

Seven Knots You Can't Live Without

It was June of this year. We were anchored in the quiet harbor of Hampton, VA, when suddenly we were invaded by a fleet of Offshore Racing Association noisy speedboats that roared into the quiet setting. They had names like: *The Terminator*, *Penetrator*, and *I'm more of a man than you are*.

We watched as two of the competitors, dressed in adorable matching jumpsuits, powered up to the dock at the Hampton public pier. Judging by the press and the groupies hanging around, they looked to be the favorite. The harbormaster tossed the skipper a line but it soon became obvious that he didn't know what to do with it. He fumbled with the line for a few minutes, fully aware that a crowd was looking on, then gladly handed it off to one of his pit-crew guys and returned to the cameras.

We watched the pit-crew guy proceed to wrap the line around as many things as he could find on the boat but never actually tied a knot. He quickly looked from side to side to see if anyone had seen him and then moved on to more important matters, like polishing the metallic-flecked gelcoat.

That moment reminded us of how vital knowing basic knots was to the voyager. We've found it's simply not possible to get through a day on the boat without having to tie something, even if it's just the string on my cap to the label in the back of my shirt. So, here are seven knots you can't live without if you want to go cruising.

There are literally thousands of knots out there, but luckily you need to know only these seven. I learned these knots back in junior sailing class before my brain said it didn't want to know anything more. Larry, I discovered, just learned the sheet bend while working on this article. We don't expect that you'll become enthused enough to join the International Guild of Knot Tyers (yes, it really exists), but know that your sailing will be much easier if you spend a few hours adding these knots to your repertoire, if you don't already have them. (See the sidebar for use applications and tying instructions.)

Here are the seven knots to success: bowline, sheet bend, clove hitch, round turn-two half hitches, figure eight knot, reef knot, trucker's hitch (not your usual sailor's knot, a land knot, but one we have found invaluable on the boat.)

The reality of it is that when you're part of the boating environment, you're constantly exposed to wind and waves, both of which, it seems, are trying their hardest to knock the stuff off your boat that you put on it. The only practical solution is that you take control of the situation by learning to tie the proper knots.

The knots used here are all designed to be extremely secure in their purpose, but, most importantly, easy to undo again. There are a lot of tangled messes that can be tied and usually do the job, but they become a real pain when it's time to untie them again.

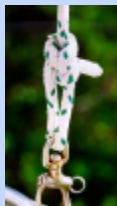
When cruising, everything usually happens at a slow and steady pace—until you run into a problem. The ability to tie the correct knot, the first time, is not only a huge time saver, but a big safety factor. There are many situations at sea where a poorly tied knot could lead to the loss of gear, failure of equipment, or, in extreme instances, even the loss of life. In fact, we have found that the solution to nearly every emergency you can encounter aboard a sailboat involves using line and tying the proper knot. For instance, reefing a mainsail, lashing a broken boom or mast to the boat, tying sheets to a storm sail, lengthening your anchor rode, deploying a drogue or sea anchor—the list is endless. All require the correct knot. And for everyday boating, it's hard to get away without having to tie a painter to your dinghy, fenders to the lifelines, a sun awning overhead or your yacht club burgee to the flag halyard.

A good knot is important in sailing, but think about how useful it is in everyday life also. Before my cruising days, I remember a situation when I was getting a large load of building supplies from the hardware store and hauling them in my truck. As I started to tie down the load, one of the guys working in the loading area came over and with an air of great chivalry said, "Don't you worry about that, missy. I'll tie that down for you." I watched him loosely attach the rope to the load, knowing that I would never get home without it falling all over the highway. I then got in my truck, drove around the corner out of sight, and retied everything with the proper trucker's hitch.

Once you've mastered these seven knots, picture the scene: You're on the boat, you tie the perfect "nautically correct" knot and the rest of the crew stands by in complete admiration . . . well, it's nice to dream anyway.

Illustrations excerpted from: *The Ashley Book of Knots*, by Clifford W. Ashley, Doubleday; *Anchoring/All Techniques for All Bottoms*, by Don Bamford, Seven Seas Press; *Sports Illustrated Small Boat Sailing* by David Dellenbaugh and Brad Dellenbaugh

Seven Knots to Know



1. Bowline

This sailor's knot is easy, strong and secure. Its beauty lies in that the greater the load on it, the tighter it holds. Yet it is always easy to untie. These qualities make the bowline the first knot of choice and the first knot to learn. You can use the bowline to secure the genoa sheets to the sail, make a lasso to slip over pilings (a running bowline), attach the

dinghy painter to a ring or handle, and attach a line to an anchor, among many other uses.

2. Sheet bend



This is the most common knot for tying two lines of same or of different sizes. Like the bowline, the more pressure applied, the stronger the knot. If you can already tie a bowline, you can tie a sheet bend. You simply use two pieces of line instead of one. (Make sure that the lines are not too different or the knot loses its effectiveness.)

3. Clove hitch



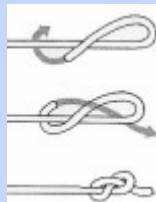
The clove hitch is commonly used to tie your boat to a post or piling when docking. With a slipped end, the clove hitch is our favorite knot for tying boat fenders to the lifelines or tops of stanchions. You can simply pull the slipped end and the whole knot unties.

4. Round turn-two half hitches



This knot is often used as an alternative to the clove hitch. You can secure a line to a piling, ring, hook, or handle while supporting high loads. It is also used to secure a line to an anchor.

5. Figure eight knot



Probably the easiest of all knots to tie, you tie the stopper knot at the end of a jib sheet or halyard. It ensures that the line will not inadvertently feed back through your fairlead or block. Note: Never tie a stopper knot to spinnaker sheets since they may need to be released quickly to run through.

6. Reef knot (or square knot)



The reef knot is a multi-purpose, flat, symmetrical knot that forms a square when tied. It is useful when reefing the mainsail. It's easy to untie by pulling one end at a 90-degree angle. Do not mistake this knot for a granny, which does not stay secure. The reef knot should lie flat after tying. This knot is never used with lines of different sizes or unequal fiber properties because slippage can occur.

7. Trucker's hitch (Sue's favorite)



The trucker's hitch started as a way to secure a load to a wagon. Since this hitch provides a purchase of 2:1, its primary advantage over other knots is that it can be drawn extremely tight. It is very handy for lashing any number of items on deck. The loop can be made by tying a harness loop, or simply a half hitch. (Note that the half hitch will work fine as a loop but will be difficult to untie later.)