

Lower-cost Fly Tying Alternatives

This past April, at the Washington State Council FFI Casting event in Lake Ballinger, WA, several excellent fly tiers were demonstrating their skills and visiting with the attendees. It was interesting to listen to people talk about how and why they started tying flies. No one said it was to save money. (If any one believes you save money by tying your own flies, do I have a deal for you!) As the day progressed, many people said they were just starting out in fly fishing, which is expensive. Coupling that with starting to tie flies, made it really expensive.

Tiers who were demonstrating their skills also talked about the cost of fly-tying tools, material, and hooks. They all agreed prices have skyrocketed as of late. However, most were not too concerned because they all had more than enough material to last a lifetime. Only occasionally, did they have to buy some material or hooks.

We talked a bit more about what could be done to help people who are starting out in a very exciting, rewarding, and, at times, relaxing hobby of fly tying. A suggestion was had to write a series of short articles on fly tying alternatives to reducing cost. The idea is to start out articles in the WSCFFI Newsletter and then, hopefully generate some enthusiasm over the next year to start generating a monthly article which will be posted on our website (wscffi.org) and our social media accounts. Initially, we would be focusing on alternative materials.

So let begin, 90% plus of all flies tied are on hooks. There are numerous other options on which you can tie on flies. (You can make you own hooks; but, I do not think it the most cost effective when you are just starting to tie flies.)

These are a few of the you have for tying flies on:

- 1) Tube flies (a fly tied on a hollow tube)
- 2) Shank (just a straight piece of metal with an eye, no barb but you attached a hook to it)
- 3) Waddington shank (special type of Shank, no barb but you attached a hook to it)
- 4) Tying a fly directly onto a leader than attach a hook to the leader

All these methods still require you to have a hook, but you have the option to buy a much cheaper non fly tying hook. From the list above, there are so many excellent articles on tube flies on the internet, you could get up the learning curve so much quicker from watching a few of these videos. Once you see what you are trying to accomplish, you will figure out all the different alternatives for generating your own tubes (hint, Q-tips work great or any small diameter hollow plastic tubing) In a similar fashion, Waddington shanks can be made quite easily, except there is an out lay of approximately \$100 to buy jewelers loopers and a few other tools. Not only are you able to make you own Waddington shanks with this tool you can use it to make articulated spines for game changers, wiggle tail nymphs and articulated saltwater flies. Again there are excellent videos on the internet that will walk you through the process.

BY now, you might be questioning if all I am going to do is tell you there are great videos on the internet. Well, this is where the rubber meets the road. I really enjoy tying flies on “shanks” and I enjoy the latitude to make “shanks” to any desire length as well as heighten my creative. In addition, I will discuss how to make articulated spines at a fraction of the cost to buy a set. The entry cost for building these “shanks/articulated spines” is by far the cheapest. You only need three tools: (cost is less than \$40)

- 1) Jeweler Looping Pliers
- 2) Flat Nose pliers
- 3) Wire cutters
- 4)

Materials required is just thin diameter Stainless Wire (0.015”-0.030”). This can be trolling wire, SS wire from the hardware store, etc. etc.

