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Jewelry Making & Beading



Chris Franchetti Michaels



Jewelry Making & Beading



by Chris Franchetti Michaels



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Teach Yourself VISUALLY™ Jewelry Making & Beading

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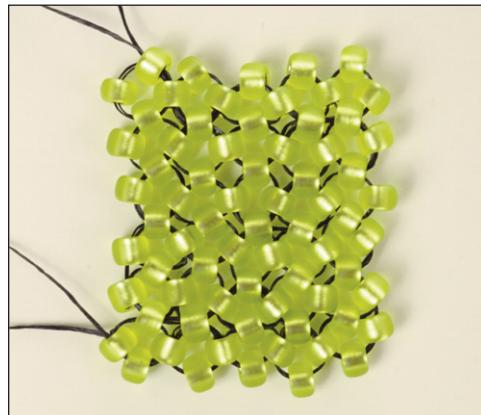
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chapter

1

Introduction to Jewelry Making and Beading

Are you interested in learning how to make jewelry and work with beads, but unsure where to begin? Let this book guide you through the basic skills and techniques you will need to create the most popular styles of jewelry and beadwork. In this chapter, you will learn about the essential tools, equipment, and supplies used for common tasks. Then you can set up your work area and start exploring this creative hobby.



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Become a Jewelry Artisan

Jewelry making and beading are very personal and rewarding crafts. With some basic supplies and a little creativity, you can adorn yourself, and the people in your life, with beautiful objects that communicate your inner feelings and your sense of style.



People have been crafting jewelry and beading for thousands of years. Throughout human history, jewelry and beads have symbolized social status, wealth, and spiritual beliefs. Some cultures even attribute magical powers to their jewelry and gemstones. Today, many people still view jewelry as more than mere decoration; they use it to symbolize love and commitment, religion, politics, life experiences, the birth of children, and important memories. Our choice of jewelry conveys important information about us. It helps us—and those around us—to understand who we are.



When you begin making your own jewelry and beaded artwork, you will use many of the same techniques that ancient crafters used thousands of years ago. Your designs will be special because you made them by hand to your own specifications. You will experience the satisfaction of making jewelry you really love (and that fits you), while avoiding the cheaply made, mass-produced jewelry that you see at so many retail stores.



You can also save money by making your own jewelry. Using the basic techniques covered in this book, you can affordably make jewelry that is very similar to expensive designer jewelry from department stores and boutiques. You will also find that gift-giving becomes far less challenging for the jewelry and beadwork lovers on your gift lists.



One of the most rewarding aspects of jewelry making and beading is that your creations can serve any purpose and match any style that you choose. If you love fashion, you can be your own personal fashion jewelry designer. If you're interested in a particular culture, religion, spiritual path, or time in history, your designs can reflect what's important to you. You can even reassemble your old jewelry into new, updated designs.

As you work through this book, allow yourself plenty of time to experiment and play with new techniques. You may master some skills quickly, but others will take practice. Be patient, and keep in mind that you will be able to complete projects faster over time. Enjoy each new accomplishment, and use your newfound talents to bring more creativity and enrichment into your life.



Beads and Beading Supplies

Beads are the most popular and widely available jewelry-making components. You can find them at craft stores, bead shops, and on the Internet. (See pages 282–283 for a list of bead resources.) Typically, beads are categorized by material, shape, and size.

Common Bead Materials

GLASS BEADS

Glass beads are available in just about any color and style you can imagine. Their quality is often linked to where and how they are made. For example, many glass beads currently made in China and India are less consistent in size and color than glass beads from Europe; however, they typically are less expensive than European beads.

