

Crafting Unusual Bodkins

Take a break from tying flies, and have fun making these artful tools. *by Tom Keer*

Bodkins have become little works of art. Some have handles of exotic wood or polished metals, but I make mine using leftover scraps. They don't require a lot of time or money to make, and they add a little flair to an otherwise boring tool bin.

I got the idea to make dubbing needles from a friend, U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Tim Didas. Tim was stationed in Yuma, Arizona, where he found a small piece of saguaro cactus—that's the cactus that stands like a scarecrow. He pulled off a section of the dried cactus rib, and cleaned off the dirt and grime. Next, he drilled a pinhole in the end of the rib, epoxied a needle in place, and applied a few coats of varnish to the handle. The color of the cactus handle is an exquisite light brown, and it was a wonderful Christmas present.

While my exploits are far less dramatic than those of my friend in the marines, I have made several bodkins using a variety of materials. My favorite is crafted from the tip of an old split-cane fly

rod. I noticed the tip section in the corner of an antiques shop, but there was no mid or butt section. It was a tired old piece, with alligatored varnish and a set that would add new meaning to the term "curve cast." While

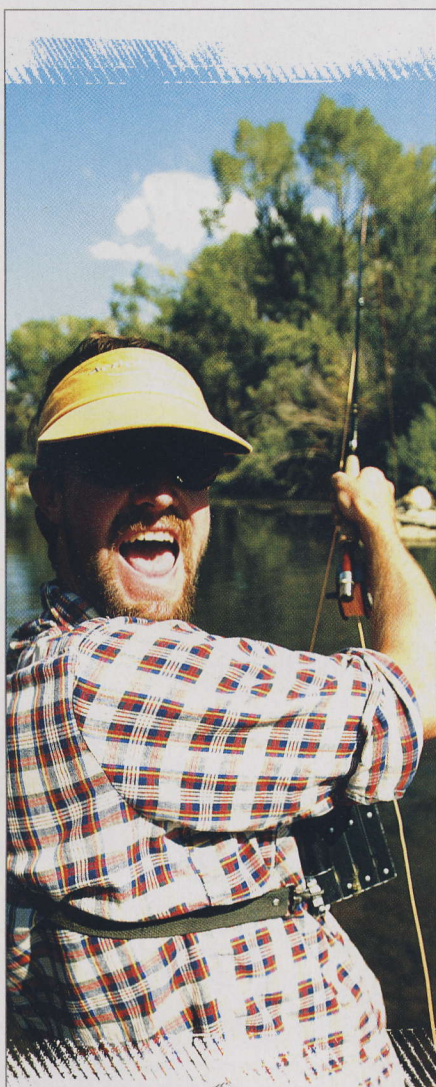
the section was unusable for fishing, it was perfect for making a few bodkins, and it cost only a buck.

I played around with different versions of bamboo-handled bodkins. On one I removed the snake guide, and then sanded and varnished the cane; on another, I left the old guide and thread wraps intact. A friend of mine dressed up a third bodkin by installing a diminutive cork handle to make the entire thing look like a miniature fly rod.

A broken graphite rod tip also works like a champ. Like most tiers, I store a bodkin with the pointed end down so I don't get stabbed when reaching for the tool. The tip-top guide is easy to see and grasp when I need to use my bodkin. You can recycle many other materials into artful bodkins that will make you smile every



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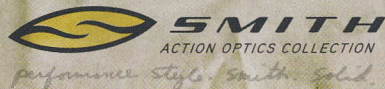


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time you apply a drop of head cement to a fly.

Construction Tips

A small drill bit is the only tool you'll need to make your own bodkins. Some bits are quite small in diameter—about the thickness of a piece of 50-pound-test fluorocarbon. Your local hobby shop is a good source of small drill bits. A sewing or craft store carries a wide variety of small solid needles suitable for making into bodkins. Toss in a tube of Gorilla Glue for working with wooden handles or five-minute epoxy for graphite, and you're set.

First, stabilize the handle in a tool-bench vise; even the smallest amount of movement while drilling will send the tip of the bit through the side wall of the handle. Move the drill deliberately, and at a high speed so that you get a clean cut.

The depth of the hole isn't so relevant. You want it to be deep enough to hold the needle in place securely, but let's face it: you'll be teasing some dubbing or applying cement, not towing a boat. In a wooden handle, a 1/4-inch-deep hole is usually ample. A dab of Gorilla Glue or five-minute epoxy secures the needle in place. Be sure to wipe off all excess glue before it sets.

Using the tip of a broken graphite rod is a bit more complicated. You won't have to drill a hole to fit the needle, but you will want to polish the broken end. Lay a piece of 100- or 150-grit sandpaper on your workbench, and rub the broken end of the tip on the paper until it is even and smooth. Note that the needle will slide all the way inside the graphite if you let it. To prevent that from happening, tamp a pinch of cotton into the hole, leaving only enough space to accept the needle. Next, insert and glue the needle in the end of the handle. Allow the glue to dry, and you're good to go.

The sky's the limit when it comes to making bodkins. Chances are you'll have almost as much fun crafting tools as you do tying flies. ■

This is Tom Keer's first submission to our magazine. Tom lives in Massachusetts.

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