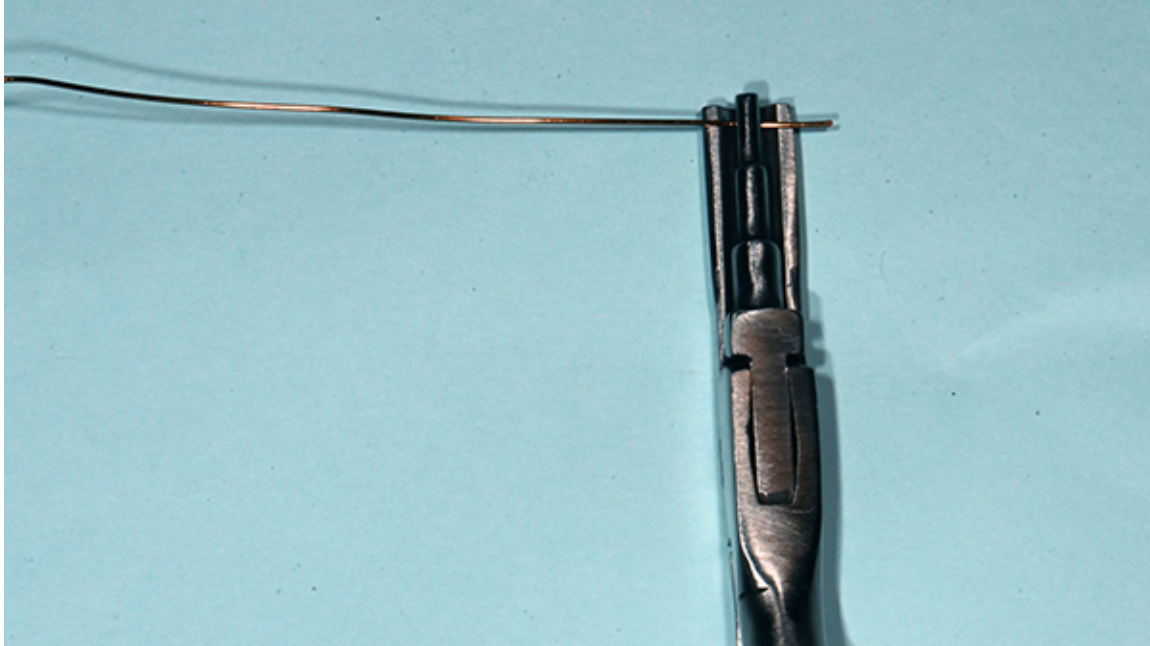


Right tool- Flat Nose pliers: Center tool is Looping pliers: Far left is a pair of Wire Cutters

To make a simple shank it is extremely easy and one can master the technique in a couple minutes!

Step #1

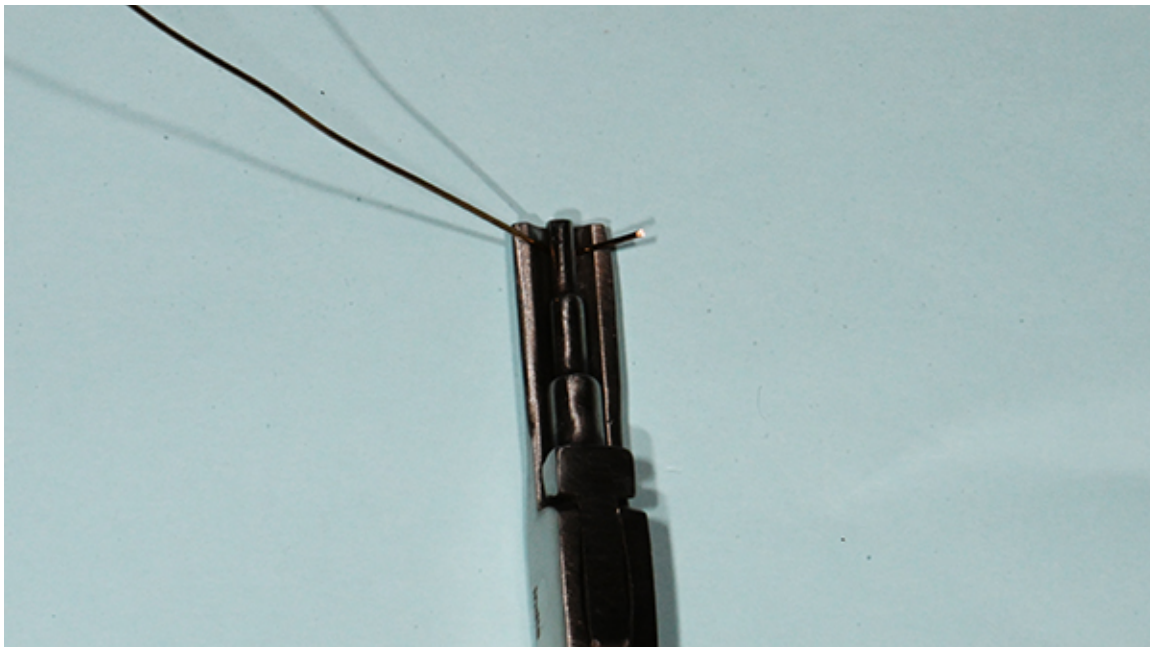
Place the small diameter SS wire across the looping pliers. Adjust the overhang on to be about 10mm.



