

GREAT TENNIS

PRODUCTS

Don't blame your racket next time it feels dead: it's most likely the strings that are the problem. Expert Peter Colvin unravels how to choose a set of strings to suit your level and style of play

Another string to your bow?

"I think it's time for a new racket. This one was great when I first had it, but I just can't seem to get on with it any more."

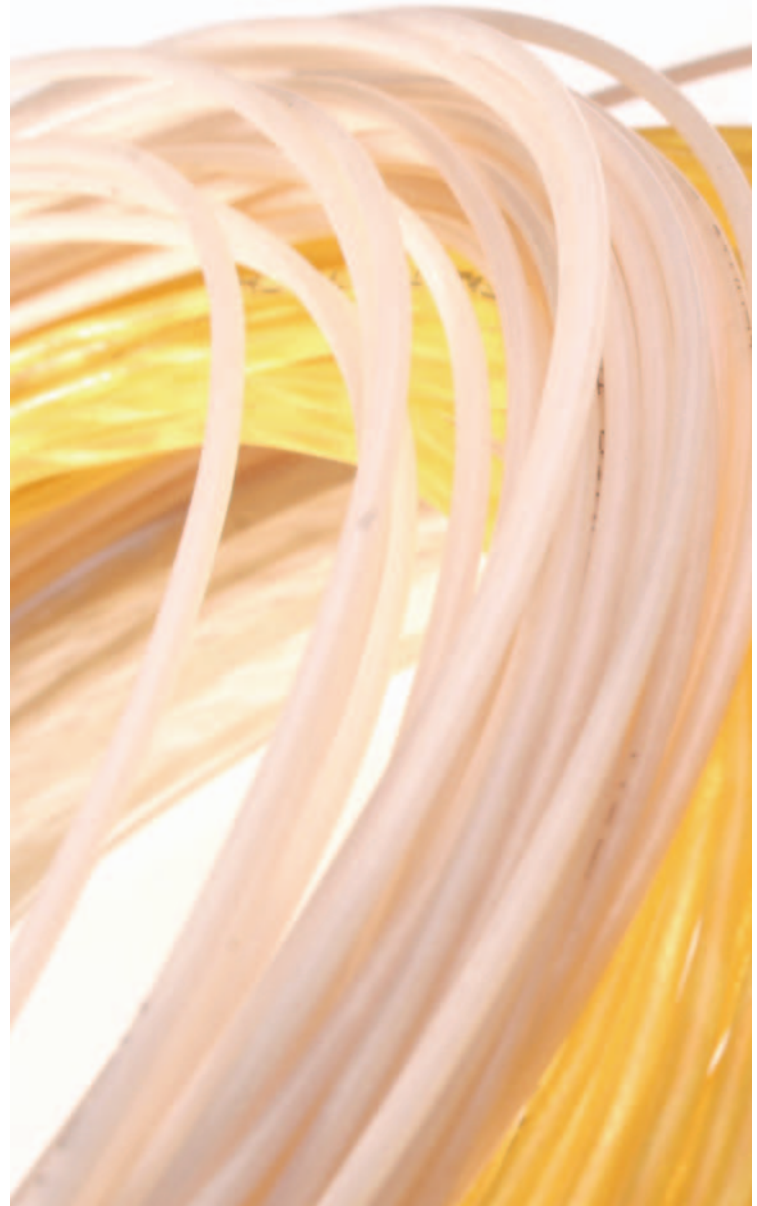
You'll hear this kind of remark at clubs every weekend, but rather than blaming the racket for loss of form, players should be looking at their strings (as well as possibly themselves!) as the culprit instead. Most players will spend a long time deliberating over which racket to use, but give little attention to their choice of strings. This is a mistake, because the type and tension of the strings will dramatically affect how well the racket, and ultimately the player, performs.

A fresh set of appropriately tensioned strings, chosen to match the level of the player, their style of play, racket type and surface, can breathe new life into even the oldest of frames. Let's face it, a restring is a hell of a lot cheaper than having to fork out for a new racket.

To the ordinary player, the world of stringing can seem like a minefield. Here we cut through

The type and tension of the strings will dramatically affect racket performance

the reels of science on the subject to provide a layman's guide to choosing a set of tennis strings for your racket. All strings, except for natural gut, are derivatives of oil. The fibres that the strings are made of are produced by chemical companies such as DuPont Industries, ICI and other companies in the Far East. String manufacturers buy these pre-made fibres, often as thin as cotton, in massive reels. The fibres are then twisted and bound together, depending on the type of string being made, and given a silicone coating. Opposite we reveal the four main string types – aramid, natural gut, polyester and polyamide (nylon) – which all have different properties and playing characteristics.



ESSENTIAL STRINGING KNOWLEDGE

How long is a piece of string?

String diameter:

As a rule, the larger a string is in diameter the greater its durability will be, but the less its 'feel'. The diameters available range from 1.25mm to 1.42mm, but the majority of strings sold at all levels vary between 1.3mm and 1.35mm – giving a good combination of durability and feel.

Restrings: If players do not have restrings they think their game has gone off, but it's usually the case that their racket is not responding due to tension loss. For club players who don't break strings

very often it is recommended that they have the same number of restrings a year as they play tennis in a week. So, if you play three times a week, you should be getting your racket restrung every four months regardless of whether the strings are still intact or not.

Tension and surfaces: Grass lends itself to higher tension. That's because on a groundstroke involving a low to high swing, such as a flat or topspin forehand, the higher tension will give you a greater angle of

trajectory, helping you to get the low-bouncing balls up and over the net. The opposite is true on a high-bouncing surface like clay where a lower tension is more suitable.

String texture:

Most strings have a smooth surface to avoid notching during stringing. Some nylons are made with one filament larger than the other and some polyesters are ribbed creating a textured finish which, the manufacturers claim, gives increased ball bite and extra spin.

YOUR EXPERT

Peter Colvin was talking to ACE Coaching Editor Heather Purchase at a UK Racquet Stringers Association (07861 380981) workshop last year. As well as being a world-leading metallurgist, Peter is a top authority on racket stringing and string

construction. He is also managing director of tennis equipment company Tennis Tech of Northwood, Middlesex. Tel: 01923 841530, email: sales@tennis-tech.co.uk, www.tennis-tech.co.uk. All string samples opposite supplied by racket service specialists

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