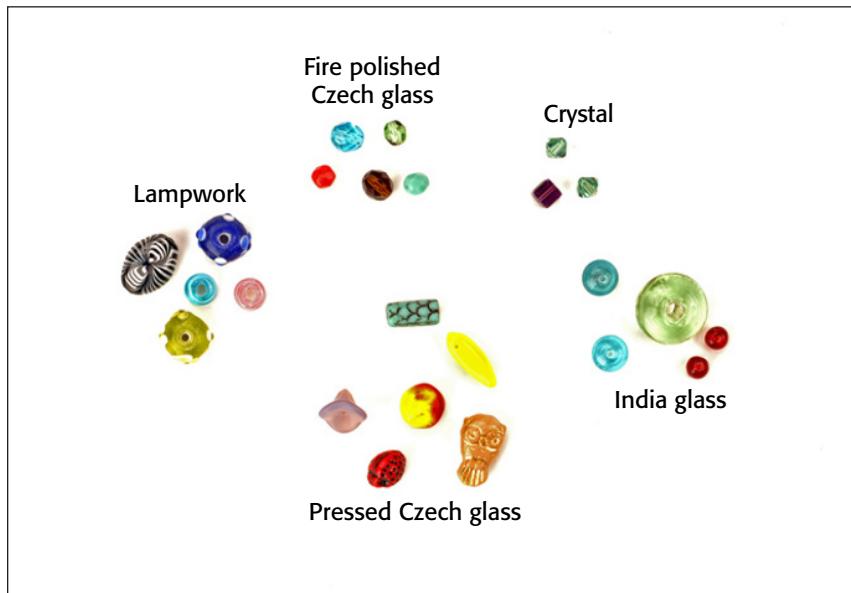
Some of the most popular glass beads from Europe are made in the Czech Republic. These are often referred to as *Czech glass beads*. Some Czech glass beads are *pressed*, or manufactured in molds. You can find them in a lot of fun shapes like flowers, animals, and even fruit. Other Czech glass beads are *fire polished*. Fire polishing is a special process that gives glass extra shine and sparkle. But fire-polished glass beads are not quite as eye-catching as *crystal beads*.

Crystal is glass that contains a small amount of lead. The lead makes the glass softer so that it can be cut into more precise shapes. It also changes the way light reflects within the glass, creating extreme shine. The highest-quality crystal beads are made in Austria and Czech Republic, but less expensive variations are also manufactured in China.

Seed beads are tiny glass beads that are commonly used to create woven beaded fabric. You can also use them to make thin, beaded strands. As with larger beads, seed beads vary in quality depending on how and where they were made. You will learn more about bead weaving and selecting quality seed beads in Chapter 5.

Although most glass beads are made by machine, some are individually handmade. *Lampwork beads* are an especially popular style of handmade glass beads. They are crafted by manually applying molten glass to metal rods.

Other beads are created by a combination of mechanical and handmade methods. For example, some manufactured glass beads are *hand faceted*, or cut to have multiple flat surfaces, to mimic the look of gemstone beads.

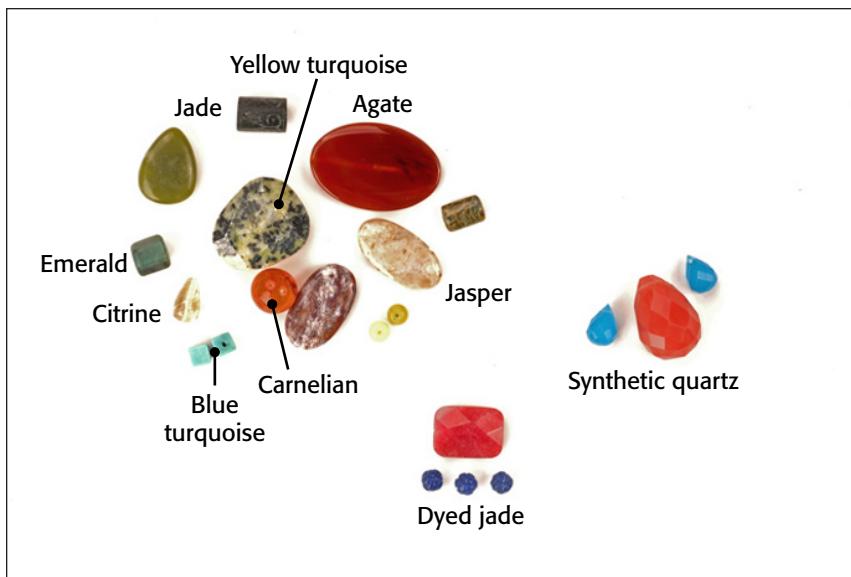


GEMSTONE BEADS

Most gemstone beads are made from *semiprecious* natural stone. Semiprecious stone is more abundant, and less costly, than the *precious* gemstones used in fine jewelry settings. Agate, jade, quartz, jasper, and turquoise are examples of common semiprecious stones. You can also find semiprecious varieties of more expensive stones like ruby, amethyst, emerald, and citrine.

