

SPORTS AFIELD

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STREAMLINED FLY TYING

By

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Don Martinez, well known California angler, has developed a new method of fly tying which makes use of the little hand or pin vise, replacing the big, stationary, clumsy table vise entirely.

With the hand vise, the flytier is able to do all his fly tying, if he wishes, relaxed cozily in his easy chair. Hunching over a table no longer is necessary. In addition, the flies tied by the hand-vise method generally are superior to those tied by the table-vise method by the same tier.

There is a reason for this. The tying operation is simplified considerably. Another big advantage is that the time required to tie a fly is very much less.

When I mastered the hand-vise method, following Don's instructions, I insisted that he write a handbook on the subject. He promised with his usual, "I'll get around to it some day." But knowing Don, and feeling that there is a crying need among anglers for early information on the subject, I decided to impart what I knew now whilst Don was "getting around" to the handbook.

Dozens of flytiers have switched from the conventional table vise to the hand vise after watching Don knock them out while relaxing cozily in an old Morris chair. More than a hundred flytiers now use the hand vise and not one of them has gone back to the old method so far as I can find out.

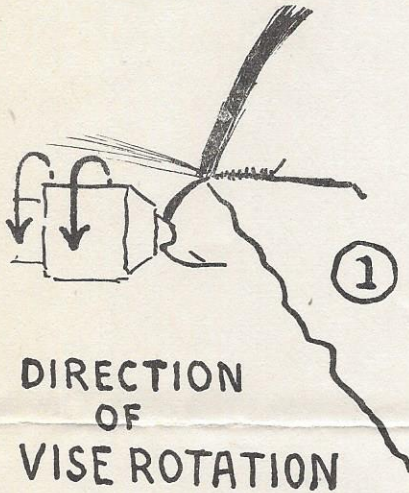
You might well ask for some proof of what may seem an extravagant build-up of a simple process. Are the flies tied by this method as good? Will they hold together as well? Can all patterns be tied - wet and dry? Are they as light and will they float as well?

To all these questions the answer decidedly is, "Yes!" These flies are modelled on those tied by crack eastern and English professionals and the resemblance is not accidental. For reasons that will appear later, they are apt to be tighter and stronger than most flies tied by the same tier in the old table vise.

Once the fundamentals of this streamlined method are mastered you will tie flies in one quarter of the time formerly required and you can tie at ease in any comfortable chair or even behind the steering wheel of the family car.

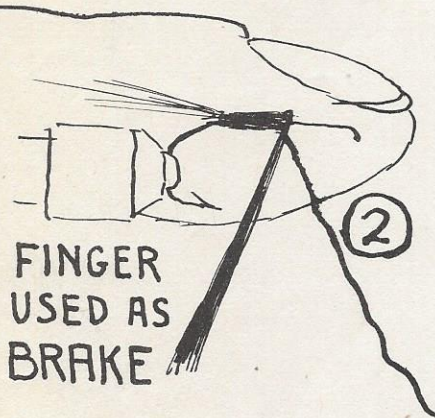
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There are just four things to learn in order to use the hand-vice method. They are, in the proper sequence:

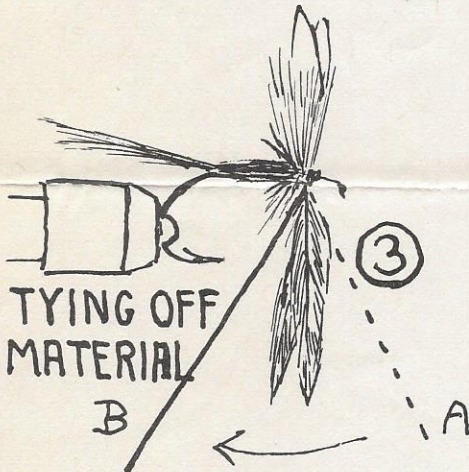


First- The vise is held horizontally, the supporting end resting on the arm of a chair or similar resting place, and the vise itself is turned or rolled always toward the operator.

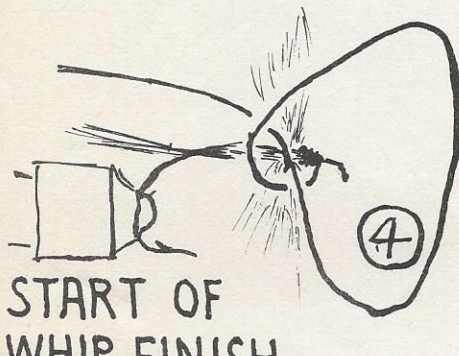
See Fig. 1.