Please note that the wire is positioned in such a manner that when you squeeze the wire will start to form a loop.

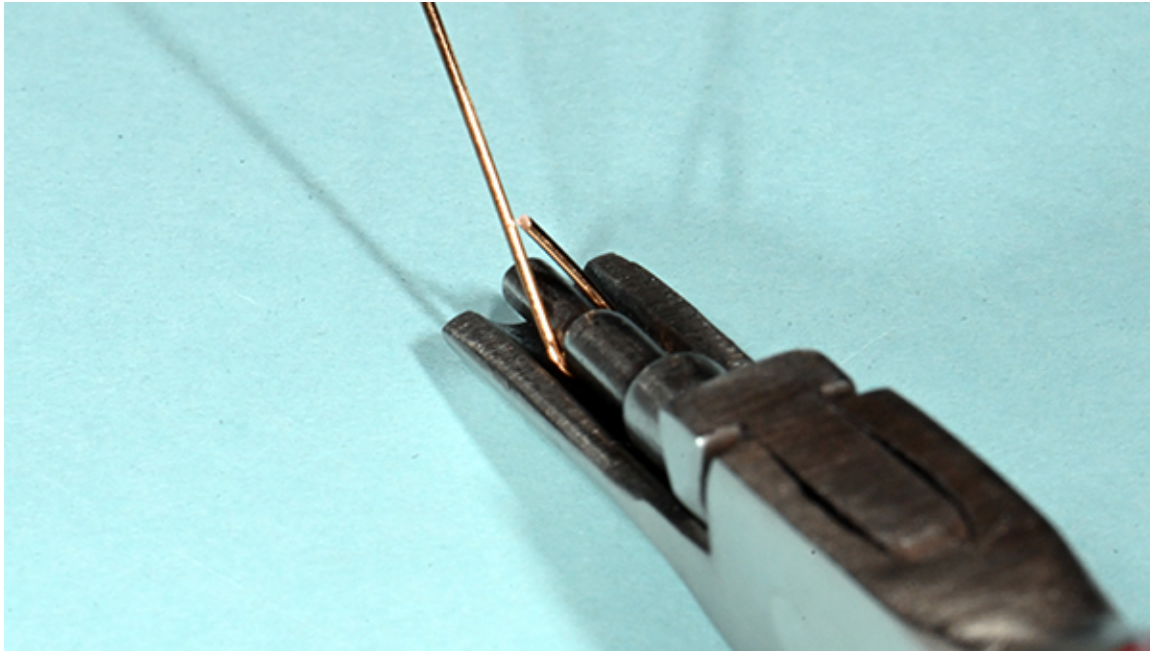
Step #2

Just squeeze the pliers. The wire will be forced down into the concaved base of the pliers. ,This is the starting point in forming the eye of your shank.



Step #3

With your hand just squeeze the wire a little more to close the gap between the wire leads. This step is not necessary but I find it helps with the next step.