Gemstone beads are usually shaped by hand. Like glass beads, their quality and cost often depend on where they were made. Some of the most affordable gemstone beads are made in India. They are colorful and beautiful, but their shapes and sizes are less consistent than more expensive gemstone beads from China.

Many gemstone beads are *treated*, which means that they may be dyed, oiled, heated, irradiated, or injected with waxes. Treatments improve the look of lower-quality stones, but treated stones remain less valuable than higher-quality, untreated stones. Treated gemstone is not the same as *synthetic* gemstone. Synthetic gemstone beads are not really made from stone; they are another material made to look like stone. Many synthetic stones—especially synthetic quartzes—are made from glass. They can be very beautiful, but they are typically considered inferior to natural stone.



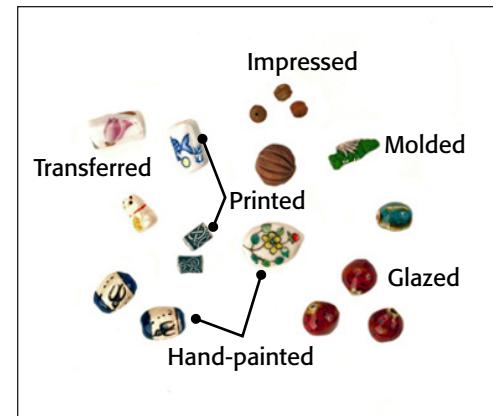
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Beads and Beading Supplies (continued)

CERAMIC BEADS

Ceramic beads are made from earthen clay. They can have a simple, natural look or be highly decorative. Colorful ceramic beads are usually painted, printed, or glazed. With *painted* ceramic beads, the paint is brushed on or the beads are dipped into paint. A coat of lacquer may be applied to seal the paint in place. *Printed* ceramic beads are either stamped with paint or have designs *transferred* onto them from other surfaces. Transferred designs are usually applied using heat, but otherwise they are similar to stamps. Printed and transferred designs are less time-consuming to create, and more regular in appearance, than hand-painted designs. *Glazed* ceramic beads are coated with colored or clear glass.

Some ceramic beads are shaped by hand, and others are molded, carved, or *impressed*. Impressed beads have indented or three-dimensional designs made by pressing a mold or modeling tool onto the clay before it hardens.



METAL BEADS

Metal beads can be made of precious metal or base metal. *Precious metal* is less abundant and more expensive than base metal. The most common precious metals used in handmade jewelry are sterling silver and gold. *Base metal* refers to any of the more common, less expensive metals like copper, brass, nickel, tin, or aluminum—or to any mixture, or *alloy*, of more than one type of base metal. Base metal beads are often finished or plated. *Finishing* is a technique used to change the color of the surface of metal to make it look more like another metal. It can also be used to darken metal, making it look *oxidized*, or antiqued. *Plated* metal is coated with a very thin layer of another metal. Common examples are silver-plate and gold-plate. Plated beads have a nice look, but their plating can wear off relatively easily.

Most solid metal beads are *cast*, or molded. Hollow metal beads are often made of two stamped sheets of metal joined together at the seam.

Handmade metal beads are usually made from precious metals, and they are significantly more expensive than cast beads because of the time and effort required to make them. Most handmade metal beads are fabricated using traditional, advanced jewelry-making techniques. Others are hand-formed from metal clay. (For more information on metal fabrication and metal clay, see Chapter 12.)



PLASTIC BEADS

While some plastic beads are inexpensive and of low quality, others are pricey and highly collectible. Beads made from hard vintage plastics like *Bakelite* and *celluloid* are especially sought after. *Artificial resin* is a soft plastic used to make bright, colorful beads, or to replicate natural materials like amber and cinnabar. (In fact, modern beads called “cinnabar” are usually made from red or black resin, because natural cinnabar is highly toxic.) Some basic plastic, or *acrylic*, beads are coated to look like metal beads. Others look like carved bone, tortoise shell, or pearls.

Many handmade plastic beads are made from *polymer clay*, which is a heavy plastic that can be shaped easily and layered to create interesting artistic effects. (For more information on polymer clay, see Chapter 12.)

