



Spider (Soft Hackle) Resources

Fly Tying Materials

Feathers for Hackles

Partridge: This is the European (Hungarian) Partridge, not our Ruffed Grouse. I recommend buying full skins.

Starling: Full Skins. (Most dealers carry these. Hareline and Wapsi are good brands)

Hen Necks in various colors: Dun, Ginger, Greenwell, Black, etc.

All of the genetic growers produce good hen necks but don't overlook the inexpensive Indian necks, these are often a great buy.

More exotic feathers include:

Snipe Wings

Jackdaw Scalp (Inexpensive, easy to get.)

Plover (Expensive)

Waterhen (May be hard to get. Some Quail species can be excellent substitutes. The dealers listed below may have suggestions.)

European Grouse: Loose bagged feathers are fine here.

Woodcock: Loose bagged feathers are fine.

European Jay (Beige feathers are a substitute for Dotterel)

Furs and Feathers for Bodies

Hare's Mask. Buy the full masks.

Mole Skins in natural gray.

Muskrat, Rabbit

Peacock Eyed feathers

Pheasant (Ring Neck) Tails

Silk (Very Important!)

Pearsall's is the traditional brand. It is easy to get now from many fly material suppliers.

Most popular colors: #3 Primrose, #5 Yellow, #6a Light Orange, #8 Purple, #19 Hot Orange.

Other good colors: #2 Straw, #9 Black, #10 Scarlet, #16 Olive

The special "722" wax I use on Pearsall's Silk is now available from Great Feathers and Badger Creek. (Address below)

Pearsall's spools are smaller (narrower) than standard thread spools and may not fit standard fly tying bobbins.

Wasatch Fly Tying Tools has a Small Spool Ceramic Bobbin that works perfectly with Pearsall's spools.

(Effective Spiders can also be tied with modern synthetic threads. Choose colors to match the Pearsall's silks.)

Hooks: I use the following, but there are many brands and models that will work fine. For Spider fly proportions, see the diagrams below.

Tiemco 3769 12 – 16 Tiemco 9300 14 – 18

Varivas 2400 V

Partridge L2A 14 -18 (Very Strong, Heavy Wire)

Partridge L3AS "Classic Spider" 12 -20 (A new hook that is excellent for lightly dressed flies)

Mustad R50 in 14 – 18

Tiemco 2499SPBL 12 – 16 ("Competition Style")

Favorite Spider Fly Patterns

Partridge & Hare's Ear: Hook, Size 14 & 16 Body: Hare's Ear Fur, very sparse, ribbed with fine gold wire. Hackle: Brown Partridge Back feather. Thread: Pearsall's #19 Hot Orange.

Partridge & Orange: (Dark & Light) Size 14 & 16 Body: Pearsall's #19 Hot Orange (Dark) or #6A Orange (Light), fine gold wire rib. Hackle: Brown Partridge Back.

Snipe & Purple: Size 16 Body: Pearsall's #8 Purple. Hackle: Snipe Wing Covert Feather.

Starling & Purple: Size 16 -20 Body: Pearsall's #8 Purple. (A thorax of either Mole Fur or Peacock Herl can be added if desired. Hackle: Glossy Starling Body Feather.

Waterhen Bloa: Size 14 & 16 Body: Mole Fur sparsely dubbed on Pearsall's #4 Yellow. Hackle: Waterhen Underwing Coverts.

Winter Brown: Size 14 Body: Sparse Hare's Ear on Pearsall's #6A. Hackle: Woodcock Underwing Covert. Head: Peacock Herl.

Plover & Yellow: Size 14 & 16 Body: Pearsall's #4 Yellow. Hackle: Golden Plover Wing Covert or Body Feather. (A small gold bead, gold wire rib, and thorax of Mole Fur can be added.

Hare's Ear & Plover: Size 14 & 16 Body: Pearsall's #6A lightly dubbed with Hare's Ear Fur, gold wire rib. Hackle: Golden Plover wing covert or body feather.

Iron Blue Dun: Size 16 & 18 Body: Lightly dubbed Muskrat or Mole Fur on Pearsall's # 11A. Show a couple turns of the Scarlet thread at end of body for a tag. Hackle: Jackdaw Scalp Feather or Dark Blue Dun Hen.