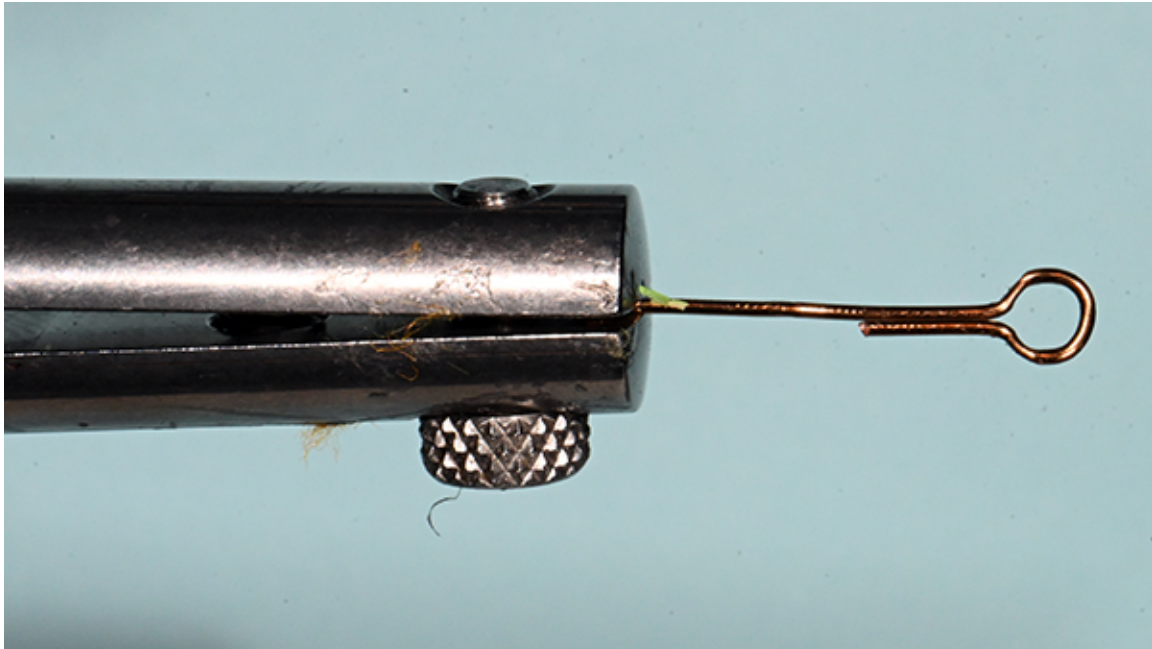


Step #4

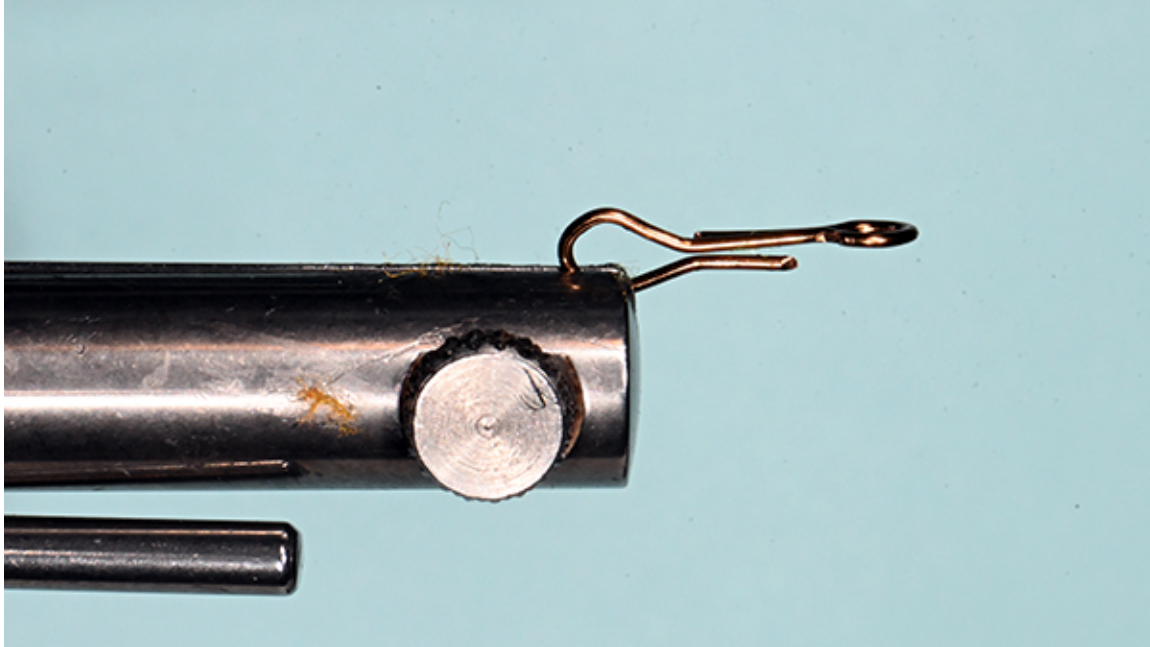
Using the Flat Nose pliers squeeze the wire leads together. This step complete the eye of your shank. All that remains to cut the wire to your desire length and cut any excess wire at the eye of you shank.



