

# Douglas Niedt's GUITAR TECHNIQUE TIP OF THE MONTH

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## Yes, it's "Doug's Dirty Little Secrets"



(Doug subtitled his Tech Tip as "Doug's Dirty Little Secrets" after reading someone's posted message on a guitar web forum. The writer asserted that professional virtuoso guitarists all had secrets they kept to themselves and wouldn't tell anyone else, so no one would play as well as them!)



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**of Dirty Little Secrets.**

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# The Best Artificial Fingernail System Yet

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*By Douglas Niedt*

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I received an email a few years ago from Richard "Rico" Stover, the world expert on Agustin Barrios. He explained that he had developed a new system of artificial fingernails. Although I generally have good nails, the inevitable does happen with me too—I break a nail. And I have students who have wrestled with their problem nails for years, never finding a really good solution. So I immediately ordered a kit from Rico to test them out. My friends, these really do work. At least for me. I know everyone is different, but I think Rico really has something here. I have tested these in concerts and they work great.

RICONAILS are not only great for people like me who have good nails but occasionally break one, but are also good for people who have terrible nails and need to use artificial nails all the time, or for people who want to use nails but can't, due to their day jobs or other instruments they play. The RICONAILS won't harm your real nails and are easy to put on and take off.

You can also use them to protect a nail that is wearing down. For instance, if I'm working on a piece that has lots of scales on the bass strings or that uses a technique that tears up a nail, I will use RICONAILS and let the artificial nail take the abuse during practice (or at least a few days a week) so I don't wear my real nail down to nothing.

They are also excellent for people who play steel-string guitar. You can actually use them to play the steel-string or go without fingernails entirely for steel-string playing and put the RICONAILS on for classical playing. They are also an excellent solution for flatpick players who grind down their index fingernail.

Here is Rico describing his product:

"The Emergency Nail Kit is for guitarists who want to have a backup system in case of the worst scenario-- accidentally breaking a nail. This happened to me just two months ago while I was driving in my car...I broke my ring fingernail. But I wasn't too worried, even though I had to perform that night. With RICONAILS I was covered.

The Emergency Nail Kit contains:

5 high grade ABM plastic nails  
3 sheets of adhesive (48 applications)  
1 roll of Transpore tape  
Complete instructions

When you break a nail it is a real drag to wait around for weeks until the natural nail grows out. Right? Your only alternative is to either suffer and play anyway, or glue on a false nail with super glue, which of course is not good for your real nail (or your general health).

I reject the super glue solution. In its place I have found an adhesive that is not permanent, not toxic, goes on and comes off with ease, and really works in holding the false nail in place as you play guitar. I play a lot and hard, and these nails stay on fine and sound great. No bull.

I developed this system because I wanted to escape from the "toxic cycle" of cyanoacrylate glue (Super Glue), acrylics, gels, wraps, etc. All these systems of artificial nails currently available are bad for your nails.

RICONAILS are the answer to the problem of broken nails. Also, my system can be utilized to enable any guitarist to stop using a synthetic toxic system (such as acrylics or glue on tips). This is all in my book "Guitarist's Guide to Fingernails" MB21258 from Mel Bay Publications."

## Getting Started

Okay, thanks Rico. You can read more about his fingernail philosophy on his website.

I have been using the system now for three or four years. Here is how it works.

First, measure the *width* of your nails in millimeters and order the appropriate sizes. He carries (in millimeters): 18, 16, 14, 13, 11, 10, and 9. Obviously, you would order a larger size for your thumb than your other fingers. Don't mess around with retail outlets for artificial nails—usually they are shaped for cosmetic appeal and come in limited sizes. Also, they usually aren't as tough as the RICONAILS. Depending on the widths of your nails, you may need to order two to four different sizes.

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The adhesive is Glue Dots. Do you ever receive credit card offers in the mail and they give you a sample card stuck to a piece of paper? They are usually stuck on with a Glue Dot. The Glue Dots Rico uses are high-strength adhesive (not the usual hobbyist version sold in stores) and large enough to cover the top surface of your nail. They come in two sizes: 1/2 or 3/8 inch. I would order both sizes so you can experiment with how to use them. People with small fingers will probably want the smaller size. But those with larger fingers may want to use one of each for better coverage. Glue Dots are also available in bulk (and cheaper) at [www.buygluedots.com](http://www.buygluedots.com).



[Watch this video to get the basic scoop on Glue Dots.](#)



[Okay. You are ready to watch this "gripping" video on how the Glue Dots actually work.](#)

*Note: Now, that darn George Lucas (director of Star Wars and founder of Industrial Light & Magic) is going to come over here and hang around the studio trying to figure out how we did the special effects in that last clip. Every time he sees one of our spellbinding videos, he comes over and I can't get rid of the guy. He just hangs around hoping we'll divulge our secrets.*

## How to Put the RICONAILS On

When you receive your RICONAILS, you will notice they are very long. Trim and file them (and smooth them) to the length that you need *before* you put them on. They go over the top of your entire nail from the quick on out to the tip. Be sure the RICONAIL is at least a millimeter longer than your real nail. Otherwise the string will contact your real nail and then click onto the RICONAIL which will feel and sound odd.



[Here is what the RICONAILS look like out of the package.](#)

First, swab your real nail AND the RICONAIL with alcohol to remove any oils. ***It is essential to swab your nail and the RICONAIL!*** The dots don't hold the nail if you omit this step.

I use Alcohol Prep Pads (available in pharmacy departments). They are individually packaged disposable alcohol-soaked pads. They are very cheap and come in boxes of 100 or 200.



