



Synthetic Tying Materials

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Recently there has been an explosion in the production and use of synthetics, man-made materials, for the fly tier. The boundaries of the modern fly angler are ever expanding. New species, challenging habitats and "fly wise" fish all present new problems for the angler and the fly dresser. Many of these challenges are now being met by the growing family of synthetics being manufactured in every conceivable (and some pretty inconceivable) color, texture, type and brilliance. The reader should remember that this information is a snapshot in time. New materials are being introduced all the time, and this discussion cannot be anywhere near complete. It is intended as an introduction to synthetics, not as an exhaustive listing of know products today.

Natural materials are limited in length, durability, color, texture and sparkle. These limitations frequently have been overcome by synthetic materials making it possible to create almost any effect desired. Synthetics are easily obtained, and they substitute for many hard-to-get or tightly controlled natural materials. Frequently, the fly tying uses of the materials are simply fortuitous by-products of another use. Those materials can be obtained through many local sources at much reduced prices from those costs incurred through fly tying houses.

Synthetics Used for Dubbing

Antron - Antron is a synthetic polymer fiber used in yarns. It has a sparkle that makes it great for many patterns. It is available as yarn or as loose fiber. Either type can be used to create the other. Antron is used either on its own or mixed with other natural or synthetic body materials to add sparkle to nymph bodies, particularly for bright hare's ear type bodies.

Polypropylene - Polypropylene or "poly" is a lighter-than-water polymer material available in spun fiber or yarn form. It is excellent for dry fly bodies and wings, and particularly useful as spent wings in dry fly spinners. It can also be used for nymphs or as streamer wings if tied on heavier hooks. It is available in a wide variety of colors, textures and fiber thickness.

Seal-Ex - Seal-Ex is a synthetic substitute for seal or polar bear under fur. Its exceptional luster and brilliance make it an excellent substitute for those hard-to-get or banned materials.

Andra Spectrum - Andra Spectrum is a fine-spun fiber available in approximately 50 different colors designed for the fly tier. Its texture and fiber length make it an excellent dubbing material.

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Fly-Rite or Poly Dubbing - See the comments on polypropylene above. This is the fine diameter material used for lighter-than-water dubbing.

Other Synthetic Yarns - Many other modern synthetic yarns are useful as body materials or as dubbing. Acrylic yarn has a spiky, brilliant appearance, yet it dubs easily. It is also the material of choice for tying yarn section crab bodies in flies like Del's Merkin. Orlon has a wonderfully soft texture, luster and long fibers that permit dubbing a very tight body with ease. It is an excellent and more durable substitute for wool in any pattern calling for a wool yarn body. Dacron is used primarily in floss, an excellent substitute for silk floss. In fact most "silk" floss is non-twisted dacron. In addition to body materials, dacron is used for tails, butts or other tag ends in patterns.

Synthetic Hair

Many types of synthetic hair are available, some of them from sources that most tiers would not consider unless they have been at it long enough to realize the sources of commercial materials.

Fishair - One of the earliest artificial "bucktails," this material is available in many colors and thickness (measured in denier). Thinner deniers are popular winging materials for salmon and steelhead flies. Heavier deniers are used to make the long wings of large saltwater patterns. Fish Hair is a straight fiber.

Ultra Hair - Ultra hair is translucent and kinky, much like calf tail. It is used extensively for epoxy flies and Clouser minnows. This material is very tough and durable. **Super Hair** is a very similar product.

Big Fly Fiber - Big Fly Fiber or (Hairabou is an extra long, very fine fiber used for extremely large flies. The material fluffs easily to give the impression of bulk without excessive weight. As a result, big flies tied with this material are easy to cast.

Craft Fur - Craft fur is used for many sewing craft activities, including hair on dolls and bodies for fuzzy animals. It is easily obtained from some craft shops, although the color selection may be limited. It is very similar to Big Fly Fiber in character and usefulness.

Lite Brite - Lite Brite is a fine, flashy fiber that comes in a clump. Simply tie it in and tease it out for excellent streamer wings or body material.

Neer Hair - Available in extremely long lengths, this product is an excellent substitute for bucktail and similar materials when the extra length is needed in the tie.

Nylon or Dacron Rope - Nylon and dacron materials from either woven or floss-type ropes can be used in numerous ways. Simply comb the fibers out with a metal pet currycomb or a clipped toothbrush (like the dubbing brush described elsewhere) to separate the strands. This material is available in a variety of colors, but any color can be made simply by coloring it with a permanent marker. If using parachute cord as a source, do not forget the outer sheath, which is made up of woven strands of the same material used inside. Simply open the weave and comb out the fibers. The weave will produce a slight kinkiness in the fiber.

Tip: Since long streamer wings can get matted and tangled with use, keep a small brush or pet comb on hand. Run it through the wings, starting at the tips and working back toward the head in small sections. This will refresh the look and action of the fly.

CHENILLE

Many types of chenille are available to the tier in addition to the silk or synthetic fiber chenille familiar to all tiers.

Crystal Chenille - Crystal chenille includes crystal fibers that create a sparkly, translucent effect. The bright, colorful chenille is used primarily on steelhead, salmon and saltwater flies.

Estar - Estar is like crystal chenille, but sparser. The result is bright, sparkling chenille with a very translucent appearance.

Ice Chenille - Available in a variety of very bright colors, ice chenille is made up of mylar flash fibers twisted into a central set of thread strands. It is used to form brilliant bodies for shrimp patterns or similar flies. **Cactus Chenille** is similar but finer in texture.

