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# Beadwork

Learning Off-Loom Beading Techniques One Stitch at a Time



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Chris Franchetti Michaels



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**VISUALLY™**

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Learning Off-Loom Beading Techniques One Stitch at a Time



by Chris Franchetti Michaels



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

*Teach Yourself VISUALLY™ Beadwork*

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Chris Franchetti Michaels is a writer and jewelry artisan specializing in beaded designs, wirework, and metal fabrication. She has written extensively about jewelry and jewelry making on the Internet since 2003, and she is the author of *Teach Yourself Visually Jewelry Making & Beading*, *Beading Visual Quick Tips*, and *Wire Jewelry Visual Quick Tips*. Chris has also appeared on several episodes of the DIY Network television show *Jewelry Making*, and her designs have been featured in popular jewelry project books. Visit her Web site [www.beadjewelry.net](http://www.beadjewelry.net) for more help and inspiration.

## **Acknowledgments**

No books about bead weaving would exist if artisans all over the world had not been willing to pass down their knowledge and skills to future generations for thousands of years. Many contemporary instructors and authors have made important strides in continuing that tradition, and it's because of their efforts that I've embraced bead weaving and am now able to help new beaders explore the craft. Of those wonderful teachers, I'd especially like to thank Carol Wilcox Wells whose work has been a great inspiration to me.

I also thank my agent, Marilyn Allen, for all of her help and encouragement, and fellow designer Shari Bonnin, who believed from the start that I was up to the task of writing jewelry books. Donna Wright, Pam Mourouzis, and Lynn Northrup all devoted many hours of work to make this book a useful resource, which still wouldn't have happened if not for the excellent photography of Matt Bowen and the artistic skills of the Wiley graphics department. I owe a debt of gratitude to SK, VK, BH, and ETC, for their patience during my absence in Eldre'Thalas as I worked on this book, and to my husband, Dennis, who not only made Thanksgiving dinner by himself but also managed to keep three computers, two printers, and a scanner running during the entire writing process.

## **Online Appendix**

An Appendix to this book is available online at [www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork](http://www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork). Titled "Reference Materials," it contains lists of helpful Web sites (including online suppliers of materials used in the projects), useful bead size charts, beads-per-unit estimates, hints for coating beads with protective spray, and troubleshooting tips.

