take a couple of days to thoroughly dry.



**Step #7** When the necks are finally dry I brush them out gently with an old hair brush that I have reserved just for that purpose.



Experimentation with different materials and dyes will provide you with many hours of pleasurable fun and adventure. You'll be proud of your finished product.



***Warning:*** Before doing any dyeing in your house. Consult your wife and keep her in the loop throughout the entire process! One accident, and it'll be the last time you dye anything in your house – EVER AGAIN!

**See you on the water!**