Greenwell Spider: Size 14 – 18 Body: Pearsall's #4 Yellow waxed with dark wax, or Pearsall's #11 Golden Olive un-waxed, Gold Wire rib. Hackle: Greenwell Hen. (Ginger with Dark Center)

Grouse and Hare's Ear: Size 14 -16 Body: Pearsall's #18 Green dubbed with Hare's Ear Fur, Gold Wire Rib. Leave a tag of thread showing. Hackle: Grouse Body Feather.

Endrick Spider: Hook, Size 12 – 16 Tiemco 2488SPBL Silk, Pearsall's # 19 Hot Orange Silk. Tail, Partridge Fibers, Short. Body, Pheasant Tail Fibers –Peacock Herl Thorax – Copper Wire Rib. Hackle, Brown Partridge Back Feather.



Snipe & Purple

Tackle Suggestions

Rods, Reels, and Lines:

Any fly rod in weights 2 – 6 will work for fishing spiders, however longer rods have an advantage in line control and fly manipulation. My preferred rod is a 10' 3 or 4 weight. Softer action, light tip rods will allow the use of lighter tippets. Use whatever reel you feel matches the rod, but I sometimes use a slightly heavier reel on longer (10') rods to balance them.

My preference in lines is for Weight Forward floaters. I find no advantage to Double Tapers and they take up more space on the reel. Any good floating WF line to match the rod should work fine, but I prefer a Long Belly type. My current choice in lines is the Wulff Long Belly Floater.

Leaders

I use 9 to 12 foot tapered leaders with 3X to 6X tippet, depending on fly size and fishing conditions. When fishing size 14 and 16 Spiders, the most common sizes, I start with a 5X tippet and 4X dropper and adjust as needed. Knotless tapered leaders are fine; however I prefer to tie my own leaders as I can control the taper more precisely. I almost always use a dropper if local regulations allow. Add the dropper at the section above the tippet. The dropper should be one "X" size larger than the tippet. For example, when using a 5X tippet, the dropper would be 4X. I like a dropper length of 3" - 6" and a tippet length of 18" – 24". Droppers can be attached by leaving a short length of leader material at the leader to tippet knot; tying a 1" – 2" loop in a 5" piece of tippet material and looping it over the leader; or using a commercially available tippet ring.

In my Formula for a 10' leader to 5X, I use Maxima Chameleon from .017 to .009 (2X) and Trout Hunter Nylon from 3X – 6X. Modify as needed.

40" .017

20" .015

8" .013

8" .012

8" .011

8" .009 (2X)

12" .008 (3X)

12" .007 (4X) Add Dropper at this Point.

18 -24" .006 (5X)

Recommended Reading

Contemporary:

Roger Fogg "Wet Fly Tying and Fishing"- 2009, Highly Recommended.

"The Art of the Wet Fly" Out of print but often available from sporting book sellers.

"A Handbook of North Country Trout Flies" Out of Print but often available from sporting book sellers.

Mike Harding "A Guide to North Country Flies" 2009 Highly Recommended.

Robert Smith "The North Country Fly: Yorkshire's Soft Hackle Tradition". The best book on the subject of Spiders and Soft Hackles; Highly Recommended.

Sylvester Nemes "The Soft Hackled Fly"

"The Soft Hackled Fly Addict"

"Two Centuries of Soft Hackled Flies"

"Soft Hackled Fly Imitations"

Dave Hughes "Wet Flies"

Historical

Edmonds & Lee "Brook and River Trouting" Available as a Reprint

T.E. Pritt "North Country Flies" Available as a Reprint

James Leisenring & Vernon "Pete" Hidy "The Art of Tying the Wet Fly & Fishing the Flymph"

Oliver Edwards "Essential Skills" DVD Series "Wet Fly Fishing on Rivers" and "Czech Nymphing, Upstream Nymphing, and North Country Spiders" are very well done and full of excellent information. Highly Recommended!

There is an excellent internet forum devoted to Spiders, Flymphs, and Soft Hackles. www.flymphforum.com

The website "William's Favorite" contains a wealth of information and detailed photographs of properly tied wingless wet flies.

www.williamsfavorite.com

Sources

The following shops carry a full range of materials and tools for tying Spiders, as well as proper tackle for fishing wet flies.

Mike Hogue / Badger Creek Fly Tying

622 West Dryden Road, Freeville, NY 13068

607-347-4946 www.eflytyer.com (Mike carries many interesting and hard to find fly tying materials)

Great Feathers

14824 York Rd. Sparks, MD. 21152

888-777-0838 www.greatfeathers.com (A "Great" Source of Spider materials and the special "722" wax)

Jim's Fly Co.

