

TRIMMING AND SHAPING TURKEY POINTER FEATHERS

The most commonly available feathers on the market for making traditional bustles are domestic turkey feathers. The wing pointers are the most resistant to breakage and can be trimmed and shaped to look like those of the hawk or the eagle. The pointers come in all white, or dyed colors of brown, black, as well as just the dyed tips. Turkey pointers can be straightened and shaped to look like eagle pointers by following these suggestions.

The dye process used for the brown and the black is tough on the feathers so expect to do more steaming and repair on those feathers than the others.

If the blade of the feather is damaged, use a steaming pot on a stove to heat and steam the damaged part, then smooth back into shape by stroking between your thumb and forefinger. Repeat until repaired.

There are a number of methods used by crafters over the years and all of them involve a heat source. So this is a project that requires your personal safety and supervision of young folks trying it. One of the safest ways is to use an iron, keeping your hands away from the heat. The work is done on a table or ironing board with an old terry cloth towel as the ironing surface.

The first step (Photo 1) is to heat the quill on the underside of the feather. Stroke the tip of your iron along the quill until it is quite warm.

Then turn the feather so it is facing up (Photo 2) and now stroke the quill, giving the most heat to the thicker part of the quill. Slightly pull up on the quill base of the feather, leveraging the middle to top against the towel surface. With experience you will know when enough heat has built up. If the blade edges have curled slightly with the heat, turn the feather over and stroke the edge of the blade flat. (Photo 3)

Quickly move the hot feather to a cool surface to bring down the temperature. For very curved feathers, before it cools flex the quill backwards against the curve and it will straighten better. You may then have to re-iron the blade edge one last time. Leave them flat overnight between two boards with weights on them.

Most pointers will come with the tips a bit torn or tattered. Always plan to trim the tips back to a clean shape as shown in our drawing. (Figure 1) This will make them stronger against breakage when used in a bustle. Trim the feather by using a sharp scissors, beginning at the tip and cut to the desired shape until you get to the bottom of the feather.

For bustles, finish preparing the feather by adding loops at the base of the quill. You can use leather tabs for this, or tear resistant plastic. Cut the tabs 2 inches long and about 1/4 inch wide.

Trim off the pointed tips or a soft end of the feather quill, and cut to a solid place in the quill where it is stiff. Use contact cement or tacky glue on both the quill base and the tab. Let dry to tacky then contact them together as shown in Figure 2. Wrap tightly with heavy thread or simulated sinew.

Tip fluffs and horse hair can be glued on with contact cement or tacky glue without wrapping. Just use a toothpick to put the glue in the desired spot on the feather. Also put a drop of glue on the tip fluff base or around the base of a small bundle of horse hair. Let dry until sticky, then contact them in place.

If the pointers get roughed up in use, try steaming over a hot kettle to smooth them out again.

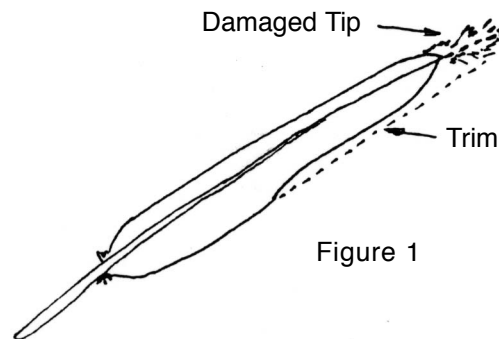


Figure 1



Photo 1 - Heat the quill on the underside of feather.



Photo 2 - Turn feather over and stroke the top of the quill, giving most heat to the thicker part of the quill.



Photo 3 - If the blade curls, flatten with the hot iron on both sides.

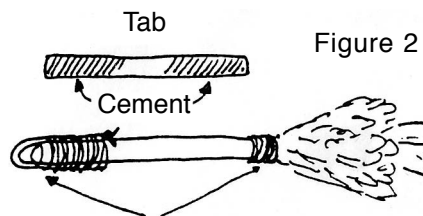


Figure 2