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# Rod Building Basics

by John Allen    photos by the author

Customization puts fishing on a more personal level. Rod building allows an angler to customize a rod to meet their own personal preferences.

You will need a rod blank, butt handle and end cap (not needed for a fly rod), reel seat, fore grip handle, guides and tip top. The most important step when you get the rod is to find the spine. Hold the butt end of the rod, push the tip against the floor and then spin the rod in your fingers. You should notice that the rod stays bent in one direction. This is the spine. For a spinning and fly rod, mark the inside of the curve. For a casting rod, mark the outside of the curve. This signifies where to align the reel seat and guides. For multiple piece rods, do this with each piece.

Next you will need a rod jig, a round file, 1-inch masking tape, epoxy, thread of your choice, a razor blade, a small mixing cup, a small stirring stick, a small stiff paint brush and a finishing epoxy.

The rod jig is used to place the rod on while you wrap the guides and apply the finishing coat. Most builders will use a jig that can adjust on the sides, and has a station that provides tension to the thread. When it comes to applying the finish, you will replace one of the resting slots with a slow turning motor. This allows the finishing coat to go on evenly and come out looking professional.

The round file is used when the cork needs to be reamed, so that it can slide into position on the blank. When putting on the reel seat, you will notice that the seat does not fit snug to the blank. You will need to wrap 2 to 4 sections (depending on the size of the reel seat) of masking tape around the blank until the reel seat fits snug. The masking tape will also be used to temporarily place your guides on the blank before you wrap them. When deciding where to place the guides, either look at another rod with the same dimensions or at a guide spacing chart that can be found on most blank manufacturer's web sites.

The epoxy is used to bond the handles and reel seat to the rod blank. You can also use the epoxy for putting on the tip top or you can use special glue that can be found with rod repair items in most sporting goods stores.

When selecting thread, keep in mind the thread will almost always come out a little darker than it appears, so it helps to sometimes go a shade lighter. Wrapping the guides is the hardest part of rod building and takes a few practice tries. Once all of the guides have been wrapped, I personally like to make inch markers going up the blank from the fore grip to the first guide.

The razor blade is essential when wrapping the guides. It allows you to make a clean cut of the thread once you

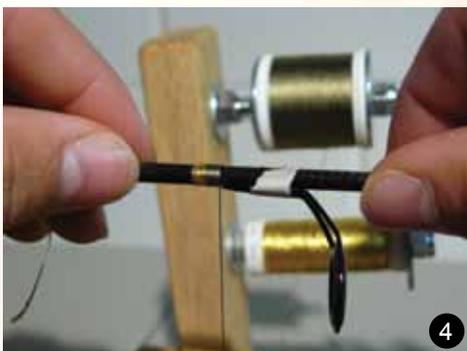
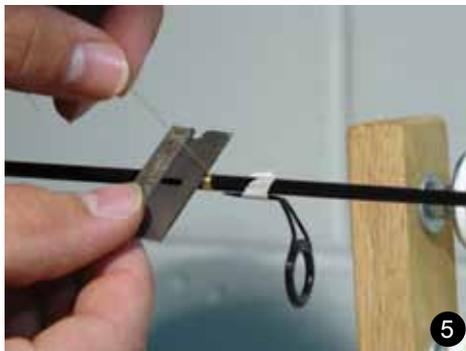
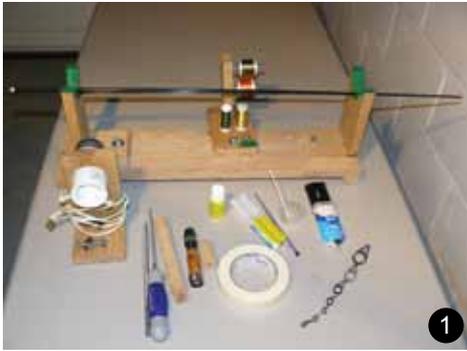
have finished wrapping a guide. Any little tag will show up when you put on the finishing coat. Before applying the finishing coat, I add my signature to the rod using model paint and a tooth pick.

The mixing cup, stirring stick, paint brush and finishing epoxy will all be used together. Combine equal parts of the epoxy into the mixing cup. When stirring the epoxy, try not to lift the stirring stick. This will create air bubbles in the

epoxy. Once the epoxy has been mixed, let it stand for a few minutes to allow any bubbles in the mixture to rise to the top. Apply the finish with the paint brush, making sure to coat all of the thread. It is better to put on two light coats of the finish, so that you do not put on too much in certain areas. I let the first application dry overnight before adding a second coat. About 30 minutes after a coat, look for air bubbles. If you find any, go over the area with a hair dryer on low power until the air bubbles go away. Once the second coat has dried, give the rod a few days to fully cure before fishing with it.

After learning the basics of rod building, you can build a professional-looking rod that you can be proud of. ☐

Once you land that first fish on it, all you have to do is look at the signature to remind yourself that this is your rod.



- 1 The key to building custom rods with a professional appearance is having all of the right equipment.
- 2 Finding the spine of the rod is the most important step in rod building.
- 3 Apply masking tape to the blank until the reel seat fits snug.
- 4 When starting out, wrapping the guides is the most challenging part of rod building.
- 5 Using a razor blade eliminates tags that will show up when you put on the finishing coat.
- 6 Adding your signature to the rod really makes it your rod.
- 7 When applying the finish, make sure to coat all of the thread on the rod.
- 8 Give the rod a few days to fully cure before taking it out on a fishing trip.

