



# Which Rope Should I Use?

If you ask a dozen riggers, you will get fifteen answers to this question. It comes down to preference, as each kind of rope has benefits and drawbacks.

Here are our core criteria:

1. Ease of purchase (expense, availability)
2. Aesthetics (color, thickness, comfort, scent)
3. Ease of cleaning
4. Characteristics of Rope
  - Strength: how much weight the rope can bear, and how it reacts when overloaded
  - Elasticity: how much the rope stretches under tension (when force is applied to elastic rope, ties may sag or loosen)
  - Tooth: how much friction the rope has (when force is applied to low tooth rope, knots may come undone)
  -

## **Multi-Filament Polypropylene (also called MFP or nylon)**

What to Look For:

1/4 inch or 1/8 inch thick with a soft bendable texture. Avoid rope with a "core," which means it is braided around other material to add stiffness. 1/2 inch or "solid core" MFP is too stiff to tie easily. There are two types of MFP: twist and braid. You can tell the twist because it separates into three or four smaller strands of rope when you untwist it; braid does not separate. The brightly colored rope in hardware stores as "polypropylene rope" is either too thick or too stiff (plastic or solid core), making it difficult to use.

## Benefits:

- 1. Inexpensive/Easy to Get:** You can buy white twisted or braided MFP at most hardware stores for around 50 cents per foot, making it the perfect starter rope if you're not sure you want to invest in rope as a long-term kink yet. Many dollar stores and home stores also carry 1/8 inch MFP clothesline.
- 2. Dyeable:** The white MFP from hardware stores is easy to dye. You can find it in bright colors online or dye it yourself with regular fabric dye (like RIT). This makes them fun for decorative work.
- 3. Comfort:** Soft against the skin. The larger diameter of 1/4 inch MFP means more comfort for the bottom.
- 4. Washable:** The biggest benefit of synthetics is that they're machine washable between uses, making it valuable for fluid contact scenes (gags, crotch ropes) and use on multiple partners. Don't use bleach; it damages the rope. the vanilla world, or even more so). Based on my experience it is well worth it!

## Drawbacks:

- 1. Unclear Vendor Information:** Online hardware stores and other non-kink retailers are often unclear about core, thickness, and texture.
- 2. Low Tooth:** Synthetics are slippery and need more twists and knots, adding bulk and complexity to the tie.
- 3. Larger Diameter:** 1/4 inch MFP, the most commonly available, can add bulk to knots.
- 4. High Elasticity:** A squirmy bottom may be able to wiggle out if they pull hard enough, and weight bearing ties may sag significantly.

## Cotton

### What to Look For:

If possible, find 100% cotton. Some "cotton" rope is, in fact, solid braid rope with a synthetic core that may not be flexible enough for most knots and ties. However, some solid braid cotton ropes are perfectly suitable. When possible, handle any solid braid cotton rope yourself before making a purchasing decision. It may be difficult to find cotton rope larger than 1/8 inch diameter without going online.

### Benefits:

- 1. Inexpensive:** Solid-braid cotton clothesline is starting to go out of vogue, but you can still sometimes find 25ft packs of 1/8 inch at dollar stores, camping stores, etc. for very little money, making it the cheapest option. Larger diameters are available online.
- 2. Moderate Tooth:** It doesn't "grab" as well as hemp or jute, but cotton cord has more friction than nylon or MFP for ties and turns that depend on friction to hold together.
- 3. Bleachable:** You can wash and bleach 100% cotton, making it good for tying up multiple partners or in fluid contact scenes. Cotton/MFP blends are washable, but do not bleach them.
- 4. Dyeable:** Fabric dye takes beautifully to cotton rope, making it a good decorative choice.

### Drawbacks:

- 1. High Elasticity:** Cotton is even more stretchy than MFP (especially when damp), so weight-bearing ties may distort or come loose. Knots may also tighten, making them impossible to undo by hand.
- 2. Strength:** Cotton is not strong enough for full suspension, and should be avoided for weight-bearing rope work.
- 3. Hard to Find:** Because synthetics have become so inexpensive, and cotton rots in wet weather, plastic and MFP clothesline are what most campers and homeowners are buying. You can still find cotton, but it may take a hunt.

# Hemp

## What to Look For:

Hemp usually is measured by the metric system. The most common diameters are 4mm (approximately 1/6 inch), 6mm (1/4 inch), and 8mm (1/3 inch). Most rope bondage is done with 6mm rope, although some artists prefer 8mm for men or larger women. Look for hemp rope through kink vendors (locally or online). Bleaching reduces the strength of hemp, so only purchase dyed hemp for suspension if you know it hasn't been bleached. (This may limit you to darker colors.)

