

Basics of Seed Beads Tutorial

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First, the boring stuff:

Here's how you can use this tutorial, Basics of Seed Beads.

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Any questions on this, feel free to email me at gailn@beadedjewelrydiva.com and I'll do my best to answer you in a timely manner.

OK, now that the boring stuff is done, let's talk about seed beads!

Welcome to the World of Seed Beads!

Seed Beads

Beads, glorious beads! They beckon to us in their tubes, bags and hanks, begging us to be made into beautiful jewelry.

But before you go wild and purchase the whole bead store, or if you are on a tight budget, then here are some things to know about seed beads before you get out your pocketbook.

Bead Sizes



Here's an example of the most common bead sizes that you will come across; sizes 15 (red), 11 (white), 8 (blue) and 6 (black).

As you can see from the photo, size 15 is the smallest and size 6 is the largest. Each size swatch has the same number of beads.

There are size smaller than 15 and larger than 6, but it's rare that you will come across them in the course of your bead

shopping. And it's also extremely rare that you'll see a project that uses these very small and very large bead sizes.

All the beads shown above have what's called a matte finish, except for the red beads, which are transparent. (I went looking through my stash for matte size 15 and I couldn't find any...one more bead type I need!). I'll be discussing bead finishes in just a little bit.

Seed beads also come in various shapes. The photo above show the typical "round" seed beads, but there are cubes, triangles, cylinders, bugles and more. I'll be showing you examples of some of the various seed bead shapes.

Hmmm, maybe now would be a good time! How about we look at a swatch with different shapes of seed beads?

Bead Shapes

There are several bead shapes you need to be aware of, as they can affect the outcome of your project.

- Japanese cylinder beads. Generally these are the Toho and Delica brand beads. They are cylinder shapes, with a large hole, and quite regular in size. Though they are small, the larger than normal hole can accommodate multiple thread passes with ease. The most common sizes available are 8, 11 and 15.
- Seed beads. These are more donut shaped, and the common shape for the Czech beads, although you will see them in Japanese beads as well. They can be any size, from 24 through 3, but it's rare that you will use any sizes outside of 15 through 6.
- Tube beads. A kind of cross between the cylinder and seed beads. Not as regular as the cylinders, though.

Below are examples of Cylinder, Seed and Tube beads (left to right). They are all size 11.



- Charlottes. These are usually from the Czech Republic and have a facet cut onto one side. These are generally in the size 12 to 13 area (although they can be larger or smaller) and can have a relatively small and/or irregular bead hole. They do shine, though! Below is an example of Charlottes; you can see they are more uneven in size than the previous types of beads. These are size 15.



- Hex cuts. These are tube/cylinder shaped, and have six cuts around the sides, so as to look like a hexagon. Great for adding texture to a project. Available in most sizes.
- Triangle. These are what you expect; triangle shaped. These can give a wonderful texture and look to a project. Most often available in sizes 11, 10 and 8, although you might occasionally find them in 6 and 15.
- Cube. These are generally more of a rectangle in shape, and are typically larger than size 6 beads.
- Bugle. These are long, thin beads. They can be straight or twisted, and come in different lengths. One thing to watch out for is the fact that they generally have sharp bead holes, so you'll have to either file the bead edges or toss the ones that are really sharp. And make sure to use either a braided thread or double your thread...just in case.
- Magatama / Drop. I've seen them called both, but they are basically teardrop shaped. They are great for embellishment, and are generally found in 3mm and 4mm sizes.

Here are all of the above; bugles are the gold beads on the left. On the right, top to bottom, are cube, hex, triangle and at the right of the triangles, the magatama / drop beads:



And here are yet a few more: Czech duos (upper left), long drops (upper right) and peanut (middle lower).

The bead shapes I've listed can be found in many of the bead finishes discussed on the next page.

Bead Finishes

There are a multitude of bead finishes; far more than what I am about to show you in pictures. But here are some of the common ones that you'll come across.



These are matte opaque beads. These are opaque beads that have a frosted surface.

These are matte transparent beads. You might also see them listed as "frosted".



These are transparent beads; as you can tell, you can see right through them. These are wonderful beads to use if you have backlighting, but if you don't, some of the colors will almost look black when you use them (like a dark cobalt blue).

These beads are actually a bright lemon yellow, but they are slightly muted on this gray background.



These are opaque beads. They provide a lot of color, but they don't tend to have a "glassy" look to them.

These are opaque lustered beads. They have a shinier look than plain opaque beads.



Alabaster gilt-lined. These are slightly translucent opaque beads and have a silvery undertones.



These are colorlined beads. This means an opaque core, covered by a transparent color. These beads are turquoise colorlined crystal.

These are ceylon finish, which gives the beads a pearly look. They can be great when you want a pearl effect, but don't want to use pearls.



These are transparent AB. This is a transparent bead with an AB (Aurora Borealis) coating. The AB gives the beads a rainbow effect.



These are known as iris beads. They have a metallic look to them, and typically have two or more colors on any given bead.

Here's a relative; these are matte iris beads. It's easier to see the multi-colors on a single bead with this photo.



These are gold-lustered beads. Interestingly, gold tends to turn glass pink, so you see a lot of the gold-lustered beads in various shades of pink and red (although they do also come in other colors).



