

Basics of Beadweaving Supplies Tutorial

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First, the boring stuff:

Here's how you can use this tutorial, Basics of Beadweaving Supplies.

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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 beadweaving supplies!

Basic Beadweaving Supplies

If you're new to seed beads and beadweaving, you'll probably be wondering what else you need, aside from the beads! Sure, you'll need a needle and thread, but what kinds?

This tutorial will help you to learn about the basic supplies you'll need to bead faster and with less frustration.

Let's go!

Basic Beadweaving Supplies

First, you'll need some basic beadweaving supplies, which will be needed for pretty much any beadweaving jewelry (whether peyote, herringbone, right angle weave or some other stitch). I'll list them out, then talk a little about each.

Your basic beadweaving kit should include:

- Seed Beads
- Needles
- Thread
- Scissors and/or wire clipper
- Lighting
- Magnification

Optional supplies include:

- Thread Conditioner
- Findings (earwires, buttons, clasps, etc.)
- Beading Mat
- Beading Tray
- Larger Beads (pearls, crystals, gemstones, etc.)

Now let's talk a little bit about each one – what will be good to use, and what you might want to stay away from -- at least for the time being.



Needles

There are two kinds of needles; those that are good for beadweaving, and those that are not. And it's pretty easy to tell the difference.



If you're wandering in a craft or sewing store, resist the urge to buy one of those multi-packs of sewing needles; maybe one needle will be almost OK for your seed beading project.

Instead, buy a pack of needles specifically made for beading. You can find these in your local beading shop, or various places online.

These needles come in two types: sharps and beading (but don't worry, either will do).

Sharps are more ridged and shorter in length. They are also slightly thicker.

Beading are longer and slightly flexible. My advice is to get a pack of each and decide which one you like best for your own beading style, as they each have their own advantages and disadvantages.

The advantages of the beading needles are that they are slimmer and slightly flexible. This makes it easier to get your needle through the smaller seed beads, or when you have to do multiple thread passes. The disadvantage is their longer length when you are trying to tie off your beading.

Sharps are pretty much the opposite; their biggest advantage is that they are shorter (better for tying off the piece of thread when it's gotten a little too short). The disadvantage is that they are thicker, which makes them better suited for larger seed beads (sizes 6 and 8) or for designs where there are fewer thread passes through size 11 beads.

Now that you know what kind of needles you need, now you have to decide upon size. The two most common are sizes 10 and 12, with size 12 being thinner. If you find yourself beading with size 11s and up of the Japanese beads, size 10s should suit you for the vast majority of your work.

If, however, you find yourself working with size 15 or with Czech beads, your best bet is to use a size 12, since the bead holes are much smaller.

And as you probably have already figured out, the thinner the needle, the smaller the eye size, which means it's harder to thread. And that also means you'll have to use thinner thread.

Which leads me to another of the must-haves for beadweaving; thread.

Beading Thread



You may be familiar with thread from sewing or embroidery projects you may have done, but neither is best for beadweaving. Let's take a look at the three most popular (and easy to find) beading threads.

The three most popular beading threads are Nymo, Silamide and Fireline.

In the photo, clockwise is a small Nymo spool, Fireline, 2 different colors of Silamide

and then a large Nymo spool.

Each has their strengths and weaknesses, and which one you ultimately use for a project is up to you. While I favor Fireline for almost all my beading, you can use any of the above. And you'll soon have your own favorites! Let's talk a little about them.

Nymo has the advantage of coming in many thicknesses and is by far the least expensive of the three. It comes in white, black and around 8 colors (although the colors are only in limited thicknesses). The biggest disadvantages are that it frays pretty easily and can tangle. If you use Nymo, you may want to use a thread conditioner like Thread Heaven or Beeswax, to help keep down the fraying and tangling. You can find Nymo at any bead shop and a lot of the craft stores.

Silamide is a twisted, pre-waxed thread that comes in many colors. It comes on cards and so it's a little "bended" when it comes off the card. Run the thread through your fingers a few times to straighten it out, as well as stretch it out some. Silamide generally does not need thread conditioners. It's a little more expensive than Nymo, and comes in fewer thicknesses. But if the color of your thread is important for your project, Silamide may be what you want to use. I like it better than Nymo as it frays much less. Most bead shops carry Silamide, and you can also find it easily online.

