

MAKING DUBBING WITH WOOL

You can make the bodies of flies with many different materials, but you will apply nearly any material with one of two methods. The most obvious method is to tie a piece of material to the hook and then wrap the stuff around the shank. This is how you cover a hook with chenille, yarn, floss, tinsel, and other materials.

The other method is called dubbing, and it consists of twisting fur, wool, or some other material onto the tying thread, and then wrapping the dubbed thread around the hook shank. This is among the oldest and most important fly-tying techniques.

Many of the flies described in this book have bodies dubbed with wool. To make wool dubbing, you'll need a pair of wire brushes used to brush long hair on animals. These brushes can be purchased at a pet shop. Look for brushes that have stainless-steel wires.

The other component is, of course, wool, which you can purchase on the hide, tanned. Fly shops and catalog houses sell patches of wool in many colors. I use wool for dubbing almost all my dry flies, wets, and nymphs. I've been asked many times, "Won't wool dubbing sink your dry fly?" My reply is, "Yes, but I use a dry-fly floatant on my dry flies." If your dry flies do not have a coating of something to protect them, they would absorb water and sink. I have worked with just about every kind of fur, and they will all sink without some

kind of floatant. I like wool because it is very easy to work with.

When buying a patch of wool, look for hair that is around two inches in length. Feel the hair. The best wool feels very soft and has a fine texture.

Dubbing also comes from many kinds of animals, and is made from a variety of synthetic fibers. The fur of muskrats, beavers, rabbits, raccoons, and foxes are just a few of the natural dubbing materials. Antron is probably the best known synthetic fiber used for dubbing, but many other synthetics have been put to use by fly tiers. I prefer wool dubbing because it is easy to work with and because it goes a long way. Wool can be purchased in all the colors used for tying flies, and colors can be mixed together to create new shades. You can even combine synthetic material with wool to produce dubbing that has some sparkle; I'll show you how in a little while. First, you need to learn how to prepare wool.



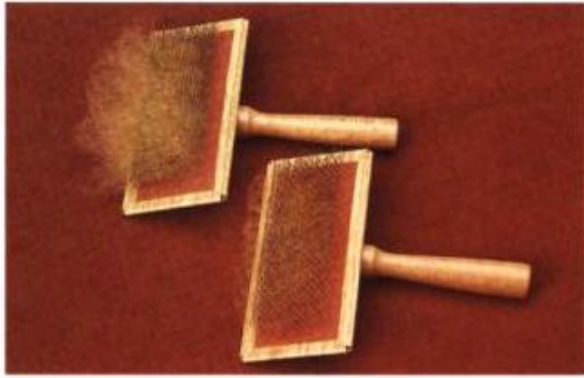
1. Essentially, you're going to use a pair of wire brushes to card the wool.



2. Cut the wool as close to the hide as possible. Do not cut the wool into pieces; you want the fibers left long.



3. Place a small amount of wool on one of the brushes. Place the other brush on top, forming a wool sandwich. Press the brushes together, then pull them in opposite directions, allowing the wires to pull the wool fibers apart.



4. Keep repeating the brushing operation until all the wool fibers are separated and carded into a neat clump. That's all there is to it; the material is now ready to be used.

USING CARDED WOOL FOR DUBBING

After carding the wool, you will notice the uneven fibers extending beyond the edge of the brush. When you remove material from the brush, grab only the tips of the wool. As you pull these longer fibers from the brush, others will follow.

How much wool to use depends on the size of the fly you are tying. With a little practice, you will learn to select the right amount for any hook.



1. Pull a little wool from the brush. You don't need much—grab only the tips of the fibers, and draw out a small clump of material.



2. With the bobbin in your left hand, angle the thread away from the hook shank. Keep the thread tight. Tack the fibers between your right index finger and thumb to the thread. Press your index finger and thumb together

and twist the wool onto the thread. Twist in one direction only—do not go back and forth. From above, the direction is always counterclockwise.



3. With the tips of the wool attached to the thread, move your finger and thumb farther down, grasping the wool along with the tying thread, and cradle the bobbin in the butt of your hand. Start to wrap the wool around the hook shank. As you wind the dubbing, keep the opening between your index finger and thumb toward the hook shank. This helps to avoid rubbing your finger-

tips against the dubbing and pulling it from the thread.

After making several wraps, you will notice that the wool is starting to twist itself around the thread. To twist the dubbing more tightly and produce a tighter, slimmer body, hold the thread and dubbing closer to the hook shank when making your wraps. For a looser, fuzzier body, hold the thread and dubbing farther from the hook as you wrap. Generally, the smaller the hook, the closer to it you hold your index finger and thumb; with

a larger hook, hold the thread and dubbing farther from the shank.

After practicing this dubbing technique, you will be surprised how much time you can save tying flies this way, compared to the conventional method of twisting all the dubbing tightly around the thread before you start wrapping it around the hook. This technique works particularly well with wool, which is one of the reasons I like this material. We'll look at this method in greater detail later in the book, when we start tying flies with dubbed bodies.

ADDING SPARKLE TO DUBBING

Antron yarn (rug yarn) can be purchased in many colors useful to fly tiers. It is often called sparkle yarn. Adding this synthetic material creates dubbing that catches and reflects light.

To add sparkle to your dubbing, cut the Antron yarn into pieces, about an inch to an inch and a quarter in length. Add the pieces of yarn to one of your carding brushes, and work the brushes against each other to separate the fibers, just as you do with wool. Card the Antron yarn by itself, and then add it to wool to get the amount of sparkle you would like your dubbing to have.