

Bead Jewellery Basics

Contents

Beads, Materials & Tools	2
Beads	2
Findings	3
Threads and Wires	4
Tools and Other Equipment	5
Basic Bead Jewellery Techniques	6
Necklace Threading	6
Method 1: Nylon-coated Wire with Crimp Beads	6
Method 2: Nylon-coated Wire with Gimp and Crimp Beads	7
Method 3: Nylon-coated Wire with Crimp Beads and Clamshell Calottes	7
Beading Threads	8
Method 4: Gimp with Beading Thread	8
Method 5: Using Beading Thread with Clamshell Calottes	8
Method 6: Thong or Cord with Box Calottes and Jump Rings	9
Basic Earring Making	9
Method 7: Headpins	9
Method 8: Nylon-coated Wire	10



Beads, Materials & Tools

This section provides an introduction to the different kinds of bead widely available, together with a guide to the simple tools and basic materials that the bead jewellery maker needs, such as pliers and scissors, findings (clasps and so on), thread and wire. However, when you come to work through the projects, it will be apparent that you don't need everything itemized here for each project.

BEADS

With every project you will find an 'ingredient' list that tells you what type of beads are used. This enables you to follow the design exactly, but be aware that you can achieve alternative results by using different beads, and I like to think that my designs will inspire you to experiment and create your own unique jewellery. The most popular varieties of bead are listed below, together with a brief description of each.

Rocaille Beads

These tiny glass beads are also known as seed beads. Sizes range from 1–5mm. They are sold by weight or packet size.

Bugle Beads

These tubular glass beads are mostly small, ranging from 2 × 5mm to 2 × 10mm, but giant bugles are also available that may be 5 × 50mm in size. They are usually sold by weight or packet size.

Larger Glass Beads

Glass beads vary enormously from plainly coloured, mass-produced pressed beads and diamond-like faceted crystals to elaborate lamp beads, such as the one shown, among the most attractive beads on offer.

Metal Beads

These beads also appear in an enormous variety, from plain base-metal 2mm rounds through to large, intricately worked silver or exquisite cloisonné and enamel.

Acrylic, Resin and Plastic Beads

This type of bead is usually inexpensive, brightly coloured and fun, and therefore useful for making jewellery for children. However, at the other end of the scale, there are classy-looking beads available to suit more sophisticated tastes.

Pearls

Real pearls are fantastically expensive, but cheaper options are available. These are made from substances ranging from pearlized plastic to cultured examples of the real thing. Some are copies of real pearls, but others are colourful lusted beads that owe little to nature.

SAFETY FOR CHILDREN

Because beads are small, they should be kept out of the reach of very young children. It is also advisable to supervise older children when bead jewellery making until they become competent at handling the tools, sharp wires and so on.



Beads, Materials & Tools



Bone, Horn and Wooden Beads

Beads made from these natural sources have been around for as long as Man has been beading, and there is a wide range of styles available to us, from the simple coloured wooden beads of childhood to intricately hand-crafted carved bone.



Semi-precious Stone Beads

Today the choice of semi-precious stone beads is vast and beads made from all types of stone are easy to obtain in a wide variety of sizes and shapes.



Ceramic Beads

These have been around for many thousands of years and many different styles are available, from the rough terracotta beads of Africa to the fine painted porcelain varieties of China.



Et al

Anyone who becomes really interested in beads will soon discover that there are more types available than those listed above, and you will find examples made from, for instance, polymer clay, seeds, natural resins and shell.

FINDINGS



Findings are the metal components that are needed to complete nearly every piece of jewellery; from the clasp to fasten a necklace and the hook from which to hang an earring, they are the essential 'nuts and bolts' that make jewellery work.

The Nickel Issue

Many people will be aware that this metal, which has been used in the manufacture of jewellery findings for many years, can cause allergic reactions. Consequently, in recent times, the EU brought in a directive that reduced the amount of nickel allowed in such products to minute proportions and disallowed the sale of jewellery containing higher nickel content. However, not all countries adhere to these restrictions, and in the USA, for example, nickel is still used in some jewellery metals. If this issue affects you and you purchase products made in a non-EU country, check out the nickel content for yourself.

You will notice that some metal findings and other materials listed in the project ingredients appear within quotation marks, for example 'gold'. This indicates that the metal is imitation.



Beads, Materials & Tools

THREADS AND WIRES

One of the biggest advances in beading has been in the materials on which beads can be strung. Today the choice of bead threading materials is huge.