Bakelite plastic



ORGANIC BEADS

Historians believe that the first beads ever made were crafted from small seeds or tiny pieces of shell. These materials are *organic* because they come from living things. Pearl is an all-time favorite organic bead material. Pearls are formed by little water creatures called *mollusks*. When an irritant, like a piece of sand, gets trapped in the mollusk's tissue, it deposits layers of a substance called *nacre* around the irritant. Multiple layers of nacre create a pearl. Most pearls are *cultured*, meaning that irritants were manually placed into mollusks' tissues to create them. *Natural* pearls are pearls that form without any human intervention. They are very rare and expensive, and so the pearls you use in jewelry will likely be cultured. Pearl beads are often dyed, but they can also have a natural white, cream, or tan color. There are many different qualities, or *grades*, of pearl beads. Even the lower-grade, inexpensive varieties can look stunning in jewelry.

Other organic bead materials include wood, seeds, shell, amber, bone, and horn. *Amber* is a very lightweight material made from the natural resin of ancient trees. Bone and horn beads typically derive from the byproducts of large livestock like cows and sheep. Beads made from these materials are usually handcrafted, and many are hand carved.

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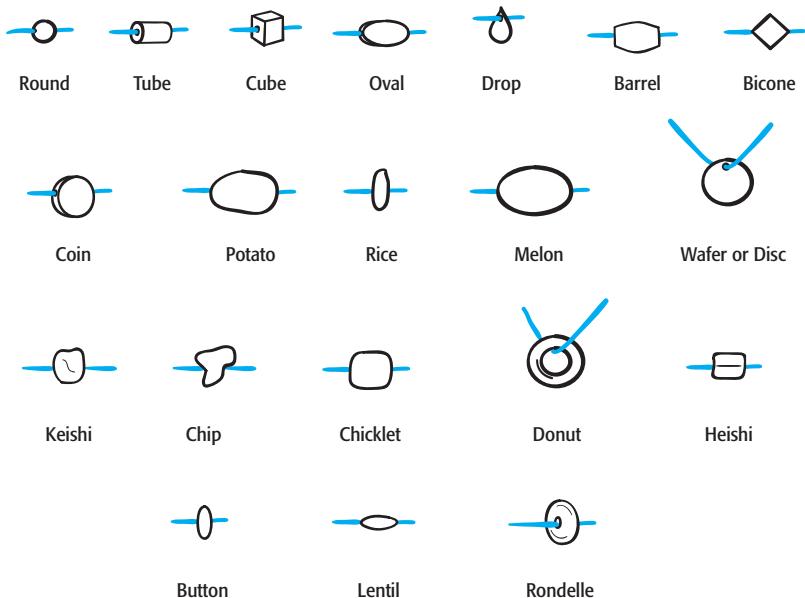
Seed



Beads and Beading Supplies (*continued*)

Bead Shapes

Beads are available in many shapes. Here are the most common shapes you will encounter when bead shopping.



FAQ

What are bead caps?

Bead caps are small, cup-shaped components that adorn the ends of beads. You can string on bead caps before and after a bead to give it a more ornate appearance. Bead caps are usually made of metal, and they can be plain or elaborate in their styling. For best results, select bead caps that fit snugly so that they almost appear to be part of the beads that they contain.

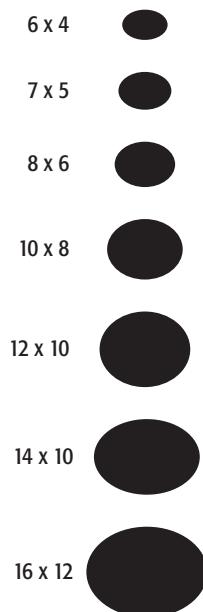
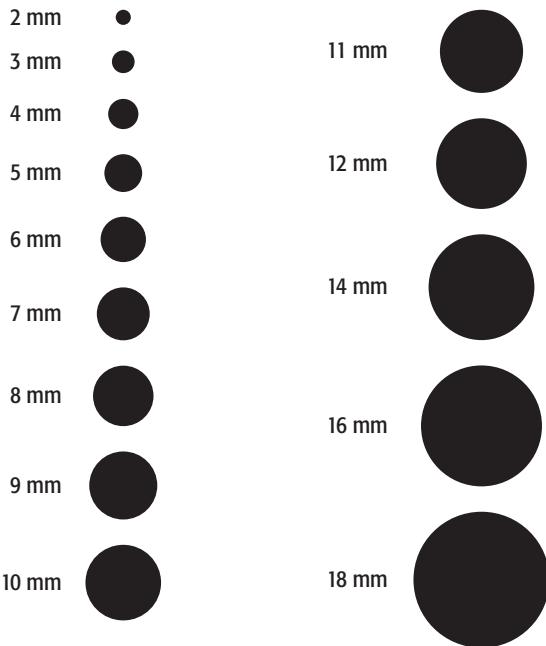