155 Campfire Lane, West Yellowstone, MT 59758

406-646-7259 www.jimsflyco.com (Large selection of Hackles and other materials)

Blue Ribbon Flies

305 Canyon Street, West Yellowstone, Montana 59758 406-646-9045 www.Blue-ribbon-flies.com

For out of print books contact David Foley Sporting Books: dryfly@snet.net 860-561-0783

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Partridge & Hare's ear



Furs and Fur Blending

Dubbing fur is a favorite subject of mine. Notice I said "fur" as I have an aversion to synthetics in trout flies. (Saltwater flies are an exception.) While I rely on relatively few furs, my palate of body materials is actually fairly broad. I am as interested in furs as I am in feathers but I have some favorites that I use most often. I seldom buy pre-blended furs as I very much prefer to process my own dubbing, as you'll see below. Fur on the skin is inexpensive and I can get just what I want with very little cost or effort.

Hare's Mask - If I was restricted to one dubbing source it would be Hare's Mask. The diversity of color, texture, length, and application contained in one mask is almost endless. One can find delicate mottled grays, long, soft gingers and tans, spiky ear fur and soft under fur. I use Hare's Mask fur for everything from Spiders to Dry Flies. Dyed or bleached masks add even more color choices. The fur from the ear, poll (forehead), and cheek are the most useful and I "process" them separately. To do this I water blend them; it's a very easy process and produces a beautiful result. Water blending can be used on almost any fur and you can mix very disparate textures and lengths. I gave up dry blending many years ago and have never looked back. Here's how.

To process a Hare's Mask, (I usually do 3 or 4 at a time, enough for several hundred flies) take a sharp pair of scissors and remove as much of the brown, mottled fur from the ears as possible. Work from the tip of the ear towards the base and get the scissors as close as you can to the skin before cutting. Collect this fur in a pile or container. Now cut all the fur from the forehead and between the eyes (poll) and keep separate. You can cut the sandy colored fur from the cheeks as well, and lastly I cut away anything else that looks useful and keep it in a separate pile, I call this "Hare's Blend". Each of these piles will be blended separately so don't mix them up.

You'll need a clean jar of about a pint capacity with a tight fitting lid, a jam jar is perfect, a small wire mesh tea strainer, (you can find these at your local Dollar Store) and some Crème Rinse Hair Conditioner, any brand is OK. Just don't use shampoo, it will make a sudsy mess! Fill the jar about half full with warm tap water, put in the Ear fur and about a teaspoon of the conditioner. Screw on the lid and shake vigorously for about 30 seconds or so, then pour the contents into the tea strainer. Swirl a bit more water in the jar to get all the fur out and pour through strainer. It will look like you have lost a good deal of the fur but it'll all be there. Keeping the fur in the strainer, rinse well under warm running tap water, then squeeze as dry as possible, remove the fur to a few layers of paper towel or newspaper, squeeze against the paper to blot up the moisture and let dry completely. Repeat with the remaining furs you have kept separate; these will give you several distinct colored/textured dubbings from a single mask. If you haven't tried this before you're in for a treat; it will be the cleanest, easiest to dub fur you can imagine and becomes almost silky in texture.

This process works with almost any fur. Mole, rabbit, muskrat, beaver, fox, and mohair, are wonderful when treated this way. You can also blend furs of different colors, textures, etc. together, or add chopped synthetics; whatever you like. For example, muskrat and fox makes a nice blend. Experiment!

Some commonly used Furs.

Muskrat - Silky bluish under fur, very easy to spin. Similar to English Water Rat but a bit finer and longer in fiber.

Beaver - Another silky under fur, denser than muskrat, Bleaches and dyes very well. Will spin the finest bodies of any easily available fur.

Fox - A very traditional dubbing fur, commonly used in Catskill School dry flies. Wide color range: tans, grays, sandy, reddish, browns, etc. Long fibered and somewhat "glassy", it spins easily. Next to Hare my personal favorite, but I don't use it as much as I once did. The pink urine burned fur from a vixen is legendary and is the traditional body material for the Hendrickson.

Otter - Very fine under fur with spiky guard hairs.

Rabbit - Easy to dub, soft under fur and guard hairs, dyes and blends easily. Available in a multitude of natural and dyed colors. The basis of most prepackaged commercial dubbing.

