

Shrinkage

This is the biggest thing to remember when installing natural fibre rope in a wet or damp environment. (You don't usually need to allow for this when using ropes indoors) **When ropes like manila and sisal get wet they will shrink in length and at the same time they will get fatter.** There really isn't anything you can do to stop this and its important you take it into account because the pull the rope can exert is substantial. I know of a Garden Designer who installed some 18mm Manila taut between 3" posts around a deck and the first time it rained the shrinkage of the rope tore one of the posts off its fixing.

The biggest change occurs the first time the rope becomes wet. After that it will be much more stable but you will still see a difference in the length of a rope between a soaking wet winter's day and the end of a long, dry spell.

I suggest you allow 10% shrinkage, but you can usually round things down a little to make the maths easier.

Pre-soaking

You may have heard about pre-soaking. Basically this is where you take a natural fibre rope, like manila, and put it into a dustbin or other large container of water for a few hours, depending on how thick it is. Then you take it out and allow the rope to dry. (If you want to really see how much it changes then measure the rope when its dry and again when its wet). After you have done this the rope will be much more stable in length.

However, it can take some time for the rope to fully dry, maybe a couple of weeks for something like 36mm Manila when its not very warm. You don't have to wait for it to dry but as the rope is fatter and stiffer when its wet you'll find threading it through post holes and tying knots will be easier with dry rope.

In many cases where you are installing the rope in your own garden and in such a way that you can adjust it easily it might be worth putting the rope up dry with lots of slack and letting it rain. Then once the rope has shrunk you can make all your adjustments.

If you are a professional gardener or landscaper installing the rope in a customers garden then popping back to make adjustments when it has rained may be impractical. In this case it might be best to soak the rope and install it whilst its still wet, putting up with the handling difficulties. The benefit is that you know the rope should not become any shorter. If you do this don't forget you may need larger holes in any posts to accommodate the fatter rope and any knots you tie may slacken off slightly as the rope dries.

Sag between Posts

In most applications, whether it be Rose swags or a rope and post fence it is more pleasing to the eye to have some sag or drape to the rope. Customers can get quite anxious about working out exactly the right amount of extra rope to allow for this. Forget the very long-winded mathematical way to get an answer and just use a tape measure or any old piece of rope. Stretch it taut over roughly the span you want, note how long it is and then let some slack through until it looks about right. When you see how much the length has changed you will almost certainly be surprised, it is usually a tiny amount. Over a 1.5 to 2m span of rope you might only need an extra 5-6cm.

Bear in mind this will be much less than the amount the rope will shrink the first time it gets wet so if you are putting the rope up without first pre-soaking then leave plenty of sag until it has rained.

Finishing the Rope Ends

Remember, you can't melt together the ends of natural fibre rope, it catches fire!

Taped end



This is the standard finish, in fact when I cut your rope I will first tightly wrap PVC tape round the rope then cut through the taped section. The effect may be workman-like but it is quick and easy, if you are cutting your own ropes it's probably what you will end up with. Whilst a taped end can last for years it's worth checking and replacing the tape if it gets a bit ragged, do this before it breaks and the rope has frayed out.

Whipped end



For me this is the best looking way to finish a rope end. Basically a thin thread or twine is tightly wrapped, many times, around the rope, just short of the end. I use a Common whipping which is fine in most cases but if you are looking for something that will be a bit more robust then I can apply a more complex and secure whipping.

Spliced end



Splicing is a very ancient art, it creates a beautiful effect and it is actually much stronger than tying a knot. Whilst there are probably hundreds of different splices the most common type used on a natural fibre rope is the eye-splice which creates a neat, secure, permanent eye in the end. This is perfect if you want a loop so you can drop the rope over a hook, or it can attach the rope to a fitting.

How Long will the Rope Last

There is no getting away from the fact that all natural fibre ropes, when used in a damp or wet environment, will eventually rot through. However, choose the right rope for the job and it could be lasting 10 years, probably as long as the posts supporting it. Don't forget that the synthetic ropes which are made to look like natural fibre, and are usually made from polypropylene, will often suffer quite badly from the effects of ultra-violet rays in sunshine and may not last any longer than 10 years.

The choice for an outdoor rope would usually be Manila and, as mentioned above, it is not unusual to hear of a 10 year life span when using something like 32mm Manila to support your roses. As it is the damp that leads to the problem it is impossible to give a guarantee; do you live in a wet location with lots of fungal growth or a dry one? If your garden gets lots of rain but also good drying winds then your rope could be nice and dry for much of the year. If you are supporting the rope by passing it through holes in wooden posts then the place the rope gives way is usually at the posts – where its stays damp within the hole.

This information is to assist you with knowledge regarding Manila rope and has been sourced from various websites on the internet.