Making Tubes

By Ray Rigby

Before I get into the details of making tubes, let me remind everyone that this is not something that is going to make you rich, however with that said I will say this. You will be richer spiritually for your accomplishment and the feel of a fish on your line is the icing on the cake for your efforts, nothing sweeter than catching a fish on something you made yourself.

The first thing you need to obtain is patience. You will mess up often when first starting out, and this is to be expected so don't be discouraged and quit. Once you get the patience needed to carry out your quest to make your own tubes, hit the nearest commercial Restaurant equipment supplier and buy a reconditioned deep fryer, commercial grade works best as it allows more plastic at one time to be cooked, it is taller and skinnier than the store bought brands. When making your purchase make sure it has a temperature control on it, this is critical in the consistency of your plastic.

Once you have obtained your deep fryer you should then hit the local lumber yard for your next purchase. Purchase a piece of quarter inch plywood, purchase 50 quarter inch gutter spikes and a tube of epoxy(Two part works best) Then purchase a can of engine enamel. You didn't think this was going to be easy did you? Once you have made your purchase, head home to the garage and get started. First thing you need to do is measure the opening of your deep fryer, once this is complete make yourself a template out of cardboard, make it one inch smaller in diameter than your fryer. Take your piece of plywood you purchased and lay your template on there, mark it and cut it. Once you have your first circular piece of wood get a quarter inch drill bit and drill holes in a circular fashion around your piece of round wood, make the holes approximately two inches apart and get as many of them on there as possible.

Once this is done start putting your spikes thru it and add a touch of glue to each one (Epoxy) this keeps them from moving around. Once you have this done, grab that engine enamel and spray the spikes liberally. Let them dry. Now your half way there. Now that you have got this far, your in to deep to turn back now. Take an old screen door handle and fasten it to the top of your new contraption (Tube Dipper) this make it easier to hold onto. Now that it is complete, take a permanent marker and mark your rods for the size of tubes you want, or you can simply play around and make them as you see fit. Now that you have the most important parts finished comes the plastic.

I personally use Lure Craft 500 series salt water plastic; it is tough and holds up real well to fish and the elements. Selecting colors is your next task. Once you pick the colors you want to make, remember that the coloring is highly concentrated and does not take much to achieve your desired results, although trial and error will get you what you want, plus it's fun. The other most important part of your plastisol is, heat stabilizer and salt. The stabilizer allows for long periods of cooking plastic and the salt adds the consistency you are looking for in your tube. I personally use popcorn salt, which can be purchased from any bakery supplier at a very reasonable cost. Now that you have accumulated everything you need, let's get it cooking.

For the novice or beginner I recommend that you cook the plastic uncolored, this will make it easier for you to distinguish the color you are looking for, the one thing you need to remember is, what you see uncooked is not what you get cooked, totally two different colors. Once the plastisol reaches a clear liquid state, which should be cooked at 320 degrees, add your coloring and fleck accordingly, once this is complete, add your salt until you feel you have enough to satisfy you, cause remember this is who you are doing it for. Now that you have everything mixed together, let's get them dipped. Lower your tube dipper in the plastic until it reaches your predetermined mark or until you are happy with the size. Lift it just above the plastic until it is almost completely stopped dripping and then turn it upside down, this gives you your rounded head. Wait a few seconds and dip again to achieve the head size you want (or body size, however you choose to call it) repeat the upside down thing again, now for the finishing touches, one last dip and repeat the upside down process, once this is complete I lower mine into a bucket of cold water, this quickens the cooling process and let's you handle them much quicker.

Okay now you have your tube, how are you going to cut the tails? Well I will tell you. I took a piece of U shaped aluminum about 4-5 inches long, I then drilled holes thru the sides of it. After you have done this take some machine keys (This is my preference and others may use something else) and glue them inside the U shaped aluminum at the desired distance you want the thickness of your tails, then purchase some American Brand utility blades, I choose these because they already have holes thru the center of the blade, which makes it easier for the aluminum contraption I just made. Once the glue dries on the aluminum place the blades in there at the desired distance and take a cotter pin and run it thru the holes you drilled and thru the holes already in place in the blades, this will hold them securely in place.

Now for the actual cutting. Take a piece of 1X6 wood and lay your tube on it, you then take your new tube cutter and press down with the blades into the plastic tail part of the tube, do not drag your cutter thru the tail as this will just tear the tube tail. I know this sounds like an expensive process, it is not, I have less than $100.00 in the whole set-up, besides once you purchase everything the sky is the limit on what you can create with your tubes. One other little idea you might want to incorporate into your tube cutter. Take a piece of soft rubber, self adhesive and place the soft side up on the back of the tube cutter, trust me you will wear blisters on your fingers and thumbs if not.

I hope I have answered any questions you have on making your own tubes. If not don't hesitate to give me an e-mail. I will be more than happy to help you out.