Fireline is actually a very fine, braided fishing line. I don't know who came up with the idea to use it as a beading thread, but it works wonderfully well. It's very strong, and hard to break, so it's the best thread to use for projects involving bugle beads and metal beads (which are notorious for having sharp edges). The disadvantages are that it's the most expensive and only

comes in 2 colors, "smoke" (a medium gray) and "crystal" (white). I hear there is also a green, although I haven't come across it. Another disadvantage is that it tangles, but fortunately the tangles are pretty easy to undo. There are plenty of sizes, but I've been happiest with the 4-, 6- and 8-lb sizes. Fireline is available in many bead stores, online and also in sporting goods stores.

Note: please don't try using plain monofilament fishing line, as it will eventually degrade and break (trust me on this one). Fireline, Power Pro and Spiderwire are the best fishing line to use, as they are thin but extremely strong.

Which leads me to the last part of the essential tools; your cutting tools.

Cutting Tools

Your choices here are scissors or a wire cutter, and which you use is somewhat dependent on the thread you choose.

For Nymo and Silamide, a pair of sharp embroidery scissors is wonderful. They have a tiny end point, and can get into small places, and cut threads very close to the work.

When it comes to Fireline, a lot of people choose wire cutters, sometimes called a nipper tool. But I'll be honest; I've used a pair of embroidery scissors for a few years now and they still seem as sharp as ever.

Forget about using craft and general-purpose scissors that you can find just about anywhere, though. They tend to be too large to get close enough to your work for cutting, and they usually aren't sharp enough.

I wait until there is a sale at a local sewing store like Jo-Ans and get the good scissors (which tend to be pretty pricey). But they seem to last forever, as long as you dedicate them only to cutting your thread!

There is also a thread burner out on the market that has a very fine tip that will melt off the end of your thread very close to your work. It's easy to use, but you still need scissors to cut the thread off the spool before you start your project. And please use caution – the end gets very, very hot! I've never tried this with Fireline, but I have used it with Nymo and Silamide.

Lighting

Good lighting is essential to your beadwork; after all, if you can't see your beads well, it's hard to work!

There are debates all around as to the best lighting, but I know every time I've been to a beading class, we always have the craft lights available for each person – the kind that folds and has full-spectrum light. The next-known brand is Ott-Lite.

Yes, you can use regular incandescent or florescent lighting, but be aware that they will change the bead colors you see; they will look different in sunlight.

I personally use a full-spectrum lamp when I'm at my beading table, but when I am relaxing in front of the TV I have an incandescent light coming over my right shoulder. So it's really up to you, and where you bead.

Magnification

If you're fortunate enough to be able to thread needles and bead size 15 seed beads without magnification of some kind, you can skip this section. Otherwise, read on!

As time catches up with us, most of us find that we need some sort of magnification to see to thread the needles and find the holes in the smaller seed beads. What can you do?

I finally bought myself a pair of reading glasses from the drugstore, and they seem to do fine for both threading needles and working even with size 15 seed beads. You may find that they work fine for you as well.

However, if you already wear glasses and have problems seeing your work clearly, there are a couple more options.

First is a magnifier that you wear over your head – Opti-Visor is the most common brand name. They fit over your glasses, but can be a little bulky to wear. They are, however, quite portable for beading on the go.

Some of the crafting lights sold also come with a magnifying glass area, where you can easily see your work. Coupled with the excellent lighting, it's a big help. The disadvantage is that it's not terribly portable if you travel and bead.

In any case, don't be vain – use whatever magnification you need to clearly see the beads. Not only will it help prevent eye strain, but you won't have to squint (think wrinkles around the eyes) and you'll just enjoy yourself more.

Optional Items

Options for you are things like clasps (purchased or you can make your own if you like), earring findings, a bead mat, bead tray and miscellaneous beads, such as pearls, lampwork, gemstones, crystals and the like.

Thread Conditioners

There are two primary types of thread conditioners that you can likely find at any bead store; beeswax and Thread Heaven. There are others, but these two are the most common.

But first, what are thread conditioners, and why would you want to use them?

Thread conditioners help to protect your thread from fraying, cut down on the tangles and give your thread more "body", which may be useful for some stitches.

By more “body”, I mean that the thread is thicker, so it fills the bead holes more. Useful if you have a thinner thread than you would like – for example, when working with the larger seed beads.

Beeswax is better for body; Thread Heaven is better for preventing tangles. And you can use both together – the Thread Heaven first, then a coating of beeswax over it.

