

Directions for Inspecting, Washing, and Cleaning Feathers and Furs

Use 3 containers such as a five gallon pails:

1st pail - Fill with warm water and then put an antibacterial cleaner and a degreaser such as Dawn dish detergent in and stir.

2nd pail - Fill with cold water for first rinse of materials

3rd pail - Fill with cold water for second rinse of materials

Step #1 - Inspect the materials to see if they are worth cleaning. For fur and deer tails you may want to check to see that they have been cleaned properly. This means that the hide should have been scraped free of fat. If they have globs of fat and are real greasy, they may not be worth the work to clean them. Also determine if the feathers and other materials are something you have a use for. If the materials are of good quality and something you might use, but just dirty or you are concerned about the stability of the dying process, proceed with the directions below.

Step #2 - Place materials into the first pail and let stand for around 10 minutes. This will allow the detergent and degreaser to penetrate materials for better cleaning.

Step #3 - Stir slightly and then remove the materials and place them in the first rinse pail. A strainer can be used to scoop out the feathers and larger pieces of fur such as deer tails can just be grabbed by hand. **(Note: It is a good idea to use Latex Dish Washing Gloves or similar gloves to protect your hands any bacteria or dye that might leach out of the materials)**

Step #3 - Stir slightly to rinse the materials and then move them to the second rinse pail. Remove from the second rinse tank and take a piece of paper toweling and wipe a sample of the materials cleaned to see if any dye (color) comes off onto the toweling.

Note: This is a good time to inspect the materials you have cleaned for the following:

- Does the dye (color) still come off which means the dye job may not have been set properly and may continue to come off when used for tying a fly and bleed into other materials on the fly? Color may come off of hides of fur and this is ok, but the color should not come off of the hair or feathers.
- Has the color faded or has it maintained a good saturated color?
- Based on the above, this may be a good time to decide whether to keep and dry or dispose of the materials.

Step #4 - Dry the materials. There are a number of techniques for drying depending on the circumstances. For deer tails you can shake them to get rid of excess water and then lay them out to dry on a board, screen, or plastic grid used for fluorescent light diffusers. It also helps to wipe/blot them with paper toweling to remove additional water.

Optional: You may want to rub borax into the hides of fur or bucktails as a preservative. This is not necessary but optional. If you do this, you need to shake and brush off when dry. It also helps to take a shop vac to remove any left over borax from the materials.

For drying feathers you can put them in a old pillowcase and dry then with a hair dryer. Note: Do not put on Hot!. You can also tie the pillowcase and put it in a clothes dryer. You can also lay them out to dry on a board, screen, or plastic grid used for fluorescent light diffusers as mentioned above. This does not work good if left in the sun to dry if the wind can blow them off when they dry.

Step #5 - After the materials have dried, this is the time for final inspection. Take a piece of wet paper toweling and wipe a feather or deer tail to see if any dye comes off. If the dye (color) comes off onto the toweling, it is an indication that you might not want to use the materials for fly tying. You want the materials to retain their rich color and not fade or bleed into to other materials when the fly is fished.

Step #6 - Sort and store your materials. For quill feathers you might want to pair them up so that you have a right and left quill of similar size and characteristics. Place the materials in a suitable storage container such as a plastic storage container. Placing a piece of cedar closet lining in the container also helps keep the bugs out.

This might seem like a lot of work, but if done properly it can save you a lot of money and give you a good supply of tying materials that will last you a long time. If your materials are stored properly they will last a life time and you will never need to do this again.

Good Luck
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