Bead Sizes

With the exception of tiny seed beads, bead sizes are typically described in millimeters. (To learn about the unique sizing classifications for seed beads, see page 95 in Chapter 5.)

The size of a round bead is its *diameter*, which is the same measurement as either its *length* (the distance between the two openings of the drill hole) or its *width* (the distance between the other two sides of the bead). The sizes of other shapes of beads are often described by both their length and width. Typically, length is the first measurement given, but sometimes width is provided first. (For this reason, it's important to examine the bead in question to understand its width versus length.) Here are some examples of common bead sizes.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Beads and Beading Supplies (*continued*)

Pendants and Charms

You can use pre-made pendants and charms in just about any type of jewelry you make. They are sold at most bead shops and jewelry supply stores, and you can even take them off of old jewelry and reuse them for new designs.

Pendants are usually larger than charms and serve as focal pieces for necklaces. They can be made from any material that beads are made from. The little devices that hold pendants onto necklaces are called *bails*.



Charms are typically used as accent pieces rather than focal points. You can use a single charm in a design, or a collection of many. Charms usually attach to jewelry with split rings or jump rings (see page 27).



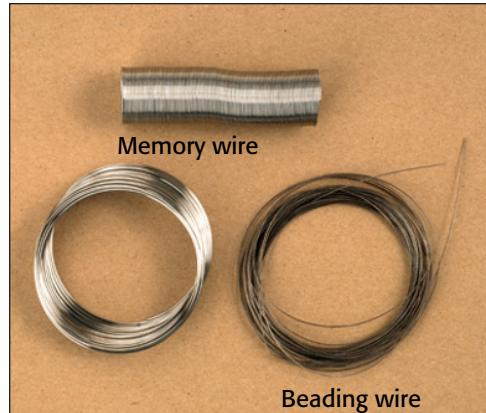
Bead Stringing Materials

You can string beads on many different materials. Here's a brief look at the most common stringing materials used for beading. You will learn more about them in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

BEADING WIRE AND MEMORY WIRE

Unlike regular metal wire, *beading wire* is soft and flexible. It's made up of many tiny metal strands woven or wound together. Most beading wire is covered with a thin layer of nylon plastic. To learn more about the types and sizes of beading wire, see "Select a Stringing Material" in Chapter 3.

Memory wire is hard, single-strand steel wire designed to hold a circular shape. You can use it to make beaded coil bracelets, necklaces, and rings that don't require clasps.



CORD AND RIBBON

Cord is non-metal material that often consists of smaller strands woven together. Silk, nylon, cotton, and satin are popular types of multiple-strand cord. Leather, suede, and rubber are typical single-strand cords. Stretch cord can have single or multiple strands. Most cord is sized in millimeters or inches according to its diameter, but some manufacturers use their own sizing system using numbers or letters. *Ribbon* for beading is usually made of soft fabric, like organza or satin.



BEADING THREAD

Beading thread is a special synthetic thread designed for beading. It has a very small diameter and can fit through tiny bead holes. Like cord, it is often composed of multiple strands. Beading thread is usually stronger and smoother than thread used for sewing. To learn about beading thread sizes, see "Select Beads, Thread, and Needle" in Chapter 5.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Beads and Beading Supplies (*continued*)

Beading Tools and Supplies

Although beads and stringing material are the basic necessities of any beading project, there are other tools and supplies that can make your beadwork easier and help you create more complicated designs. Here's a look at some items that you may find useful. You will learn more about working with many of them in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

BEADING MATS, BEADING DISHES, AND BEAD BOARDS

Because many beads are round, they can easily roll away from your work area. You can keep better track of your beads by working on a *beading mat*. A beading mat can be any flat surface that is textured to keep beads from rolling. It can be as simple as a terry cloth hand towel or as fancy as a specially engineered, rubberized mat from a bead shop. Textured foam drawer-liner material also makes a nice bead mat, and you can find it at most drug stores.