These are galvanized beads. You have to be very careful to get beads labeled as a permanent finish, or else the beautiful metallic finish will wear off faster than you can use them in your jewelry projects!

I've had good luck with the permanent finishes, though – I've worn them for weeks at a time, in all kinds of weather, and they have remained shiny.

Time for some silver-lined beads! These kinds of beads are lined with a silvery finish, which brings out the colors of the transparent glass.

This way, even colors like cobalt blue or deep purple have their colors shine and not appear muddy.



You might also come across some beads marked as dyed. I really don't recommend using these in jewelry, as the dye can come off, sometimes on you or your clothes.

All these beads come in more colors than you can easily count! And I can almost guarantee that no matter how many beads you have, there will always be one more color that you absolutely have to have....

OK, you have the beads, and you've make a few projects. What do you do with the leftovers, when you don't have enough of a bead color to make something else?

Glad you asked!

Bead Soup

You may run across the term "bead soup". Basically, that means beads of all colors, shapes and sizes, all mixed together with crystals, gemstones, glass, polymer and precious metals.

Here is an example of a pink bead soup. You can see that there are all kinds of beads, all in the pink/peach/red colors (with some gold and silver thrown in for highlights).

OK, the big bead in this photo isn't a seed bead, but you get the idea – a bead soup is made from all kinds of beads.



Don't have much (or any) beads for a bead soup? Not to worry, you can make your own pretty easily. You do need to buy some beads to do it, though.

A basic bead soup would be in one color group. In the photo above, I've mainly used shades of red and pink, but you can make bead soup out of greens, blues, purples, browns...you get the idea.

You can also make a bead soup out of any and all colors, but I like to do color families, and then if I need to, I can mix them – like reds with purples, greens and blues, etc.

If I had no beads and wanted to make a bead soup economically for, say, a bracelet, I'd go to <http://www.artbeads.com/japanese-seed-beads-tohos-mixes.html> and get a few bags of their mixes, which not only include various colors in a color group, but also different seed bead shapes, sizes and finishes.

(In fact, I buy a few bags every now and again just to add to my bead soups, especially for colors I might not normally buy a lot of.)

You'll need maybe 4 bags for an average bracelet, because you won't necessarily use all the different shapes and sizes of the soup in one bracelet.

Here's an example of a bead soup bracelet.

But keep in mind that eventually you will be building your very own bead soup with leftover beads from your projects. And unless a project calls for a "bead soup" you won't necessarily need soup right away.



Here's another color combination for bead soup – blues and greens.

Remember, after you've made a few projects, you'll have a soup "recipe" that's all your own!

This should give you enough information to venture out and buy some beads! Buy where do you buy them?

If you have a local bead shop, you'll undoubtedly find tubes and tubes of a rainbow of sizes, colors and finishes. The staff will happily help you to select a nice mixture of beads. Bead shops are the best if you're new to seed beads. Although you might be overwhelmed with the sheer number of beads available, it's very useful to see the beads "up close and personal" before you buy.

No bead shop around? Some of the big craft stores now sell seed beads, but be careful; not all are high quality, and could drive you to distraction! Stay away from the super-low-priced ones, as they are generally very irregular in size and shape – not worth the aggravation.

I've seen Michael's recently selling a line of Tohos, which are very nice beads indeed; just a little more expensive than traditional seed beads (but oh so worth it in some projects). In any case, the craft stores will have a far fewer selection of seed beads than would a bead store. Still, it's nice if you need a few beads and would like to see them before you buy.



You can also find a multitude of seed beads online! Three places I buy from are

<http://www.whimbeads.com>

<http://www.artbeads.com>

<http://www.limabeads.com>

Now there are a lot more places online from which to buy seed beads; I am only mentioning the three above because I can vouch for their customer service, seed bead quality and fast shipping.

(And no, I did not get any freebies or special discounts from the three I've listed above – again, they are just three places I've ordered from that I can recommend.)

Ready for some more beady photos? Read on!



This is a bracelet done with peyote stitches, with a little bead embroidery on top.

Once again, peyote, but this time using triangle beads, as well as magatamas.



Peyote one more time, but this time as a freeform, where I added pearls and other beads as well.

More →



Yes indeed, these use seed beads of all kinds! These are three bead embroidery cuff bracelets that I have made. True, they are not what you would call "instant gratification" projects, but they do turn heads when they are worn!

And one more; this time the seed beads frame the rivoils and chatons.

Interested in some more tutorials? Just turn the page!



Other Tutorials

I hope you've enjoyed this Basics tutorial. And if you'd like to know more, here are some additional free tutorials that you might like:

- Basics of Beadweaving Supplies
- Basics of Even Count Flat Peyote

Both are available at: <http://www.beadedjewelrydiva.com/basics-tutorials-for-jewelry/>

You will also find other project tutorials on my site. You can take a peek at

<http://www.beadedjewelrydiva.com/project-tutorials-for-jewelry/>

You'll see bead embroidery, bead weaving, stringing and more!

Once again, I hope you've enjoyed this tutorial, and that you'll come and visit me at Beaded Jewelry Diva often.

See you there!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gail" with a smiley face "😊" drawn below it.