

# Practical hints and guidance for sword owners

## How to toughen up the wrap on your tsuka

Most production katana come with poor tsukamaki or handle wrapping and this is one of the points of a sword that you should be safety checking before you consider using it. I'm not saying that you can't get a sword with a second rate maki and take it out and cut with it. You should be able to do exactly that, just make sure it's safe. But you will find that it probably won't come through just one good session without having been pulled all over the place. I had one sword where the end knots started to come undone the second time I cut with it. Needless to say, that got rewrapped, pronto.



*This is unacceptable. yuk.*

Problems like this, in a perfect world are fixed by making sure you buy a quality sword rather than an ebay special or something, but you're probably looking at this article because the wrap on your own sword is maybe not as robust as it could be. The short of it is, that if the wrap on the tsuka isn't unsafe, but just loose, you can lacquer it into place.

Our method is a quick and dirty fix to a problem however, it is interesting that historically, many katana have shown up with lacquered ito. I can only assume that they were made like this to improve durability as we are trying to do here. I would say that this method is geared entirely toward fabric ito.

1. You firstly need to make sure that the ito is as clean as you can get it without soaking it. basically, we're going to make sure that there isn't any gunk or residue on the ito itself that will stop the lacquer we will use from properly soaking into the ito. You can do this

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with a sponge and some warm water. Don't get the thing sopping wet, use a minimal amount of warm water to get the surface muck off. Once you've done this, leave it to dry.

2. Next, we're going to make up a 'lacquer' mix. I actually use a water based varnish because I find it easier to thin with water and to work with. I mean, you can use any polyurethane lacquer, but if you do you will have to use white spirit or turps to thin it down. There's no real difference in the end result, but I've found that the rather distinctive smell of turps in the house doesn't go down well with the rest of my family so I try to avoid it. Whatever you choose to use, Mix one part lacquer to two parts thinner, be that water or white spirit/turps. This will make the mix thin enough to soak into the ito.
3. Now this has the potential to get messy of course. I should of mentioned this earlier but hey, You're old enough to play with sharp objects so you should be wise enough to know about mess. Using a brush, paint the mix onto your ito. You should find that you can put some on the brush and when you wipe it across the ito, it will get sucked into the fabric. This is good, just carry on down the tsuka, getting a good amount soaked in evenly across the whole length. Try to avoid getting it on the rayskin. I mean it won't hurt the functionality of the sword at all, but we don't want this to be one big lacquered mess.
4. Once you're happy with the coverage, put the tsuka somewhere safe to dry. Now this will probably take a while because we thinned it down to get it to soak in, so put it somewhere safe. Dust free is a bonus as well being as the wet coating will slowly collect dust and fluff if you're not careful. I find the best way to put the tsuka is stood up on the fuchi end. Make sure it doesn't get knocked over though.

When it's properly dried, you should find that the ito won't shift around like it used to. As well as allowing the lacquer to soak in properly, the thinner should stop the finished product from getting too stiff and rough, but if the surface of the ito seems too hard for your liking, use a stiff brush, and brush over a few times to soften it up.

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