When you work with tiny seed beads, you may find it more helpful to keep them on a ceramic dish or in a shallow, smooth bowl. This makes it easier to pick up the beads using a beading needle.

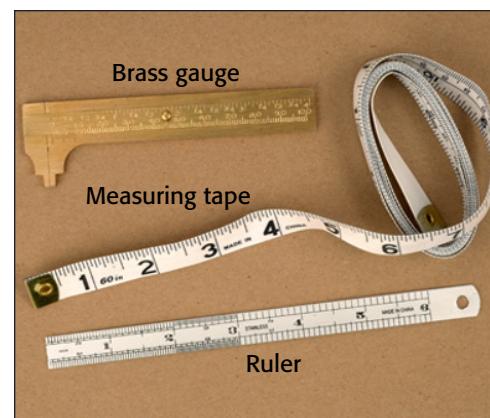
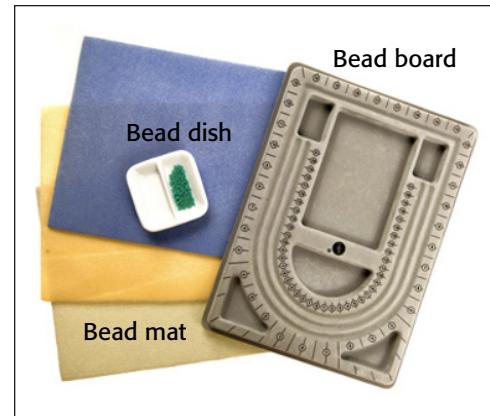
A *bead board* is a three-dimensional tray with long grooves for holding and arranging beads. Most bead boards are made of plastic with a velvety coating that helps beads stay in place. Bead boards are available in a variety of shapes and sizes, and they usually have measurement marks to help you gauge the lengths of your designs.

TAPE AND CLAMPS

There may be times when you want to string some beads before you permanently secure the end of your stringing material. You can keep your beads from falling off the string by temporarily securing it with a piece of masking tape or a clamping device. *Alligator clips* are small metal clamps traditionally used for electrical work. They are especially useful for clamping cord. You can also find clamps made specifically for beading called *Bead Stoppers* at some bead shops and jewelry supply stores.

MEASURING TOOLS

It's a good idea to have a ruler and a measuring tape on hand for measuring the lengths of beaded strands, sizing beads and other components, and helping with jewelry sizing. You can also use a sliding *brass measuring gauge* to determine the dimensions of beads and components. Brass measuring gauges have marks that line up to show you the sizes of items in millimeters and inches. They are relatively inexpensive and provide very accurate measurements.



SHARP SCISSORS OR NIPPERS

A good pair of small, sharp scissors will help you cleanly cut and trim soft stringing materials like cord, ribbon, and thread, and even smaller sizes of beading wire. For larger beading wire, or to cut soft materials more quickly, you can use a pair of short-bladed cutters called *nippers*. Try to avoid using your beading scissors or nippers on anything other than bead-stringing material; hard or rough materials can damage or dull them.



PLIERS FOR CRIMPING

You can secure the ends of beading wire with little collapsible beads or tubes called *crimps* (see “Crimp Beads and Crimp Tubes” on page 26). To attach crimps, you need a pair of chain nose pliers or specially designed crimping pliers. *Chain nose pliers* are short needle nose pliers with smooth jaws. Although similar pliers are sold at hardware stores, it’s best to purchase them at a bead shop or jewelry making supply store. *Crimping pliers* are usually available where other beading supplies are sold. (To learn more about crimping pliers, see page 50 in Chapter 3.)

