

Stripping Quills

-back to basics-

By: Tom Deschaine



Most fly tiers have stripped quills at one time or another. Each of us has our own favorite technique. Special situations sometimes require us to be flexible or creative with our methods, in order to achieve a certain desired result. I'd like to share with you some different methods of stripping quills that I've used over the years.

I do not intend to explore all methods of stripping quills. Many of the older methods I've found to be too laborious or complicated. I will also admit that there are probably many methods out there that I'm not familiar with. If you have developed or are aware of new or better methods, I would encourage you to share them with your fellow tiers. We are always receptive to new ideas that make our bench work more interesting.

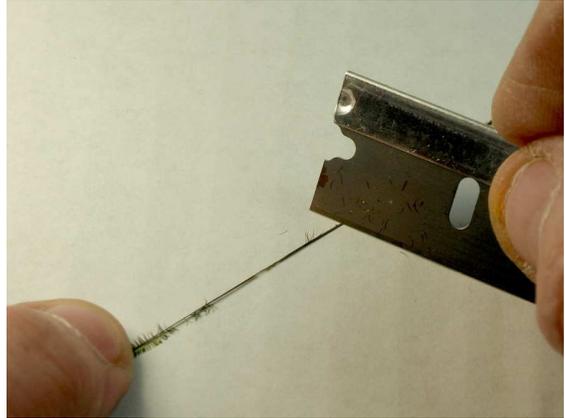
By Hand: This is the obvious, the method we don't have to think about. Each day when preparing quills we just grab-and-go. It's probably the first method we all learned. It works especially well with hackle quills and flank feathers. The technique is simple and requires no tools. Just grab the quill fibers and pull them off. This is probably the most commonly used method. It's quick and effective.



Pencil Eraser: This is probably my all time favorite method of stripping quills. It works in most every situation and produces a stripped quill devoid of burrs and extraneous material. Your final product is smooth and supple. The technique is quite simple. Using a finger, hold down the tip of the material and rub a clean eraser along the spine of the quill, moving in the direction away from the finger. This technique works on most every type of material I've tried.



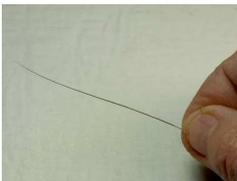
Razor Blade: This method requires a little practice but produces very acceptable results. Hold down the tip of the material to be stripped with your finger tip. Stroke a razor blade along the spine of the quill repeatedly. While you're doing this gradually rotate the quill with your finger tip. Be careful of the amount of pressure you apply with the razor blade. Too much pressure will result in cutting through the quill. This works best on a hard or semi-hard surface, like cardboard or wood. Do not try to pull the material through the blade it will result in the material curling on you. This method works extremely well on soft or fine materials like peacock herl.



Bleach: Bleaching is easy! Just place some bleach in a small bowl and add the material to be stripped. Some people use straight bleach and other will dilute the bleach with water. The stronger the bleach, the less the time that will be required to soak the material. After the stripping is complete, immediately remove the quill or herl and rinse in water or a baking soda solution to prevent the bleach from further acting on the material.



Remember that bleach, by definition, will change the color of the material you are stripping. Also remember that any time you use a chemical treatment on fly tying materials, to some extent, you will be damaging or stressing the material.



Be sure that you soften your stripped quills or herl before you try to wrap them on a hook. Softening is done to prevent the quill from splitting or breaking. I usually soak mine in cooking oil for a couple of hours but many tiers prefer to use a glycerin and water solution.

See you on the water.....