

Kolker's Guide to Different Types of Rope

The most common fibers used for bondage are Hemp, Jute, Nylon, MFP, and Cotton. Hemp and jute are usually associated with traditional eastern-style bondage, while nylon, MFP and cotton are usually associated with traditional western-style bondage. There are so many more possibilities out there though, so try different ropes and go with what looks & feels right for you.

Natural fibers

Hemp, Jute, flax linen

Flexible, rough texture, high friction, low stretch, moderate durability, good strength

Very popular with rope enthusiasts, these fibers have great grip and are very easy to tie with. Hemp is widely available and has a unique scent. Jute is smoother and lighter than hemp, and compresses more easily. Linen (flax) is the softest of this group.

Hemp grown and made in Romania and imported, and usually could be considered 100% organic because of the way they grow and process it. Where as Jute often has a Batch Processing Oil distillate embedded in it that needs to be dealt with before it can become good bondage rope. Breaking strength of hemp is often "rated" at 400 pounds for 6mm, with 200 pounds at the smaller common 4mm, and upwards of 800-1200 pounds for the 8mm (depending on who is "rating" it). Hemp shrinks a bit (as much as 10% when wet, which you can use to your advantage) and can be carefully washed as needed.

Jute is lightweight, fast to tie with, photographs well with its sheen, and is a week rope, with ratings running from 175-200 pounds per 6mm, and with craftsmen homemade rope or loose lay asian lay, possibly even less. Choose this rope carefully once you know its strengths and weaknesses. This is a RACK aware type rope to play with. Jute is grown and made in India, though maybe sold via Japan, it is Indian in origin.

Cotton

Flexible, soft texture, moderate friction, moderate stretch, low durability, low to moderate strength
Often marketed as clothesline, cotton rope can be found priced as low as 50' for \$2, though higher quality cottons are stronger, more durable, and less stretchy. Its price, availability, and ease of tying make it great for beginners. Cotton is usually not recommended for suspension, with the exception of higher quality cotton with a rated breaking strength of at least 400 lbs or so. (I can get this kind of rated 3 stranded cotton, and have seen suspensions done with it)

Silk, Bamboo

Flexible, soft texture, moderate friction, low stretch, moderate durability, good strength
These luxury ropes combine all the best characteristics of natural and synthetic fibers, but are considerably more expensive. Silk has good grip and is somewhat similar to cotton, while bamboo has less grip but also natural anti-bacterial properties and can have a shine like nylon. Beware of the cheap "silk" rope from china often sold in sex shops, as it is mere nylon blend, no silk.

Manila, Sisal, Coir (coconut)

Stiff, harsh texture, moderate friction, low stretch, moderate durability, moderate strength, these are seldom recommended for bondage since they're stiff and splinter easily, but they're very inexpensive and sometimes enjoyed by those looking for a very sadomasochistic experience from their rope. Higher quality coir (coconut) is the most usable of this group since it's more flexible, but it's also more stretchy and is not considered strong enough for suspension.

Synthetic fibers

Nylon, paracord, MFP (multi-filament polypropylene)

Flexible, soft texture, low friction, moderate stretch, high durability, very high strength
These popular synthetics are inexpensive, easy to clean, and available in a wide variety of colors. Nylon very soft, flexible, and highly durable. MFP is similar, but with more plastic texture and generally lower quality (MFP is particularly susceptible to friction damage). They lack the grip of natural fiber ropes, but their softness and flexibility make them fairly easy to work with. Paracord is technically a specialized type of nylon consisting of multiple strands inside a braided sheath, but the term is colloquially used to refer to any thin-diameter synthetic rope. Example, my 1/4" MFP is rated for 650 pounds average tensile strength.

Synthetic Hemp (Promanila, Unmanila, Polyhemp, Hempex)

Flexible, rough texture, moderate friction, low stretch, high durability, very high strength
Similar to natural hemp in appearance, but a little more stiff and plastic-feeling. Made of polypropylene, these ropes grip better than other synthetics and are more durable and water-resistant than their natural counterparts, but are limited in availability and color, and quality varies widely.

Bondage Rope Qualities

Construction

Twisted/laid (3-strand, 4-strand), braided (solid, diamond/single, double)

Most natural fiber rope is 3-strand twisted, since it's very strong and practical to produce, while most synthetic rope is solid braid, since its smooth texture and flexibility make it easy to use. There are a variety of other constructions of synthetic ropes available, but the extra strength usually isn't worth sacrificing cost or ease of tying when it comes to bondage.

Ends

Whipped, knotted, fused, glued, taped

Rope ends are finished to prevent fraying or unraveling. Whipping, or binding twine around the ends, is attractive but requires time and skill. Knotting the ends is fairly easy, but extra knots can be bulky or clumsy. Synthetic rope ends can be fused, or partially melted and allowed to harden.

Diameter

Thin (4-5mm), average (6-8mm), thick (over 8mm)

Most bondage rope is 6mm (1/4") in thickness, since it offers a good balance between ease of use and comfort for the bottom. Thinner ropes hold knots more tightly, sometimes too much so, and they really dig into a bottom when pulled tight. They're usually used for microbondage, tying digits, nipples, genitals, faces, etc. Thicker ropes can be more comfortable, but form bulkier knots or intersections and are easier to slip out of. They're sometimes preferred for suspension or by people with larger bodies.

Length

Short (10-15'), average (25-35'), long (45-50')

Most riggers prefer to keep most of their ropes around the same length and adapt their ties to different body types, as opposed to trying to come up with the perfect length for every situation. The most popular length is probably 30', though traditional Japanese riggers solely use 7m (22') lengths. Sticking with a primary rope length in the 25-35' range is recommended, with optional short ropes for tying limbs only or long ropes for unusually elaborate body harnesses. Generally, the longer the rope, the more difficult it is to work with.