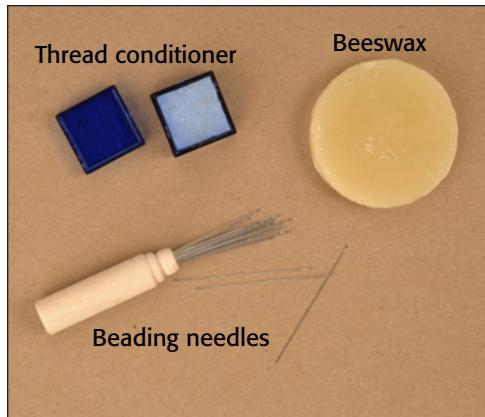


NEEDLES AND THREAD CONDITIONER

Some bead-stringing materials are stiff enough that you don’t need a needle to string them with beads. This is true for beading wire and many types of cord. But for very thin or soft cord, or with beading thread, a needle can make bead stringing much easier. There are several types of needles used for stringing beads. The one you select for a given project depends on the stringing material and beads that you use. (For more information on needles, see page 54 in Chapter 3, “Needles Used with Cord” and page 97 in Chapter 5, “Selecting a Needle for Beading Thread”.)

Before you string beads onto a strand of beading thread, it’s also a good idea to treat the thread with beeswax or thread conditioner. *Beeswax* is sold in blocks at most bead shops. When you rub it along a piece of thread, a layer of wax adheres to the thread to protect it from moisture and to slightly stiffen it, making it easier to work with. However, some beaders avoid beeswax because it can attract dirt and make thread feel sticky.

Thread conditioner is an alternative to beeswax. It is usually sold in small plastic boxes at bead shops and fabric stores. You apply it by gently pressing the thread into the container with your finger and pulling the thread through the conditioner until it is completely coated. Thread conditioner is thought to make thread stronger and to reduce tangling. It is not as sticky as beeswax and it is less likely to attract dirt.

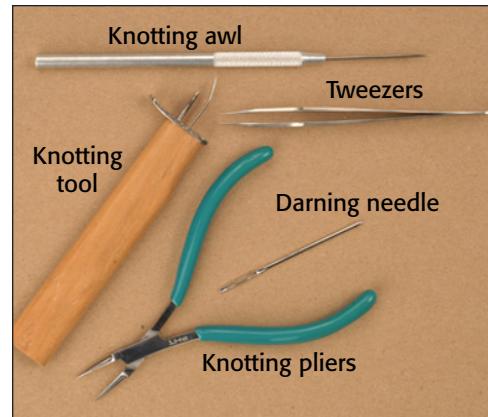


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Beads and Beading Supplies (*continued*)

KNOTTING AWLS AND KNOTTING TOOLS

A *knotting awl* helps you position knots against beads. You can find one at most bead shops, or you can use a regular darning needle as a substitute. Narrow tweezers or *knotting pliers* are also useful for sliding tiny knots against beads. Another option is a *specialty knotting tool*, which mechanically maneuvers the stringing material as you make knots. (You will learn how to use an awl and specialty knotting tool in Chapter 4.)



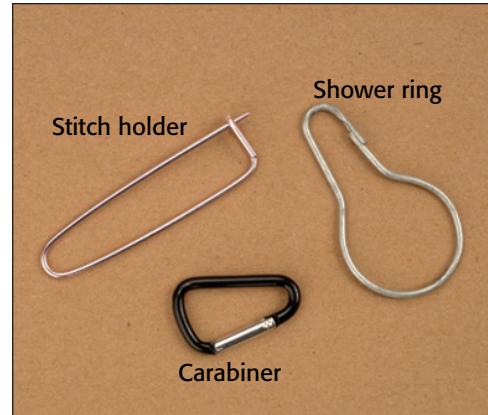
GLUE AND TOOTHPICKS

Glue is often used to help secure knots at the ends of stringing material or to attach components to base findings (see "Jewelry Findings" on page 26). One of the most popular glues for jewelry making is E6000. This thick, clear glue can take time to dry, but it remains flexible and moisture proof when it sets. You can find it at bead shops, jewelry making supply stores, and hardware stores. It's a good idea to keep some toothpicks on hand for applying the glue to small areas, and some paper towels for wiping up glue messes.

Instant bond glue is also used in jewelry making. This is the glue that you typically find in little squeeze bottles at grocery and drug stores. As its name implies, instant bond glue sets very quickly. However, it also becomes brittle and may crack and break. For some applications, especially securing small knots, you can use clear nail polish as an alternative to E6000 or instant bond glue. Whichever glue you choose, always apply it in a well-ventilated area and avoid breathing in fumes.