Threads

These are available in various materials, including strong man-made materials and traditional silk. All are obtainable in a wide range of colours and thicknesses.

Nylon-coated Wire

This is now frequently the threading material of choice, and for strength and ease of use it is incomparable. There are two main types. One is generally known as tiger-tail; this is the least strong and flexible, and by far the most inexpensive. The other type is known as flexible nylon-coated wire, which is very strong and supple, and is my usual choice of threading medium. The best-known brands of this type are Beadalon and Softflex. Both types are available in a variety of colours and thicknesses.

Cord and Thong

The choice of beading thong and cord is also huge and many purpose-made examples are available. However, creative beaders can also select cord from haberdashery shops or even make their own from embroidery threads specially chosen to match their beads.

Wires

Jewellery wires are available in a wide range of colours and qualities. Often, these are simply coloured-coated copper, but, for the most upmarket jewellery, anodized niobium is available. This expensive material is ideal for those with allergies and can be used to produce beautiful long-lasting jewellery of superior quality.

Memory Wire

This is another wire worthy of separate mention, great for making simple jewellery. Available in long coils of hard wire, its uncut appearance is similar to that stair-creeping toy of childhood, the Slinky. It remembers its shape, so that when you pull it apart to thread beads or to wear, it springs back to a round and needs no clasp to fasten in place. It is made in three different diameters suitable for choker necklaces, bracelets and rings.



Beads, Materials & Tools

TOOLS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT

Anyone can start beading with nothing more than a sharp pair of scissors and a small pair of household pliers, but as you become involved with this fascinating hobby, you will eventually want to purchase tools that make the tasks easier for you.

The main tools required for making bead jewellery are pliers, and these come in a variety of types. They are also available in several qualities, and as the saying goes, 'you get what you pay for'. The very best are German and usually cost over £20 (about \$40). These are very high quality and should last a lifetime (my own pair are nearly 30 years old!), but those costing less than half the price do the same job, are perfectly serviceable and are pictured in the accompanying photograph.

General-purpose Beading Pliers

These are a miniature version of household pliers; their small size aids dexterity. You can use them to do all the jobs that are required in beading, but more specialist pliers (see below) are very helpful.

Round-nosed Pliers

The sole purpose of round-nosed pliers is to aid the smooth bending of wire. They are invaluable if you intend to make a lot of earrings.

Cutting Pliers

These are useful when you need to cut with accuracy or in an area that is not easy to access with a pair of general-purpose pliers.

Crimp Pliers

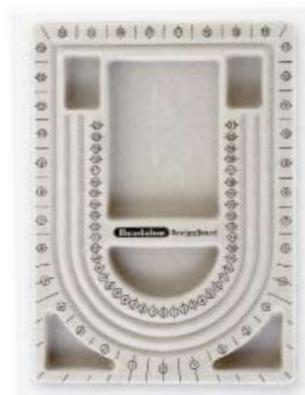
These specialist pliers are for use with high-quality crimp beads (see Step 3, Method 1, page 9). They produce a neat finish to the crimp.

Beading Trays

There are purpose made to make life easy for the beader. However, you can work at beading very easily using a domestic tray and several small flat containers to hold your beads (I find the plastic lids from tubes of savoury snacks perfect for this), and in some ways this approach can be preferable to the purpose-made tray, which will give you less space. A pucker beading tray, however, comes into its own when designing, as the beads can be laid in the proposed order of threading within its necklace-shaped grooves.

Bead Reamer

This useful tool enables you to enlarge most beads holes with ease or to smooth the rough edges of bead holes. It consists of a hand-held tube containing three different sizes and shapes of round file, and at one end of the tube is a small chuck into which the required file is fitted.



Basic Bead Jewellery Techniques

Most of the simple techniques involved in the projects are contained within this chapter, so print these pages (9–13) for quick, easy reference. When browsing the disk, you can go quickly to any of these techniques by clicking on its bookmark (go to top left of this pdf document). More specialist techniques are included with the projects.

The following tools and equipment are required for most projects:

- beading tray or household tray with separate shallow containers
- scissors
- cutting, round and flat-nosed pliers or a small pair of general-purpose pliers

NECKLACE THREADING

Most necklace making involves threading beads onto beading thread, nylon-coated wire, jewellery wire, leather thong or cord, and there are various methods of attaching these threading mediums to a clasp. The most commonly used of these are demonstrated below.

