



USING STROP PASTES

Introduction

Strop pastes have been used for many years to enhance the benefits of stropping and traditional pastes are usually made up from iron oxide, chromium oxide or graphite in a 'carrier' to emulsify them. Spread on a strop they were an aid to finishing an edge, the coarser pastes being used first, followed by the finer pastes (similar to hones). The problem with using old-type pastes is that the steel being used in straight razor blades has, over the years, become ever-harder.

Traditional pastes are fine for vintage razors but for new steels with their extra-hard composition diamond pastes are ideal, as diamond is of course far harder than the hardest steel ever made. The diamond particles used in our (and other) pastes are bi-products of the world diamond industry, the so-called 'industrial-grade' diamonds unsuited to gem use. These are ground and crushed to a fine powder and specified particle size – from 1/10 micron (one ten-millionth of a metre) to 100 microns or more. Here it is worth pointing out that cheap diamond pastes are low-priced generally due to the fact that the particle size is not strictly regulated, and indeed for some applications this is not a problem. However, for sharpening the ultra-fine edge of a razor it is essential that when 1-micron paste (for example) is being used there aren't chunks of 3 or 4 micron in there as well. The pastes we supply are tightly controlled as to particle size and have a higher particle density than most, hence their 'thickness'. The carrier paste used is both water and oil-soluble, making for easy cleaning and helping to reduce cross-contamination when compared with a pure oil base.

Using the Correct Strop with your Diamond Paste

Although diamond pastes can be used on hanging strops, particularly those with canvas or linen backs, they are best used on a four or two-sided paddle strop. Here we look at using both, starting with the four-sided strop.

The Four-Sided Strop

An ideal companion to the four-paste system and the one we use extensively in conjunction with hones for professional sharpening. To use the strop properly you should of course be proficient in stropping technique. If you need more information, see our information about stropping. Provided that your technique is OK, the method for using this system is very easy – it's a simple progression from coarser to finer paste, finishing on your bare leather hanging strop (or paddle strop if you use one).

The four-sided strop has indentations where the handle enters the body of the strop which are meant to number the four sides 1 to 4. Side no. 4 is smooth leather and the other three are napped and of different colours. So the intention is that paste can be applied as follows:

Side 1 – 6 micron paste

Side 2 – 3 micron paste

Side 3 – 1 micron paste

Side 4 – 0.25 micron paste

It's a good idea to leave the pastes to reach at least room temperature before applying as this thins them slightly and lessens any waste. An airing cupboard overnight is good, but don't put them on a radiator, near a source of heat you couldn't comfortably touch with your hand and definitely NOT in a microwave oven! To apply, start with the 0.25 micron on the smooth leather (any transfer that may occur then only puts finer paste on a coarser paste which is not a problem whereas the reverse is). Squeeze drops from the syringe about the size of a pinhead onto the surface, about fifteen to twenty should be ample, and gently work these into the surface with the tip of your finger. Repeat the procedure on the appropriate sides with the 1, 3 and 6 micron pastes. Wash hands thoroughly.

When the paste has been worked into the surface, don't use the strop straight away, as the paste is still wet and most will 'traffic off' onto the razor blade and be wasted. Instead, stand the strop on end and leave to dry overnight at room temperature. Come the morning it will be ready for use. On first few uses there is likely to be a 'traffic-off' of a small amount of paste onto the razor blade, so ensure it is cleaned before the next grade is used to prevent contamination. It's a good idea to do this even when no residue can be seen – the particles are very small and over time can build up until the strop is thoroughly contaminated with crossover particles. If this occurs a new strop is the only real answer.

The Two-Sided Strop

This type of strop, the conventional 'paddle strop', is best used for maintenance purposes where a razor's edge is just too dull for the bare strop to revive, typically using 0.25 micron and 1 micron pastes. Or perhaps 0.25 micron and chromox.

Again, the strop surfaces used for 1, 3 and 6 micron should ideally be of napped or 'sueded' leather as this holds the particles better than smooth 'chrome' leather. Two strops can of course be used, one for 6 and 3 micron, the other for 1 and 0.25 micron to give (in effect) a four-sided strop.

Chromium Paste

Chromium paste is a fine polishing paste which helps take the bite out of an aggressively sharp edge. Though it can be used on a smooth leather strop, I use it on a napped leather paddle strop as this holds the paste well, though it doesn't necessarily look too attractive.

To apply, first it is best for the paste to have been in an airing cupboard or similar overnight to thin it slightly. Alternatively the jar can be stood in warm water for a while. Peel back the skin and mix well. Apply a small amount to one part of the strop and work it in to spread it around. Then repeat at another spot and so on. There is no need to cover every last part of the strop as it will traffic with use anyway. Recover with the skin. Afterwards wash hand thoroughly.

Suggestions For A Stropping Schedule Using Pastes

For A Razor With A Badly Dulled Edge Or In 'Breadknife' Condition

This really does need a trip to the hones, but once honed use a full progression from 6 to 0.25 microns, then (ideally) chromium paste, then finish on a bare leather strop for the best results.

For A New Razor

We supply all our razors "shave ready" but if you have bought from somewhere else and the razor has not been prepared we suggest: A full procedure from 6 micron to 0.25 micron, using some ten to

twenty strokes on each grade will give most razors a shaving edge. Then (ideally) chromium paste, then finish on a bare leather strop. If the edge is still 'not quite there' repeat and re-test.

For A Razor Used Regularly

We would recommend every week or two to use 3, 1 and 0.25 micron, then chromium paste, and then finish on a bare leather strop. If trying to keep costs down, then I would suggest dropping the 0.25 micron diamond paste in favour of the chromium paste.

For Day To Day Upkeep Of A Razor

The bare leather strop should be all that is needed for everyday use, though a few strokes on 0.25 micron paste or chromium paste followed by bare leather every few days would help.

This system is easy to use and gives very good results, though it should be remembered that razors differ quite widely in their heat treatments and steel make-up and so results may vary – only time and practice will tell you the ideal regime for your razor or razors. One thing we are certain of, however. Used regularly this system will extend edge 'life' to a significant degree, therefore reducing the number of visits to the hone and slowing the rate of wear on any given blade, as well as providing an excellent shaving edge.

If you have any questions regarding the use or care of razors, just email us:

sales@theinvisibleedge.co.uk

Address for all correspondence:

The Invisible Edge Ltd.
Unit 15 West Barn
Wimborne Road
BLANDFORD FORUM
DT11 9NF

This document copyright© 2010-25 The Invisible Edge Ltd. The Invisible Edge logo copyright© The Invisible Edge Ltd. 2015. All rights reserved. This document may not be copied, deconstructed, added to or edited in any way without express consent of The Invisible Edge Ltd. Whilst all advice is given in good faith, The Invisible Edge Ltd. cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, injury or damage to persons or property caused by following the advice and recommendations herein, and accepts no liability in relation thereto, including any liability for consequential losses incurred in any way whatsoever.