Second- The winding silk is grasped in the right hand at all times, running down through the closed fist in such a way that it is always held by at least one finger, preferably the little finger. There is nothing tricky to this - you just take hold of the winding silk as though it were a rope or a rod handle and catch it in the crook of your little finger, letting the silk slip through as you use it.



Third- The tie-off, which is the operation essential to completing the attachment of each piece of material, is accomplished by crossing the material with the tying silk and turning the vise simultaneously. After two or three turns of well-waxed silk the material will be found to be securely tied in by the tying silk and the surplus is cut off with a scissors or razor blade. The winding silk moves (See Fig. 3) from position A to position B. There is absolutely no necessity for a half hitch at this time or at any other time during the construction of a fly by this method.



Fourth- The middle finger of the left hand is used as a brake by resting it against the material on the hook at any place or any time desired. In this manner the operator can pause to examine his handiwork at any stage of the operation, and he also can stop long enough to light up the old pipe or pick up the telephone and order a pint of beer. No hackle pliers are used so there are no tools or bobbins hanging around in your way. See Fig. 2

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These essential operations can best be learned before beginning actual fly making by practicing with a length of waxed silk on a bare hook of ample size, say a No.8. After the student is accomplishing them with a fair degree of ease and precision, the making of the first fly will prove not difficult.

It isn't a bad notion to practice these steps "dry" by doing them mentally while twirling a pencil or fountain pen in the left hand in simulation of an actual vise. I would caution against this type of practice while riding to the office on the street car or subway as you are likely to be picked up by the man with the big butterfly net.

As far as tools required, all you need is a simple pin vise and a pair of scissors or a razor blade. You can hang your old hackle pliers on the wall with that five-pound brown you caught three years ago and you'll have just about as much use for either of them.

Take about a fifteen-inch piece of dowel wood or, better still, the broken section of an old fly rod, whittle the end down to fit into the handle of your pin vise, cement it in with ferrule cement and stick an old slip-on pencil eraser on the other end of the stick. This stick or handle should be long enough so that the rubber-covered end can rest on the arm of your chair with the vise centered in front of your body. The eraser prevents it from slipping off the material of the chair arm and is particularly useful if you use a leather armchair.

Throughout the entire flytying process the vise is rotated *toward* you, that is, the *upper* surface of the vise revolves toward the operator, as mentioned previously. This is essential. The winding silk and the materials are spun onto the hook by this rotation except in the case of the wings and the tail.

Since the winding silk is continuously under tension, no half hitches are necessary but what is important is that you use a fairly sticky wax on the tying silk. Any good commercial wax will do nicely. An ideal wax can be compounded easily by melting together the following ingredients in the proportions indicated. Resin 3/4, paraffin 1/8, turpentine 1/8. More paraffin will make the wax less tacky, more turpentine will make it softer and vice versa.

Now let's tie a dry fly and follow the entire process.

As in the conventional method, commence by waxing a length of tying silk. Start with a piece about eighteen inches long. After you become more adept you can cut down the amount of silk as you will use less because of the elimination of half hitches. I wax my silk by running it through a piece of soft leather on which I've stuck a piece of wax about the size of a pea. Be sure the silk has a good tacky coating of wax.

Wrap three or four turns around the middle of the hook, winding over the short end to securely tie it in. Naturally you wind the silk on with the right hand. You are now ready for the tail. Snip off the tail material, hold it against the top of the hook with the left hand which holds the vise and wrap several turns of the tying silk around it, maintaining an even tension at all times. The vise has been held stationary during the above process.

You now are ready to tie in the body material and ribbing if called for. These materials also are held in the left hand and tied in with several turns of the winding silk just as in any other method. Of course, in the case of ribbing, the ribbing material is tied in after the body material, and left hanging until the body is spun.

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At this point the rotation of the vise begins. Holding the tying silk in the crook of the little finger of the right hand, the body material is held with the thumb and forefinger of the right hand and the vise is turned with the left hand. The material is thus spun onto the hook exactly as wrapping a rod. Incidentally, it was rod-wrapping that first suggested the revolving vise method to Don Martinez. No one in his right mind would clamp a rod joint into a vise and attempt laboriously to wrap it by passing the thread around and around the joint, releasing it at each turn as it passes from hand to hand. Which is exactly what you do when you tie a fly with the table vise.