Method 1: Nylon-coated Wire with Crimp Beads

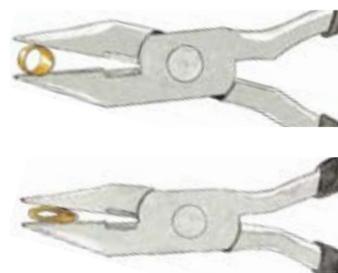
Modern nylon-coated wire provides a flexible, strong and simple choice for threading beads. It is made in various diameters that for simplicity I call fine, medium and thick. For each project, unless I state otherwise, you should assume that the wire used is medium, but as a basic rule, the lighter the beads, the finer the wire should be.

1. Thread a crimp bead onto one end of the nylon-coated wire and then thread the wire through the loop of one part of the clasp. Then thread the wire back through the crimp bead to make a small loop.
2. Use pliers to close the crimp bead to secure it to the wire – see photos for the use of general-purpose pliers. Note: for simplicity and clarity, photos are shown with non-coated wire.
3. If using specialist crimp pliers, this involves a two-part process, as there are two sets of grooves in their ‘jaws’. First place the crimp into the inner groove and squeeze the pliers, then place it into the outer groove and squeeze the pliers again – this has the effect of rounding the crimp.
4. After securing the crimp bead, use cutting pliers to trim the spare wire so that it appears as in the photo.

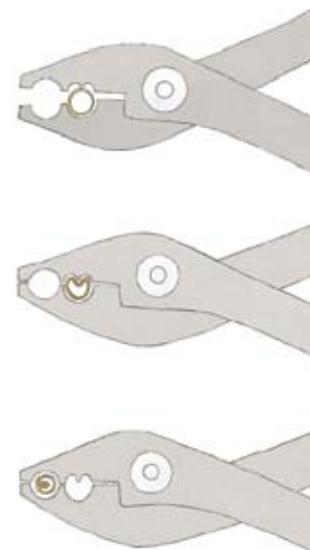
To begin a project, assemble all the ingredients on a purpose-made beading tray or a household tray with separate shallow containers.



Method 1, Step 1



Method 1, Step 2



Method 1, Step 3



Method 1, Step 4

Basic Bead Jewellery Techniques

Method 2: Nylon-coated Wire with Gimp and Crimp Beads

This is the same as Method 1, but instead of leaving the wire loop bare, it is covered with gimp for a more attractive and professional finish. Gimp (sometimes known as French wire or buillon) is a fine, very flexible tube of gold or silver coiled wire, which is sold in long lengths that are then cut into short pieces.

1. Using a pair of cutting pliers, cut an 8mm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in) length of gimp. Follow the instructions in Method 1, page 9, but after threading on the crimp bead in Step 1, thread on the length of gimp to cover the wire.

Method 3: Nylon-coated Wire with Crimp Beads and Clamshell Calottes

This is a very easy method of attaching a clasp and gives a neat finish.

1. Apply a crimp bead to the end of a length of nylon-coated wire and squeeze it firmly in place (see Method 1, page 9). Then thread through the hole of a clamshell calotte and pull the wire through so that the crimp bead sits inside the 'shell' of the calotte.
2. Use cutting pliers to trim any spare wire, then use general-purpose pliers to close the calotte. Use the same pliers to open the loop of the calotte and attach it to the clasp, then use the pliers again to close the calotte loop.



Method 2: nylon-coated wire with gimp and crimp beads



Method 3, Step 1: threading on a clamshell calotte



Method 3, Step 2: the calotte attached to a clasp

To ensure that there is no visible thread on your finished necklace, before attaching the final part of the clasp, hold the threaded beads as shown so that they all slide down to take up any slack thread.



Basic Bead Jewellery Techniques

BEADING THREADS

There are many beading threads from which to choose, varying from synthetic to real silk (which often comes ready threaded with a flexible needle), and most are available in a wide range of colours. I use beading thread in two situations: firstly, when the beads are very lightweight, and secondly, when I want the thread to show, as in knotting, when the thread becomes an integral part of the design. As with nylon-coated wire, there are several ways of attaching beading thread to a clasp.

Method 4: Gimp with Beading Thread

1. Thread an 8mm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in) length of gimp onto your beading thread, then thread through the loop of one part of the clasp. Ensure that the threaded gimp sits inside the clasp loop and a 5cm (2in) length of thread is left at one end. Then use this short length of thread to tie an overhand knot around the other side of the thread.

