

Boater's Tip: Washing Rope

by Ed Bottrell

I have been using the following techniques to wash rope successfully in a household washing machine for about 20-years. If you are not the main user of the washing machine, I highly recommend that you involve that person with your rope washing project up front.

Most of the rope I have washed has varied in size from ¼" to 1" diameter and up to 300' of double braid Nylon or Dacron, and 3-strand Nylon.

There are **two critical preparation steps** – preparing the rope using the Chain Sinnet (“daisy-chain”) knot and ensuring protection of any shackles, thimbles or other hardware. The Chain Sinnet works – I have also tried ‘onion bags’ and other ways to keep ropes from tangling but only with modest success. If you enjoy untangling lines for a few hours, then proceed without the Chain Sinnet approach and just toss a bunch of lines into the washer. Also, I have come close to ruining the tub of the washer and dryer by not adequately protecting the hardware. Be sure to properly whip, seize or fuse the bitter ends so they do not fray – heat shrink tubing also works.

The Chain Sinnet, which I also call a 'daisy chain' is a very easy knot to tie and is covered in a separate **Boater's Tip**. When washing rope, it should be tied with relatively loose loops to ensure adequate washing. The cubic capacity of the rope will be the same; however, the Chain Sinnet results in a 4.5:1 length reduction and can quickly be untied. Be sure to tie a secure knot at the end that unties (pulls free) the Chain Sinnet knot – I typically use a bowline involving one of the loops.

Cover any shackles, thimbles, hardware or other hard parts with several layers of loose knit rags – I use shop rags or old dish rags. Bind the rags tightly with a nylon cable tie and trim any excess. You should be able to slap your hand with the bundle and not feel anything other than the padding.

Lay the rope around the centre agitator to balance the load. Fill the washer with warm water, regular washing detergent or Woolite®. **Do not use bleach on nylon or Kevlar® (it is a solvent)**. I typically use a GENTLE cycle instead of normal and add fabric softener at the appropriate time. On some occasions I need to wash rope twice and/or let it soak for a while in order to get it clean.

After washing, just hang the rope somewhere appropriate to dry. You can use a clothes dryer but I find rope air dries overnight just fine. I have never noticed any wear or reduced life by washing rope and it typically looks brand new.