

Riverwood's Dubbing Reference

Dubbing can be a mystery to the beginner fly tier. It was for me! You see the little packages of fuzzy stuff at the fly shop, but you're not quite sure what it's for. You continue down the row of bins and grab some chenille, floss, yarn, quills or other body product and go about your business. Then one day you take a class, watch a video, read a book or are otherwise exposed to the wonderful world of natural fur and synthetic dubbing products. Your choice of flies to tie becomes endless!

There are a number of ways to utilize dubbing, but basically what you're trying to accomplish is a way to bind the fur or synthetic product to the tying thread so that it can be wrapped around the hook. There is the "touch" method, loop methods, pre-made ropes and brushes, twist and wrap, etc. etc. Practice makes perfect and soon you're dubbing like a master!

Next is dubbing selection. It can get a little confusing at this point. There are so many products available these days. There's also a lot of "marketing" going on. I'm guilty of that as well, but I will try my best to be objective in this document and simply make suggestions based on what I use and what other tiers I know prefer.

The 1,000 foot view

Here are some general guidelines on dubbing selection:

Dry Flies – For authenticity and high floatability, use natural fur products that are known to repel water – Beaver, Muskrat, Nutria and other water inhabiting mammal fur. Rabbit, Squirrel, Opossum and other land based mammal furs do not contain the same amounts of built in water repellants, but can be treated with floatants to accomplish the same buoyancy. Some synthetic products are also highly buoyant – Antron, Z-lon, and other lab created fibers make great dubbing, plus they add shine and sparkle to a fly body. Blended natural and synthetic fibers make a great all around fly body product as well.

Nymphs and Wet Flies – Again, for authenticity to a particular pattern, use natural fur dubbing from Rabbit, Squirrel, Woodchuck, Opossum, Mink, Fox and others. These products blended with a good balance of under fur and guard hairs create a great “buggy” look to most flies. For the best in “Hatch Matching”, I use rabbit dubbing and mix and match as required. Blending with synthetics is also a good idea for sheen and sparkle and fish attracting qualities.

Steelhead and Salmon Flies – I’m a big fan of Angora (Mohair) when it comes to salmon and steelhead flies. This goat wool takes and holds color extremely well and it’s hard to beat the shine! A dubbed body of angora flows beautifully in the water and the colors are so bold and eye catching. Flies come out stunning – for fishing or display. It’s readily available, legally obtained and easy to work with. Dyed Rabbit is also a very good alternative for Salmon and Steelhead flies and is a little more affordable. It flows well in the water and has very good color holding qualities. It’s a great product for blending with synthetics as well for sparkle and shine.

Synthetic Products – A lot folks use synthetics exclusively for all types of flies. There’s nothing wrong with that. It floats well, shines, sparkles and attracts fish! You can’t argue with that. Add a little weight and it’ll sink just fine for use on wet flies too. I have used 100% synthetics, but prefer to blend it with natural fibers to get the best of both worlds.

Popular Fly Patterns and my suggestions on dubbing to use:

Dry Flies & Emergers

Adams - Muskrat, Mole, Hare, Dyed Rabbit, Dyed Rabbit/Antron Blend

Mayflies, Light Color (Hendrickson, Cahill, etc) – Dyed Rabbit, Opossum, Bleached or dyed Muskrat or Beaver

Mayflies, Dark color (Hendrickson, Cahill, March Brown) – Beaver, Muskrat, Dyed Rabbit

Olive Dun, Blue Wing Olive – Dyed Beaver, Dyed Muskrat, Dyed Rabbit

Grey Fox – Fox, Red Squirrel, Dyed Rabbit

Wulffs – Dyed Rabbit – except the Ausable Wulff – use Opossum

Elk Hair Caddis – Dyed Rabbit, Squirrel (red or grey), Opossum

Stimulators – Dyed Rabbit, Rabbit/Antron blends, Antron, Angora

Klinkhammer – Dyed Rabbit, Opossum

Nymphs, Flymphs, Scuds, Softhackles, etc.

Caddis Larva – Opossum, Rabbit, Woodchuck, Nutria, Mink

Hare's Ear – hmm..... Hare's Ear/Mask. Rabbit, Woodchuck or Squirrel make a nice nymph using the Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear design principals.

Scuds/Sowbugs – Rabbit, Antron, Rabbit/Antron Blend, or maybe some Angora

Buggers/Wooly Worms – Traditionally, these flies have a chenille body, but give Angora a try

Stonefly Nymphs – Angora, Antron, Rabbit/Antron, Woodchuck

Softhackles/Flymphs – Antron/Rabbit Blend, Squirrel, Mink, Woodchuck, Angora

Steelhead and Salmon Flies

Pacific NW Hairwings – Angora, Dyed Rabbit, Synthetics

Classic Atlantic Salmon – Angora

Great Lakes Region Nymphs, Scuds, Sucker Spawns - Angora, Synthetics

Spey and Dee River Styles – Angora

Summary, Tips and Tricks

This list is by no means all-inclusive, but I hope it gets you pointed in the right direction. There are thousands of fly patterns and hundreds of ways to use dubbing products. I encourage you to experiment at the bench. Try different materials and methods to create your own twist (no pun intended) on a pattern.

Put a little thought into what you are trying to create and use the right product for the task. For example, if you want a fly to be "leggy", use a natural fur with a high amount of guard hairs blended in. Woodchuck, Mink, Squirrel and Nutria are good choices. Rabbit can also be included here, although generally, the guard hairs in rabbit are more "flowing" when wet. For smooth bodied flies, I'd recommend Beaver, Muskrat or Mole. Again, Rabbit will fill the bill here as well.

Don't be afraid to experiment with your own blends! Mix fibers of various animal furs and synthetics and fur. Mix shades of different colors as well. You won't find many "solid" colors in bugs/insects you're trying to imitate. If you find a blend that works, make the small investment in a basic coffee bean grinder. They work great for blending larger amounts of dubbing. Just be careful when blending synthetic fibers because heat buildup can ruin the mix.

Tight Lines!

Dave Carpenter
Riverwood Flies

www.riverwoodfliesonline.com