## Benefits:

- 1. High Tooth:** You can do with a few twists what would take knots in other rope, because the friction is high enough to hold when hemp comes into contact with itself. Hemp loses its tooth as it ages, softening, but even worn out hemp has more tooth than most synthetics.
- 2. Strength:** Safe for suspension, but avoid using bleached or worn rope (identifiable by its relative softness). Softer hemp should be relegated to floor work.
- 3. Low stretch:** Good for suspension and other high-stress ties, as hemp holds its shape under stress.
- 4. Distinctive smell:** The horsey odor of hemp is a sensual part of the scene for many riggers and bottoms.

## Drawbacks:

- 1. Price:** Expect to pay \$1.00 to \$2.00 per foot for good hemp.
- 2. Availability:** Hemp growth is restricted in the U.S., so there are occasional shortages where you just can't get it. You may need to buy online or make your own.
- 3. Distinctive smell:** For some, the hemp odor is off-putting and they never do get used to it.

**4. Color restriction:** It is hard to get bright, vibrant colors on hemp without bleaching it, which weakens it, making it unsafe for suspension and prone to wear. Hemp does not photograph as well as dyed MFP or Jute.

**5. Cleaning:** The only way to clean or sanitize hemp is to leave it out in direct sun for a few days, which allows UV rays to kill infectious organisms. You might want a separate set of ropes for fluid-bonded partners.

## Jute

What to Look For:

Like hemp, jute uses metric measurements; see that section for conversions.

Benefits:

**1. High Tooth:** Like hemp, jute grabs onto itself and often a twist or wrap will suffice where synthetic rope needs a bulky knot to stay put.

**2. Strength:** Jute is appropriate for suspension until it becomes worn and soft, or areas of uneven wear develop.

**3. Color:** Jute can hold a much brighter color than hemp, and jute has sharper tones, so light and shadow on jute are very well defined. This makes it an excellent choice for photography.

**4. Low odor:** Jute has a slight smell, similar to straw, but some dyes leave an acrid smell.

**5. Low-stretch:** Similar to hemp.

Drawbacks:

**1. Price:** Expect to pay \$1.50-\$2.00 per foot for good jute.

**2. Cleaning:** The only way to clean jute is to leave it in sunlight for a day. You might have a separate set of jute for your fluid-bonded partners along with a "public" set for tying others.

## Silk

What to Look For:

Silk is generally available in 6mm and 8mm diameters.

Benefits:

- 1. Hypoallergenic:** Some people who cannot tolerate other natural fibers on their skin won't react to silk rope.
- 2. Sensuality:** Silk rope is soft and sensual on the skin.
- 3. Colors:** Silk takes color beautifully. If you're dyeing your own, use specialty silk dyes for the best color.
- 4. Washability:** Silk rope can be hand-washed in cool water and air dried. The colors tend to bleed, so be careful.

Drawbacks:

- 1. Price:** Expect to pay \$1.50-\$2.00 per foot
- 2. Stretch:** Silk rope has a lot of stretch, and so ties under stress (including suspension) may distort.
- 3. Odor:** Raw silk has a distinctive odor that may be unpleasant for some people.
- 4. Animal Product:** Silk is produced by insects, so vegans and those squeamish about bugs may object to wearing it. When negotiating a scene, make sure potential rope partners know you're using silk.

## Other Material

Sisal (sometimes sold as Manila):

Don't use. The fibers in sisal rope can cause rashes and infections when slivers penetrate the skin and break off.

Coconut Fiber Rope (also called Coir):

For masochists! Coconut Rope is somewhat hard to find, but is worth it for the extremely rough texture. While useful for sensation play, it has too much tooth for complicated rope work and is too weak for safe suspension.

Manila Rope:

Warning: Sisal is sometimes dyed and mislabeled as manila. Manila is less likely to splinter than sisal, but because of its large diameter (and the risk of purchasing sisal by mistake), is generally unsuitable for bondage.

Linen Rope:

Not used by us (yet). Have you used this?

Bamboo Rope:

Not used by us (yet). Have you used this?

## **In The End: A Note on Ends**

No matter what rope you buy, cut ends need to be finished to keep from fraying. Synthetic ropes can be burned (actually melted) with a lighter, but natural fiber ropes must be knotted or stitched. For small diameter rope, a simple knot at the end will do it. Knots make it faster to attach ropes together, but if you do a lot of fast tying, the knots may catch on things as you pull through. For smooth ends, consider whip stitching them. To whip stitch synthetic rope, you can use nylon cord or embroidery floss. For natural fiber, you can also use twine. [This video](#) shows three common techniques. Written instructions can be found in any scouting manual or book on nautical knots as well as many kink resources.

## **What do you think?**

Everyone has a favorite rope, and lots of good reasons for choosing it.