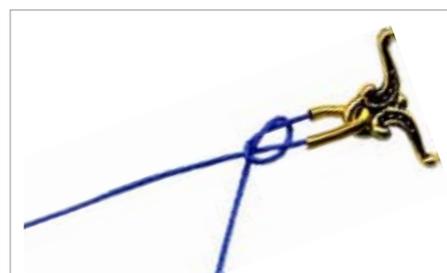
2. Pull the knot tight and use a headpin to apply a tiny touch of superglue to the knot to seal it, then trim any spare thread. Do not get superglue on your beads!

Method 5: Using Beading Thread with Clamshell Calottes

This method is ideal for beginners and those who are unsure about making neat knots.

1. Take your length of thread and tie a double overhand knot in one end. Alternatively, tie on a small rocaille bead.

2. Use a headpin to apply a tiny touch of superglue to the knot, then trim any spare thread. As in Method 3, page 10, thread on a clamshell calotte so that the knot (or the bead) sits inside the 'shell' of the calotte, then use pliers to close the calotte and attach it to the clasp. This method can also be used with cord, but you will need to use a larger bead and clamshell calotte.



Method 4: gimp with beading thread



Method 5, Step 1: tie a double overhand knot or tie on a rocaille bead

THREADING WITHOUT A NEEDLE

When using beading thread, you will need either to use a needle for threading or stiffen the thread by using superglue. For the latter, dip the first 5cm (2in) of one end of your thread into a bottle of liquid superglue. Allow a second or two for it to penetrate the thread and then remove it and swiftly wipe off the excess with a tissue. The thread will now be stiff enough for threading, but it is also helpful to cut across it diagonally to provide a sharp point (be careful not to get any glue on your fingers!).

Basic Bead Jewellery Techniques

Method 6: Thong or Cord with Box Calottes and Jump Rings

There are various styles of necklace end available for use with thong, but they all work on a similar principle, that is, they cover the end of the thong and are secured in place by being squeezed onto the thong with pliers. In the method shown here, I demonstrate the use of a box calotte, which is both neat and effective. It is useful for all types of thong, such as leather, suede, cotton cord, rat-tail, ribbon or handmade cords, and although the diagrams show just one piece of faux suede, the same method can be used for multiple lengths of suede or cord.

1. Using flat-nosed or general-purpose pliers, bend first one side of the box calotte and then the other side over and down onto the thong.
2. Use general-purpose pliers to open a jump ring sideways. Thread the jump ring through the loop of the box calotte and then thread on the loop of one part of the clasp.



If possible, always open jump rings, or other metal loops, sideways, as simply pulling the joint apart weakens it.

BASIC EARRING MAKING

Making beaded earrings is simple once you have mastered the art of making loops in wire. Most designs are based on beads threaded onto headpins, which are then cut to size and linked either straight onto an ear-wire, a link or other beaded headpins.

Method 7: Headpins

To make one pair of earrings, you will need:

- beading tray or household tray with separate shallow containers
- beads, as required for your design
- 2 headpins (normally 5cm/2in, but other sizes are available)
- 2 ear-hooks, ear-studs or ear-clips
- round-nosed and cutting pliers (it is possible to use general-purpose pliers, but it will be more difficult to form a good loop)

1. Place all your components on a beading tray or household tray with separate shallow containers. Select your beads and thread those for one earring onto a headpin.
2. Use the round-nosed pliers to bend the wire over at a right angle close to the top bead, then use cutting pliers to trim any spare wire, leaving about 8–10mm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in).
3. Use round-nosed pliers to form a loop with the end of the wire. For the best results, do this gradually, not in one motion. Attach to a ready-made ear-hook or other type of ear-fitting, by opening the loop sideways (as for a jump ring – see Method 6, above).



Basic Bead Jewellery Techniques

Once your earring has its headpin loop, it can be attached to an ear-hook or other type of ear-fitting. However, you may decide to add another length of beaded headpin, as shown right, to give a fluid movement, or attach your beaded headpin to a link.



Some ear-hooks are supplied unfinished (straight-leg ear-hooks), so you can add coordinating beads and make them up yourself, as shown right.



Anodized niobium ear-hooks, such as these, are available in a range of beautiful colours that can be damaged by rough handling, so when forming loops, cover the jaws of your pliers with clear adhesive tape to protect the colour finish.

Method 8: Nylon-coated Wire

As an alternative to using headpins in earrings, I often use nylon-coated wire and crimp beads. This method of suspending beads gives a fluid movement to the finished earrings and can also be used to make beaded drops to hang from a necklace clasp or pendant. Refer to the instructions for applying a crimp bead to nylon-coated wire in Method 1, page 9, and follow the photos opposite.