How to coat your thread? You do them both the same way. Put your thread on the surface of the conditioner (thread only, not the needle) and put your finger on top of the thread, so it is pressing firmly against the conditioner and thread.

Then, pull the thread; as it slides along the conditioner, your thread picks it up. If needed, you can repeat one or more times, but don't coat your thread too heavily, or the excess wax may clog the bead holes.

I'll be honest – although I used both when I was using Nymo, I don't find that I need either with Silamide or Fireline. But it's up to you; either conditioner can be used with any thread type is desired.

Clasps and Findings

Unless you're making earrings, a bangle bracelet or a long necklace that you can slip over your head, you'll need a clasp for your jewelry project.

What's the right clasp? There really isn't one right answer, aside from what looks right to you for a given project.

First up are **clasps**. Toggle clasps and buttons are two very popular choices for clasps with beadweaving. Other options include slides, s-shaped, box, snaps and even Velcro!

Beading stores carry a wide array of clasps, as do a lot of online vendors. If you're interested in buttons, snaps and Velcro, check out a local sewing store; they should have plenty from which to choose. And here's a hint – if you see a set of buttons that are intriguing...buy them! They may not be available by the time you need them.

The same goes for unusually-styled clasps – buy them when you see them. Standard toggle, slide and lobster-claw clasps are pretty easy to find, so you need not buy much in the way of extras unless there is a sale. But some of the designer toggle and lobster-claw clasps may not always be around.

Earring findings are the wire that goes through pierced ears, or the clip-on part for non-pierced ears. They have a loop that you can use to attach your beading to. If your ears are pierced, you might want to stay away from plated findings, because they can wear off and the base metal can irritate your ears.

Are your ears really sensitive to metals? The metals with the least reactions are silver (sterling and argentium), gold (14 or 18 kt solid or gold-filled) and niobium. Some surgical steel is OK, but some is made with nickel, which is the metal that most often causes a reaction.

(My ears are terribly sensitive, and while I have to be very, very careful with anything pierced, I find that plated clip-ons work OK – go figure.)

Bead stores will carry a wide variety of pierced earring findings, but unless the store is very large, they tend to have few or no clip-on findings. Those you'll probably have to buy online.

Other findings include jump rings and wire, which aren't used a whole lot in seed bead work. If you find a good sale, buy some; otherwise, wait until you need them for a project.

Bead Mats and Trays

When it comes to beading, I do recommend a bead mat, which helps to keep your beads from rolling around. You can usually find these in a craft store, a bead shop and online as well.

If you can't locate a bead mat, a dishtowel works fine, as long as it doesn't have terry cloth loops (which can be a hiding place for small seed beads). A piece of velvet can also work well.

However, if you're like me and like to bead on the sofa, your best bet is to use a bead tray with a bead mat on the bottom. Can't find a bead tray locally? They sell them online, usually called "jewelry display trays". The size you want is in the neighborhood of 14-3/8 inches by 8-3/4 inches, and they are usually between 3/4 and 1 inch high.

Bigger Beads

One of the optional items that is a lot of fun are the bigger beads. Two of my favorites are Czech fire-polished beads and Swarovski crystals.

Both come in a wide variety of colors, sizes and finishes. Czech fire-polished beads tend to be more economical (i.e., they cost less), but sometimes your project needs the special sparkle and flash of the Swarovski.

And yes, you can use gemstone beads, lampwork beads, polymer beads, pressed beads, pearls...the list goes on and on and on! You're limited only by your imagination.

The bigger beads don't always fit into any given project, but there are tons of projects that need the extra impact of the bigger beads.

Anything Else?

You may have wondered why I haven't mentioned things like crimp beads, pliers and beading wire in this tutorial. Here's why.

Beadweaving and bead stringing are two different styles of jewelry making, and the supplies and tools needed are slightly different in some cases.

For example, bead stringing tends to use larger and heavier beads, which means that the stringing material needs to be sturdier. In most cases, a beading wire is needed, which is made up of fine steel wires wrapped into a thin cable.

But, I'll cover the basics for bead stringing supplies in a different ebook. Rest assured that the information in this ebook will give you the basics for beautiful beadweaving projects!

But do you need (or just want) more information? Read on...

Other Free 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 Seed Beads:

Basics of Even Count Flat Peyote:

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

You can stop by for more freebies, as well as for ebook projects that are available for a teeny-tiny price. (Helps to cover the cost of the freebies.)

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!



Gail
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