When sufficient body material is spun onto the hook, tie it off by simply twisting the right wrist, passing the winding silk under the body material and simultaneously turning the vise. Once the material is caught under the winding silk you can release it from your right hand and continue making several turns of the winding silk over it by rotation of the vise or by simply wrapping it on with the right hand. Snip off the surplus and you are ready for your wings, if the fly calls for them.

At this point I would like to mention another advantage of this process. One of the most difficult body materials to master - and yet one of the best, particularly for dry flies - is fur dubbing. There is nothing simpler than spinning a fur body with the new method. Just pick out a small pinch of the fur required. Holding it between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, bring it up close to the hook and against the sticky waxed tying silk. Then twirl it around the winding silk until it is evenly spun on and rotate the vise. The body is firmly and securely wound in.

The wings are now tied in. Here again, as in tying in the tail, the vise remains stationary, the tier's hand carrying the winding silk around the material and the hook. The wings can be crisscrossed and divided just as in any other method of tying.

You are now ready for the hackles. Here we find one of the greatest advantages of the entire process. In the case of a dry fly where it is desired to use two or more hackles, they are tied in at the same time and wound simultaneously under constant and even tension. This is an utter impossibility when using hackle pliers as the hackles will not come out even. When tying such patterns as the Adams, Gray and Red Fox, Rusty Variant and others, where multi-colored hackles are required, you will appreciate this facility. You will also find your hackles always are tied on edge with a minimum of matting.

Tie in the butt ends of both hackles by wrapping several turns of winding silk over them. Snip off the surplus butt. Now, holding the hackles between thumb and forefinger of the right hand and the winding silk in the crook of the little finger, start rotating the vise. Let the hackles slip between your fingers as they are spun on to the hook, maintaining a constant and even tension, however, so that they do not slip out of your hand.

When sufficient hackle is tied on, again twist the right wrist, bringing the silk under the hackle and simultaneously turning the vise. See Fig. 3. Wind several turns of silk over the hackle tip, snip off the surplus, and you are ready for the last and final step, the head of the fly.

Three half hitches can be used here, but the whip finish is infinitely better and actually much quicker and easier than tying half hitches. If you've struggled for hours and thrown your wrist out of joint trying to master the whip finish, try this and see how easy it is. Simply make a loop in the winding silk with your right hand, holding the loose end with the left hand. Twist this loop over the silk hanging down from the hook. Now carry the loose end of the silk along and parallel to the vise. (See Fig. 4). Holding tension on the loop with the right hand, start rotating

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the vise. Make four turns of winding silk over the end. Then pull the end through. When the loop gets quite small, bring the middle finger of the right hand up close to the hook, thus maintaining tension, and pull the thread tight. Cut off the surplus and your head is complete. A touch of lacquer and the fly is finished.

This method of tying sold me so thoroughly that I conducted a series of practical fishing experiments with adaptations of standard fly patterns particularly suited to hand-vise tying. It was done not because you cannot tie any pattern with the hand vise, but because I felt that simple adaptations of popular patterns could be made easily with the hand vise, and because I had a pet theory I wanted to try out. The results of these experiments were most gratifying and some time I hope to record them as well as give the tying patterns for the adapted flies.

Brief as the foregoing instructions may seem, when compared with the detailed information usually prescribed to teach fly tying, there actually is little more to add. Naturally, it is assumed that the fundamentals of conventional fly tying methods are already known. For this reason, such details as the method of tying in various types of wings, preparing hackles, etc., were omitted. In the event that the reader is a beginner in fly tying, a perusal of one of the excellent published handbooks will prepare him for the rotating vise method. The basic principles are the same in both methods.

In conclusion, let me point out that no worth-while achievement comes easily. Even with the hand vise the tying of perfect dry flies in small sizes takes a great deal of practice. But reasonably good ones, certainly fish getters, can be turned out almost from the start. You will find that you no longer are sitting in a cramped position before a table, but are relaxing in your most comfortable chair. If you go as hand-vise crazy as the author, you will, when you go fishing, stick a hand vise in your creel, a couple of game cock necks under your hat and a spool of silk and some hooks in your pocket, and tie flies on the bank of your favorite stream between rises.