
Soft Hackle Techniques

Revised notes by Lucky Ketcham, SDFE Feather Benders
January 20, 2009

1. A full soft hackle is tied in by the fine tip, folded and wrapped 1.5 times, then try it fuller with 3 wraps of hackle.

2. One half the hackle is tied in by the fine tip and wrapped 1.5 times, then try it fuller with 3 wraps. Try to look at the curve of the feather and strip the side that will have the quill to the hook. Remember, concave, dull side to the rear, convex, shiny side to the front. (Charles Jardine style)
Sparse legs are usually better.

3. Full soft hackle, sized and tied in by the base or quill, wrapped 1.5 times. The dubbing is tied in after the hackle is tied in. The hackle is wrapped after the body and thorax are formed.

4. One half the soft hackle, tied in by the base or quill, wrapped 1.5 times. (Dave Hugh's style) Dave likes this one because the tip pulls

out or breaks too easily. The dubbing body is made after tying in the hackle and the heavy quill is covered. The hackle is wrapped after the body and thorax are formed. The fluff at the base of the feather is stripped off and the barbs are stripped off up to the desired length of the legs. This trick helps you from making nymphs with legs that are too long. It works best on larger patterns like the 16, 14, 12, 10 versions. It is hard to grab on to the tips of very small feathers with your hackle pliers without breaking them.

5. **Paint Brush Style** - This method depends less on finding very small soft hackle and lets you use up some of the hackle that was too big or too long. I just learned this method. Mount the hook and start the thread with a jam knot in the position of the legs, two hook eyes back from the eye. 7/8 of the hook shank. Wrap a thread base to the point of the hook and back to the leg position. Let the bobbin hang down. Pull the fibers of a hen or partridge soft hackle to the side of the quill to make a group of 10 to 12 approximately the same length. Pinch the barbs with your finger tips while cutting them close to the quill. Carefully position the barbs over the top of the hook with points extending forward. Determine the size of your legs by having the points at the eye and the butts just over the point for a Mayfly nymph and over the bend of the hook for a Caddis pupa. Remember, caddis pupae will now have very long legs. The recipes that call for

legs 2 hook gaps long or 1 shank length are usually imitating caddis patterns.

Anyway hold the little bundle over the hook to size the length. Now slide the bundle forward to your 7/8 shank tie in point. Make two soft pinch wraps of thread to secure the soft hackles. Take your finger nails and spread the barbs evenly around the hook. Check the length of the legs and make minor adjustments before you make the tight thread wraps. When you are satisfied that the legs will be the desired length when folded back, make a few tight wraps of thread right on top of each other. You want to make a sharp shoulder and take care not to make wraps forward. Lift up the butts of the hackle and make three cuts to help form a tapered. Cover the butts with thread as you wrap back to the bend. With this technique the dubbing or silk is added after the hackling. The first four techniques usually dub the bodies and thorax before the soft hackle.

The body can be many different types of material. The thin tapered body could be peacock herl, goose or turkey biots, rabbit, goat, cat, dog, Larvae Lace micro tubing, silk, or floss. Wrap the body with a cigar shape for the caddis and more tapered for the mayflies. Pupa bodies are shorter than larval bodies. Many soft hackle bodies only go to the point of the hook, not the bend. Many patterns will have a slightly larger ball of darker dubbing for the thorax. The ball will help

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along our coast. Since kelp harvesting stopped a couple years ago this forest of food greenery has grown to cover nearly the whole Pacific coast. Peter will show us what he has learned armed with a 6, 8, or 10 weight rod. Desirable structure, retrieval rates, water and fly colors, and seasons for different fish will be shown for impressive hookups and possible fresh fish for the dinner table.

Gary Farrar

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hold out the soft hackle from the body. Charles Jardine said he likes to keep his bodies smaller and does not normally use a larger ball of dubbing. He takes great care to wrap his quills one in front of the other and ties them down without twisting. He wants to form a small umbrella, or Umbel of sparse legs.

With the Paint Brush Method, the dubbing is brought up to the that sharp shoulder of thread only. The thread is worked through the hackle without trapping fibers. At the same time all the soft hackle is folded back. Carefully make a thread dam of wraps in front of the umbel. On small patterns the thread is used to form a head and whip finished behind the eye. On larger patterns you may need to add a little thorax colored dubbing and then the thread head whip finish.

The Paint Brush method can be fairly difficult on small 18 and 20 patterns, but it may be the only way you can find the proper length hackle legs without the hackle feathers being so delicate that they break on you with other techniques. Also if you do not buy your partridge and grouse on a skin, it will be hard to find small feathers in those bulk bags. Many of the feathers will go to waste if you do not learn a trick on how to use them.

Lucky

Selected Soft Hackle Patterns

notes by Lucky, SDFF, January 2009

Notice most of these soft hackles are tied on curved scud hooks. The heavier wire, 2X Heavy, help provide weight on the nymphs.



Starling and Herl Nymph



Yallerhammer Soft Hackle – a PMD pattern, in 16 and 18



Grey Soft Hackle and Herl Nymph



Yellow Cat and Partridge – a PMD pattern in 16 and 18



Blue Quill Wet Fly – Blue Dun (Grey) with a slip of duck quill for a wet fly swing.



Hot Spot Tups – for Pale Evening Dun emergers, in 16 and 18
Remember the pink /orange “Tups color” was originally from urine stained rams wool, shaved from the testes of a breeding ram. The yellow dubbing is probably wool, fine Angora goat or rabbit.

