
Subject: : Fly Tying

Topic: : Dry fly saddle hackles

Re: Dry fly saddle hackles

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URL:

I agree that for 100% of my dry fly tying saddles are the best way to go. I wrote this post on another forum to a guy who wanted to start tying dries;

"Seriously tying good dry flies is not a black art you just need to know the skills needed to properly handle the materials and how to apply them to the hook in a proportioned manner.

If you decide you want to tie hackled dry flies I would recommend you save some money and buy high quality (Whiting, Metz, Collins) dry fly hackle. IMO you just can't go wrong in only buying high end saddles. Forget neck capes as they just don't have the numbers of hackles in sizes #12 - #20 to make the purchase price worthwhile. There are mixed sizes from very small to humouously big but just not many of them. A good saddle on the other hand has individual feathers that are at least 4" long and may be as long as 8" and not only is the stem very fine and consistent in diameter but the individual hackle barbules from the tip to the butt are pretty much the same size. I can usually tie 4 - 6 #14 flies from a single feather and as many as 6 - 8 flies from the smaller #16 - #20 size feathers.

A couple of #1 grade saddles will last you years. You know from our exchanged emails that I fish dries most of the time and I tie over a hundred dries every year. Yet I've still got the same saddles that I bought fifteen years ago. The colors I think everyone should have are grizzly, med & dark dun, cream, ginger, and brown. I guess in todays money that is going to cost you about \$500 maybe a little less. Or you can buy half saddles as I have done many times and spend \$250.00 It is very important to know what you are looking for in high end necks and it has been written about a great deal.

I look for small diameter stems that are pretty consistent in size from the tip to the butt. I also like to see stems that are supple and when you bend them into a hoop they don't break. It is pretty much impossible not to see some webbiness down where you pluck the feather off of the skin (actually it is better to cut it with your scissors at the butt so you don't tear the cured skin) but once you go up the same about 1/2" the barbules should be nice and stiff and not webby. I don't know how other guys judge for barbule stiffness but I still bend the feather between my thumb and index finger and place the fibers against my lips. Stiff fibers will actually feel sharp and unbending. I like those, fibers that I can feel deflecting against my lip with just a little pressure go back on the rack.

If you are tying conventional fully hackled flies I might palmer 4 - 5 turns of hackle. I don't tie any "Catskill style" flies and 95% of my hackled dries are Marinaro Thorax style where I set the wings back more from the normal eye position of a fully hackled fly and I clip the hackle fibers on the bottom to a "V" shape so the fly sets up better and closer to the surface. On those flies, in sizes #14 - #16 I will use three to maybe 3 1/2 turns of hackle. On flies #18 - #20 two - three turns is plenty."