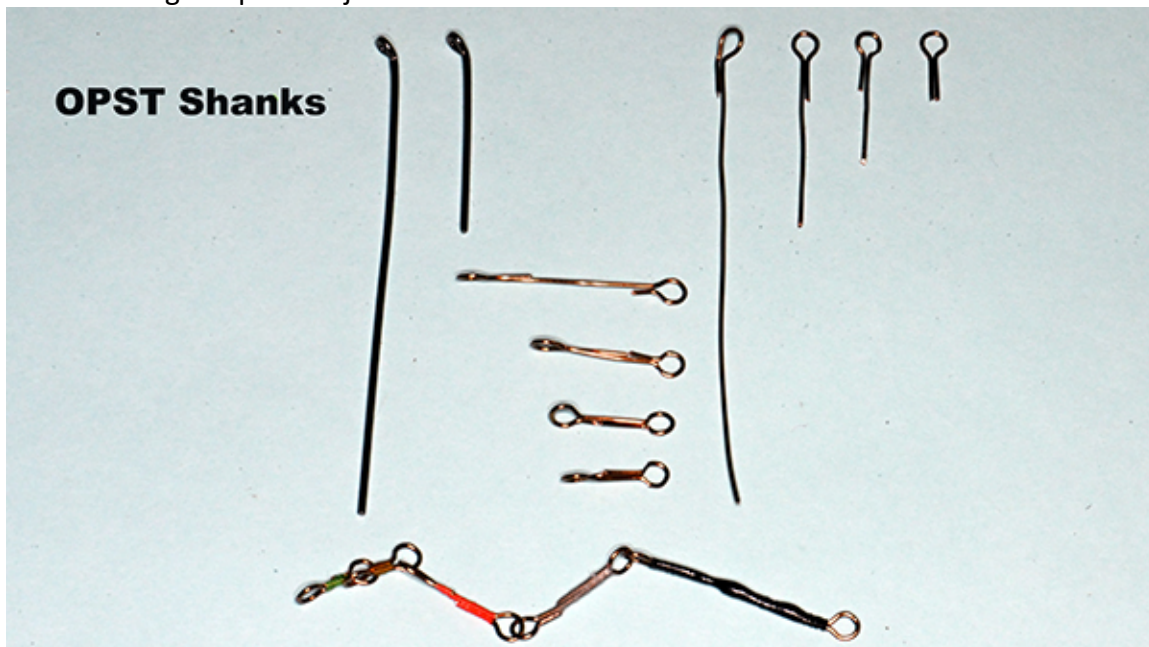
This is the shank that was created from the above sequence.



To make an articulated spine you follow exact same sequence above after you make eye, except you rotate the wire in the looping pliers to be 90 degrees from the eye of the hook. (see picture below)



In the picture below are two commercial shanks and a series of shanks and articulated spinres created using the process just described.



The fly below is nothing special, since I had the shank in my vise, I decided to tie a fly with whatever material was left on my desk at the time. Just a very simple fly tied on a shank I made.



Hint: All Stainless Steel wire is not the same, some are a little softer than other and tend to bend a little easier. On the other hand getting wire which is very stiff can creates other problems. You may have to see what available locally. Trolling wire is usually a good starting point.