Mole – A very fine, short fibered fur with no guard hairs. Natural mole is an iron blue color and is a traditional substitute for English Water Rat. Also available bleached and dyed.

Angora Goat (Mohair)- A very spiky, glassy, course, long fiber dubbing similar to Baby Seal. Another favorite as it has a very bright, sparkly, look. A little harder to dub than other furs, it gives a wonderful translucent look to the fly. I use it a lot for dry spinners, a very important fly style for me. Usually available only as dyed fur, I blend several colors to get the shades I want.

Squirrel - Pine, Fox, and Gray Squirrels all have a nice under fur with soft, mottled guard hairs that give a very buggy effect when blended. Dubs easily. Pine Squirrel is very fine and similar to Water Rat.

Crewel Wool - Great stuff when teased apart and dubbed. Cheap and lots of colors. Look in craft/sewing stores.

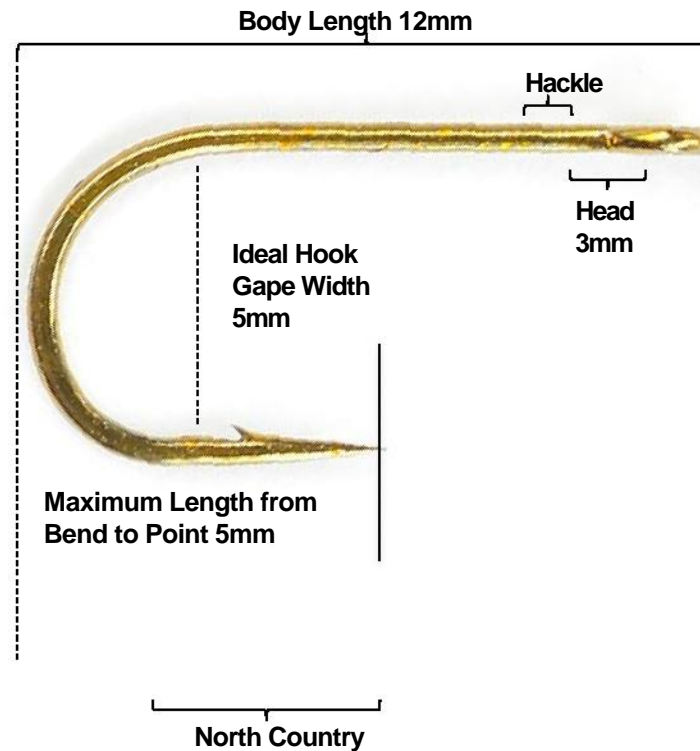
I think I might be missing one or two but that's a pretty good list of the most common dubbings. For my own tying I use Hare, Fox, Mole and Mohair most frequently.

Natural furs are my first choice as they aren't solid colors like dyed furs. I firmly believe that mottling, broken colors, etc. produce a much more killing fly than solid colors and all my flies reflect this philosophy. Even mohair, which is available only in solid colors, gets blended and may have 3 - 6 different shades in the blend.

My feelings on synthetics may not line up with most tiers today but I firmly believe they offer no advantage over natural materials. Just hold almost any color synthetic up to the light and it will show the same milky, bluish-purple hue. I do on occasion use a bit of Z-lon in spinner wings, but not very often. Also, natural materials are biodegradable so if I leave one in a fish or a tree it will decompose before too long. Plastics stay around much longer. Natural materials are just that, "natural", and in my experience more effective than synthetics when incorporated into trout flies. But perhaps most importantly I just enjoy working with real Silk, Fur, and Feathers. (To borrow a phrase from G.E.M. Skues.)

Ideal Hook Proportions

Traditional North Country Spider #14



Partridge Classic Spider L3AS

Straight eye, wide gape, Captain Hamilton bend




The Resulting Pattern Classic Spider

**PARTRIDGE
OF REDDITCH**

CLASSIC SPIDER - L3AS

Straight-eye lightweight
hook for North Country
Spiders and Soft
Hackle patterns

Sizes : #12 - #20
Bronze finish
Straight-Eye



PARTRIDGE & ORANGE

Available from:
Sportfish • Glasgow Angling • Lakeland • John Norris
Anglers Lodge • Albury • Lathkill
Lyttles of Dunchurch • Walker's of Trowell

**PARTRIDGE
OF REDDITCH**

Difference between soft hackle styles...



Proportions for Traditional North Country Spider