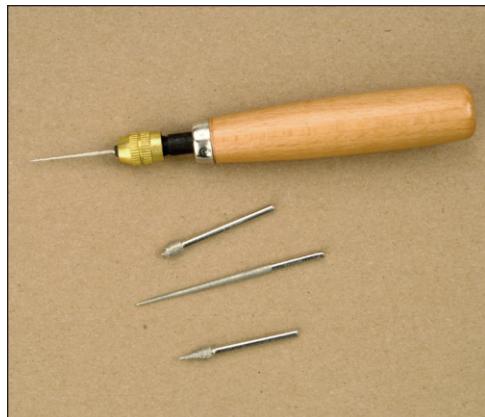
STRAND HOLDERS

Some beading techniques require that you hold or secure multiple strands temporarily while you work. One way to do this is to loop strands through a thin, generic shower curtain ring. (You may see these rings holding strands of beads at bead shops.) They are available from many jewelry making suppliers and are relatively inexpensive. As an alternative, try using a *stitch holder* for knitting. Stitch holders are made of thick metal wire or plastic and look like big safety pins. You can find them at yarn shops and fabric stores. Many other items can be used as strand holders, including small *carabiners* (often sold as key chains), or even simple twisted loops of wire.



BEAD REAMERS

Bead reamers are hand tools with rough, pointed ends. You use them like sandpaper to *debur*, or smooth out, the holes in some beads before stringing them. Reaming removes jagged edges that might otherwise damage your stringing material. You can also use reamers to slightly enlarge holes on beads made from softer materials. Bead reamers work best on beads made of stone, organic material, plastic, or ceramic. For best results, keep the tip of your bead reamer moist with water while using it.



BEADING LOOM

Beading looms are small, specialized looms designed for weaving long lengths of beaded fabric. They are available in a variety of types and sizes. Most have long, rectangular frames with a bar at each end for securing beading thread. You can find beading looms at most bead shops and from suppliers who specialize in seed beads and bead-weaving supplies.



STORAGE AND ORGANIZATION

Perhaps the greatest challenge when it comes to bead stringing is keeping track of the many beads and components that you collect over time. Some may be left over from previous projects, while others are waiting for the right project to come along. You can store beads in small reusable containers like baby food jars and prescription bottles, or you can purchase modular plastic or acrylic containers made especially for beads. Try to store items in clear containers so you can easily see them. Use a spoon or *bead scoop* to collect beads and place them back into their containers when you're finished with them. You can organize your containers by the type, color, or material of the items they contain.



Wire and Wirework Supplies

Wirework involves shaping metal wire into useful and decorative components and designs. To make wire jewelry, you need the right type of wire and some simple tools to help you manipulate it. This section provides an introduction to wire and common wirework tools. You will learn more about using them in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Wire and Tools

JEWELRY WIRE

You can make wire jewelry with any base-metal or precious-metal wire that is soft and easy to bend. (Do not confuse wire used for wirework with beading wire used for bead stringing, which is defined in Chapter 3.) The most popular base metals for wirework are copper, plated copper, nickel, and brass. Precious-metal wire jewelry is often made from sterling silver, fine silver, or gold-filled wire. *Sterling silver* is an alloy that contains at least 92.5% silver and no more than 7.5% base metal (usually copper). *Fine silver* contains at least 99.9% pure silver, and may contain .1% or less base metal. (Fine silver wire is used primarily for advanced projects that require extremely soft wire, like the wire knitting and crochet techniques described on page 274 in Chapter 12.) *Gold-filled wire* has a core of base metal covered with a layer of real gold. Gold-filled wire contains much more gold than *gold-plated* wire, which has a very thin wash of gold on its surface. Wire is available in different sizes, called *gauges*. See page 122 in Chapter 6 for a comparison of wire gauges and recommended uses for them.



FAQ

What is wire temper?

Temper refers to the hardness, or stiffness, of wire. Wire with *soft temper* is easier to bend than wire with *hard temper*. Base-metal wire is typically sold with soft temper; but when you buy sterling-silver wire, you often have a selection of tempers to choose from. Sterling-silver wire with *dead-soft* temper is the most versatile for jewelry making because it's the easiest to work with. However, you may want to use *half-hard* sterling wire when you'd like your finished component to be relatively stiff. For example, jump rings or ear wires are more durable when they're made from wire with half-hard temper.

You can also change the temper of dead-soft wire by hammering it. When you tap on wire with a hammer, the molecules align so that the metal becomes stiffer. To learn more about hammering tools and supplies, see pages 20–22.