[Watch this stunning video demonstration of nail swabbing.](#)

Allow the alcohol to evaporate from your nail and the artificial nail. Don't wipe them with tissue. Some tissue contains lotion or scents that might affect the adhesion of your glue dot. It takes less than a minute for the nails to dry.

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You apply the Glue Dot to your real nail. How you use the glue dots will depend on which fingernail you are replacing (the larger thumbnail may require two dots), how large your fingers are, and how your real nails are shaped. The dots can be placed vertically or horizontally. Place them however you get the most coverage of your real nail.



[Watch this video as I follow the OSHA regulations on proper glue dot placement.](#)

Then stick the RICONAIL on to the dot. Press it into the dot at the tip first (instead of center or at the base). It may stick up some at the base, but that's okay. You want flush adhesion with the tip of your nail where the string is. If there is a gap at the tip between the RICONAIL and your real nail, the artificial nail won't feel like it is part of your natural nail. It will feel foreign and throw off your touch.



[Watch this riveting video clip.](#)

It is that simple. If you don't get the nail on quite right, don't try to move it. TAKE THE NAIL OFF and reapply. The glue dots have "memory" and the nail will just migrate back to its original position in less than a minute. It may take several attempts to get the nail positioned just right.



[Watch how to remove the RICONAIL and glue dot. It's video clips like this that become legend.](#)

If your real nail curves a lot (arches) from the tip to the quick, you can prevent "rocking" of the RICONAIL by placing one glue dot at the tip and one at the base of your real nail. You can even stick a piece of toothpick under the base of the RICONAIL to shore it up.



[You are not going to believe this one.](#)

Next, use a *small* piece (hardly wider than your nail and about 1/4 to 3/8 inches long) of the Nexcare Transpore tape (it's a type of medical tape included in the RICONAIL KIT or available in pharmacy departments) to bridge the gap at the base so it doesn't catch on the strings when strumming and executing rasgueado effects. If your real nail is flat from base to tip, you should still use the Transpore tape for extra security in rasgueado playing but it may not be absolutely necessary. Don't misunderstand—the Transpore tape is not needed to hold the RICONAIL on—the Glue Dot does that. The tape is just to smooth any gap at the base of the nail to prevent string snagging on rasgueados.

If you have excessive nail arch you may have trouble. You might have to try reshaping the RICONAIL with heat (boiling in water) or search out nails manufactured with greater arch.

## Your RICONAILS in Action

Once you have the RICONAIL attached, it will stay on several hours. Take it off when you're done practicing, performing, or teaching. Put it back on again the next day or later in the day with a *new* Glue Dot. Do NOT leave them on all day or overnight. They may or may not stay on that long. You don't want them to come off at critical moments! It is particularly embarrassing to have one come off and fly into the audience. It's also embarrassing when it comes off and falls inside the guitar. Yes, you will have to shake the guitar upside down to get it to fall out the soundhole. You will look like an absolute dork.

Glue Dots don't do well in heat. If you play outdoors on a warm day, the adhesive glue dots soften and lose their grip. The same is true under hot stage lights. I replace them at intermission so I don't have to worry about them.

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As you are playing, you may suspect the RICONAIL is pulling slightly away from the natural nail. If the bond seems insecure, try this. Use your right-hand thumb to push the RICONAIL against the natural nail.

If the RICO thumbnail seems to be pulling away, use any right-hand finger to press it against the natural nail.



[It's easier to understand if you watch this video clip.](#)

Keep your fingers absolutely dry. If water seeps into the Glue Dot adhesive, it will weaken very quickly and the artificial nail will begin to pull away from your real nail. But even if it does, no big deal. Just dry everything and put a new Glue Dot on and reattach the nail. (*Swab again with alcohol first.*)

Unless you are doing heavy duty rasgueado playing or a lot a scale playing on the wound bass strings, the RICONAILS will wear very little and last for weeks. In fact, as you wear the RICONAIL down and you file it shorter, it is still usable. Rather than placing the base of the RICONAIL flush with the quick of your natural nail, place it further away from the quick so it is still long enough to use.



[Watch this video.](#)

And how is the tone? As with real nails, it depends on how well you shape them and smooth them. If you do it right, they sound as good (or close to it) as your real nail.

## Prepare Yourself for Disaster

If you are a serious player, you need to be prepared for nail breakage. Don't wait until you break a nail to try the RICONAILS. Order them now and practice putting them on so you are ready when an emergency arises. Although they are actually very easy to use, you don't want to learn to put them on 10 minutes before a performance.

Keep a "Oh my gosh I broke a nail!" emergency response kit in your guitar case at all times. Keep your glue dots, cut and shaped nails (have one for EVERY finger shaped and ready to go) and alcohol prep pads in a little Ziploc plastic bag in your guitar case. Remember, it isn't a question of "if" you break a nail but "when." You will be able to sleep soundly at night knowing you are ready for a fingernail disaster.

For more information, go to Rico's website: [www.ricoguitarnails.com](http://www.ricoguitarnails.com)

Or, contact him at:

Rico Stover  
PO Box 1851  
Santa Fe, NM 87504

Telephone: (505)989-7294

Rico probably won't get a Nobel Prize for scientific achievement with this, but he will receive enduring gratitude from guitarists the world over who will no longer freak out when they break a nail. Not to mention the gratitude of their spouses, significant others, and non-guitarist friends who have to listen to guitarists gripe about their precious fingernails all the time.

***NOTE: Douglas Niedt and the employees of DouglasNiedt.com receive no financial compensation of any kind for his recommendation of RICONAILS.***

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