Sparkle Chenille - Sparkle chenille is standard chenille with a strand of mylar tinsel twisted into the core. This produces a chenille with flash, similar to using a fine, oval tinsel rib.

Vernille (Ultra Chenille) - Vernille or ultra chenille is a flocked chenille that is much denser than standard chenille. It makes excellent bodies and is available in most of the common chenille colors.

Plastic Body Material

Swannundaze - Swannundaze is a flattened oval plastic used primarily for nymph bodies. The material is rather stiff but gives an excellent segmented effect to nymph bodies. It is available in a wide array of colors.

Larva Lace - Larva Lace is a thin, hollow tube of resilient plastic. It is used primarily for weaving nymph bodies or for ribbing nymph patterns.

Plaston - Plaston is similar to Swannundaze but much smaller in width. It is used primarily in quill bodies for dry and wet flies.

Nymph Rib or V-Rib - Nymph Rib or V-Rib is a vinyl ribbing material available in a fine, half-round strip that can be stretched to reduce its size. It produces an excellent ribbed effect on nymphs.

Flash Fibers

For many years, flash was provided in flies by using either brilliant materials like seal or polar bear, or by using metallic tinsel or wire in the pattern. Numerous additional materials are available to provide a wide array of flash fiber in tying situations.

Mylar Tinsel - Mylar tinsel is a plastic based product that can be manufactured in nearly any imaginable color, including prismatic or holographic patterns. Unlike metallic tinsel, this product will not tarnish when handled or exposed to air and moisture. It is available in 3 or 4 widths from tying houses and in very narrow widths as decoration tassels in craft stores.

Braided Mylar Tubing - Braided mylar tubing is available in many colors beyond the traditional silver and gold. It comes in pearl colors and holographic colors as well as the more traditional ones. All of them have a use for the fly dresser. A hollow, woven tube, the material has a yarn core (which, incidentally, may make an excellent poly wing material). Cutting the tube to length, removing the core, and slipping it over the hook's shank, either with or without an underbody, makes a beautiful bait fish body. Underbodies as varied as strips of folded aluminum can material, weighted shanks with foam padding, curon or poly foam, and dental picks may be used in the hidden underbody. The tubing comes in several diameters that can be wound or slipped on.

Edge Bright - Edge Bright is a neon plastic material available in sheets. It can be cut into strips to be wound on the shank to form bodies or to bind in as flash along the sides of a fly.

Flashabou - Flashabou is one form of tinsel marabou. It is fine, strong, flat mylar strips that comes in bundles. The light-weight mylar is extremely active in the water, providing the appearance of life in flies in which it is used. Often mixed into wings or used as wings itself, the material also may be used for ribbing bodies. It is available in a wide array of colors. The holiday decoration tassels mentioned above are an excellent source of some colors of tinsel marabou. **Spectra Splash Mylar Motion** is a similar material in twisted fiber form, called "Flashabou with a twist" by one dealer, the product "swims" well with faceted flash.

Krystal Flash - Krystal Flash is the original flash fiber, although several others are available today. A fine fiber with the appearance of a tiny string of brilliant lights, it is available in a wide array of colors. The materials come as thin, sometimes slightly crinkled strands. It adds flash to most patterns, giving a very life-like appearance. It may be used as wings or simply as an accent to provide iridescence and a life-like streamer or bucktail pattern. Patterns like the Scate's Shrimp use it as a flash back. Available in a wide variety of standard and fluorescent colors from black to pearlescent clear, a color to match your needs is available. **Flashabout Accent** is a similar material with a slightly larger fiber diameter. **Glass Mylar Motion** is a fine clear pearlescent flash fiber. **Angel Hair** is used for both flash and as a winging material on many patterns.

Sparkle Flash - Sparkle Flash is a stranded, sparkle fiber that combines mylar and nylon to form a twisted fiber that reflects light from many facets.

Other Materials

A wide variety of other materials find usefulness on the fly dresser's bench.

Scud Back - Scud Back is a thin latex or plastic material used to form the backs on scuds and other crustaceans.

Fly Foam - Fly Foam is a closed cell polyethylene foam used for some types of floating terrestrial patterns, damsel fly imitations and similar patterns.

Furry Foam - Furry Foam is a flocked, felt-like material that is useful in crab and crayfish patterns. It comes in sheets that can be cut to shape. One manufacturer is even supplying these materials with a hook and loop backing that permit the production of "velcro crabs."

Silicone Calk or Cement - This product is used in coating wool or similar materials to make floating bugs or to attach eyes to heads of other flies. **Tip:** Use a good dish washing soap to keep the material from clinging to your fingers if you choose to use it. Eyes can be attached to sticky note strips for handling until the cement sets.

Softex - Designed for making soft-bodied patterns, this product is used by many tiers as a substitute for silicone. It is easier to use, dries quickly and is reported to work very well on airhead poppers and sliders.

Epoxy - A general class of polymers, epoxies are a combination of a resin and a hardener or polymerizer. Most tiers use a fast setting epoxy or epoxy paints to cover heads, eyes or similar materials they wish to protect from teeth and other damage. It is also used in epoxy flies to form bodies.

Micro Web - Micro Web is a fine foam material that can be colored and cut to shape for realistic-looking fly wings. It looks like a very thin version of the foam sheeting often used to protect electronic equipment during shipment.

This is just a partial listing of the synthetic materials you can use in tying flies. Use your imagination and try materials you happen to see. If they work well, add them to your tying arsenal. If not, simply place them on the list of things that did not work for the application you had in mind. Remember their behavior, however. Some time later, you may have a need for exactly that type of material to create the effect you want in a new pattern.