

Tight Threads—Tying Larger Flies

By Kyle Hand

Hello Everyone.

I hope all of you have had a great summer of fishing and relaxation.

Previously, we have talked about tying tiny flies, threads, and other useful tidbits. This month I would like to talk to you about the other end of the spectrum: tying larger flies. These would include flies for both freshwater and saltwater.

We need to start with our vise again. Make sure you have jaws large enough to hold the hooks on which you are going to be tying your flies. Make the adjustments with your knobs, screws, and such so you do not spring your vise jaws. I have broken a couple sets of jaws by trying to get a hook that is too large into those jaws. For those of you with vises that are made for this, you will notice one or two sets of grooves in your jaws for the hooks to nestle into and relieve the stress on the jaws.

How might you know if your vise is not set tight enough or your vise is not made for these larger hooks? The hook will slip, usually when you put pressure on the thread to tie in material. What I mean by slip is that the eye of the hook will begin to drop down below the centerline of the hook, and your thread will want to slide off the nose of the hook.

If the vise is set too tight, you will not be able to get the arm to lock into place and more adjustments are needed. For those of you that have bought the higher-quality vises, they usually make a set of jaws just for larger hooks. If you own a Regal-type vise, this is not a problem, as the “trigger” will simply open the jaws wide enough when you squeeze it, and when you release the handle, the vise will tighten around the hook.

Now that we have the vise adjusted for our larger flies, our next selection will be the hook. Again, this can open a great big can of worms and spirited debate as to which hook is correct for the fly we are going to tie. Chances are you are going to be tying larger imitations of baitfish, larger insects, and other aquatic critters. You want to make sure the hooks you are using will perform properly for the type of fly you are tying.

What do I mean? As an example, if you are tying Clouser’s Minnows with weighted eyes, you want a hook that will roll over and ride hook point up. If you use a hook that is too heavy for the eyes, the hook may not roll over and will ride hook point down, and the fly will be tied “upside down.” This may make the minnow appear to be injured, which is a trigger point for fish, but I would prefer to tie my imitation to appear wounded in my own way, matching materials to hooks.

Next, we will decide on thread. The smaller denier threads (12/0, 8/0, 6/0 and 70 denier) will probably not do the things you want them to do. What do you want the thread to do?

Basically, you are going to be using larger clumps of materials so you will want a thread that will help you manage these bulkier items. You will probably also want a thread that will build bulk quicker at the eye and other materials tie-in points. With these bulkier clumps, you are going to have to put more pressure on the thread, and you may end up snapping the smaller denier threads and creating unwanted stress in your tying session. Having said this, I know a number of people that tie all their flies with the smaller denier threads and do fine. It is a personal preference, and I prefer to use larger denier threads. The threads I prefer to use are UTC 140 or 210.

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If you are tying deer hair bugs, you will probably want to use a gel spun thread or something similar. I am not fond of using the true Kevlar threads as I feel it cuts the materials rather than tying them in properly. Billy Munn, one of the best deer hair bug makers around, uses Monocord and Flymaster, which are Danville products, and I am surely not going to argue with his success. The bottom line is to find a thread that works for you and learn how to use it properly.

Now we get to the most fun part of building these flies: deciding what materials to use to construct them. You won't need any dainty dry fly hackles here. Bucktail, calf tail, squirrel tail, arctic fox, big nasty rooster feathers, and many synthetic fibers can be used in different combinations to make your flies. Experiment with these materials to see how much you can comfortably use to tie it in properly. You will know if you have too much as the material will spin around the hook instead of tying down properly. Start with smaller amounts and work your way up to larger clumps of materials.

Again, this is a generalization of tying these larger flies. Just as with any type of tying, thread control and materials knowledge will be invaluable assets as you progress forward. One last thing I will tell you is this: Try tying these flies from very sparse to almost overdressed and see what works. Again, using the Clouser's Minnow as an example, most of the original patterns that were tied were tied extremely sparse and still caught many fish. One can put too much material on the hook and not get the performance out of the fly that you want. Next time you are in your favorite fly shop, look at their streamer patterns. Chances are a lot of them will be overdressed in my opinion.

Experiment with different hooks. There are Circle hooks, Mosquito hooks, long shank hooks, and one of the newer "hot" materials is tubes and tube flies. Experiment with all of the different materials to find what works well for you. Let your creative juices flow, and see what you can come up with.

Until next time.

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