

A Soldering Iron Tip Cleaner That Doesn't Cool the Tip When Used

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For the first 40 years of my Amateur Radio career, when I built a project, I always followed the stern warnings of my Elmer(s) to "Always Keep Your Tip Clean!". Of course, this warning applied to the *tip* of my soldering iron... you cannot make good soldered connections with a soldering iron of the tip is all 'gunked up' (a technical term, get used to it) with oxidized solder and burnt rosin.

Any time I was building, I kept a 3" x 3" jar, filled with 4-5 layers of cellulose sponge, and then filled with water close at hand for wiping the tip of my iron on while soldering. This allowed me to always have a clean tip for my work.

The one BIG drawback to this method was that each time I 'swiped' the tip across the damp sponge, I not only cleaned the tip, I also COOLED it down by at least 50-100 °F with each pass. This was NOT a 'feature' but a 'bug' in the operation.

Then... I bought a temperature-controlled soldering station. This act in itself had no bearing upon my problem, BUT the soldering station manufacturer (HAKKO) also offered as an accessory to the station, a tip cleaner which was made of number of tightly-coiled stainless steel ribbons, all rolled into a ball. I don't recall exactly, but I think the cost of this cleaner was in the \$10 range. More than I wished to pay. However, I really liked the idea for two main reasons:

1. Having very low mass, and NO WATER, the cleaner 'ball' did not function as a heatsink when the tip of an iron was passed across (or plunged down into) it. Very little heat was lost.
2. Any solder shards stripped off as a result of the cleaning process 'trickled' all the way to the bottom of the ball and onto the bottom of the contained into which the ball was placed. This is much neater than having to rinse all the tiny pieces of solder out of a wet sponge or washcloth.

I mentioned what a nifty idea it was to my XYL, Jeri (KØRPH), and the very next day she presented me with my very own tip cleaner! Total cost of manufacture: \$1.27 US...!

Jeri went to our neighborhood grocery store, to the kitchen-wares section, bought a kitchen sink pot scrubber, commonly known as a 'scrubbie', and stuck it into a small glass jar we had laying around the house. Voila!

Since that time, I've used my new tip cleaner with tremendous success and virtually no heat loss while cleaning the tip.

Stainless steel scrubbies of this type are available in virtually all grocery stores and, I'm told, at Wal-Mart stores as well. They sell for \$1.00-\$1.50 US and will last a LONG time in this type of service. They are generally all the same, but may vary in size and the width of the steel ribbon used. Below (actually, next page), you will see two examples of scrubbie. The two scrubbies on the left are smaller in size, and are made of a more narrow width of ribbon. EITHER size will work, you just need to find a suitable holder. I finally managed to drop and break the glass jar Jeri had originally given me, but I found a small aluminum can which has worked great since that time. When I'm finished with each project, I just tap the can on the table 6-8 times, to allow the solder bits to migrate to the bottom of the can and then I remove the scrubbies (2 in the example jar) and throw the solder residue into the waste can.

I hope you find this idea to your benefit.