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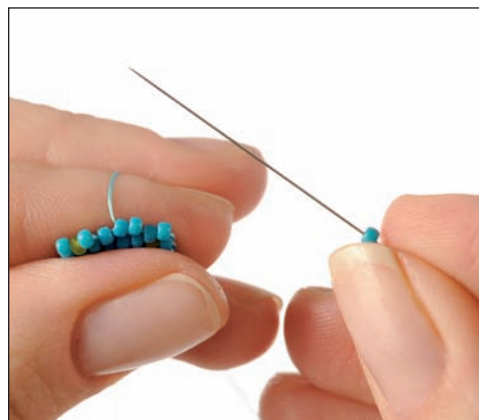
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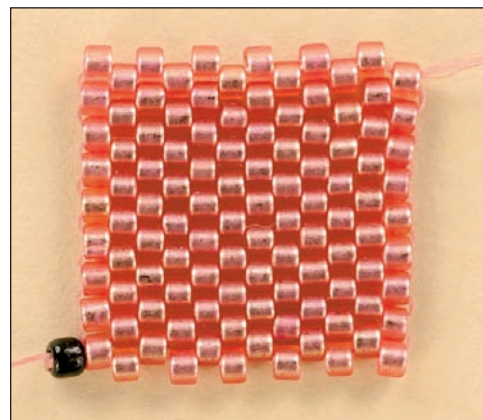
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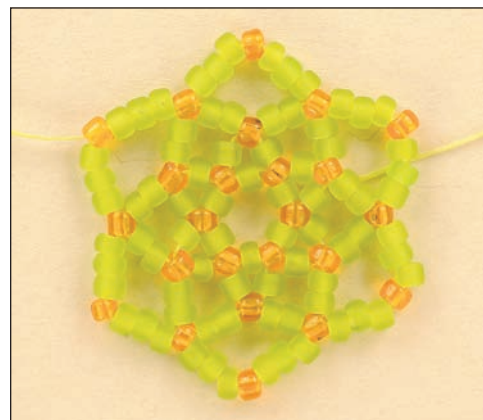
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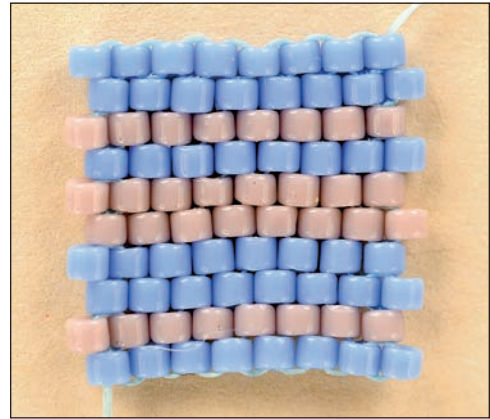
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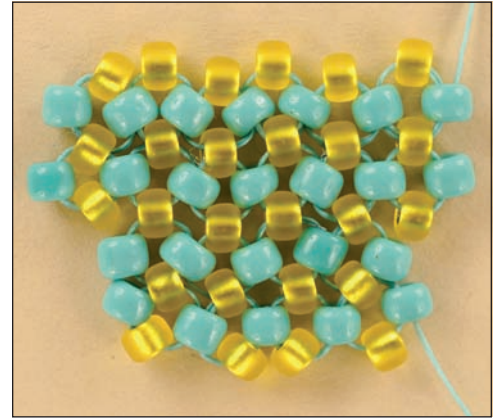
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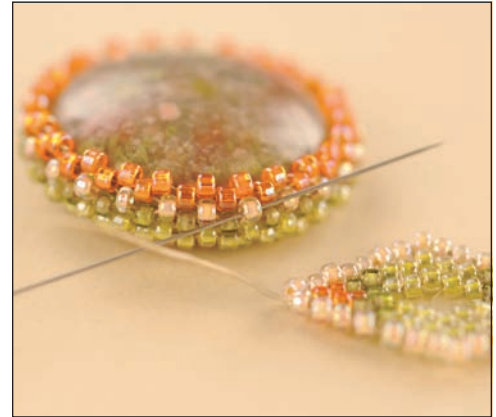
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**chapter**

**1**

# **Introduction to Beadwork**

Have you admired intricately woven, colorful beadwork, but assumed that you could never make it yourself? Perhaps you were intimidated by the tiny dimensions and sheer number of the beads, or maybe you felt overwhelmed by the complex project instructions in a book or magazine. Put your worries aside, and allow this book to guide you, step by step, through the most popular contemporary beadwork techniques. You will discover that bead weaving is not overly difficult, and that it is more rewarding than you may have imagined.



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# How to Use This Book

*Bead weaving* is the process of stitching beads together using a needle and thread. With *off-loom bead weaving*, you stitch beads while holding the beaded fabric—called *beadwork*—in your hands, rather than using a loom to support it. You can use off-loom bead-weaving techniques to create jewelry, artwork, and items of décor for your home.

This book covers introductory off-loom bead weaving for beginners, but it also includes some intermediate techniques that you can learn over time as your skills develop. As you progress, remember that successful bead weaving takes lots of practice, and your initial swatches and projects will not be perfect. Be patient, and enjoy the process of watching your skills improve. Below is an overview of how this book is organized and how you can use it to get started.



## Learn the Basics of Bead Weaving

Begin by reading the sections on beads, needles, thread, tools, and supplies in this chapter. They contain important terminology that is used in bead-weaving project instructions and will help you set up a work area stocked with essential materials.

After you finish Chapter 1, look over all of the sections in Chapter 2. They explain the basic techniques required to start and complete most bead-weaving projects. Pay especially close attention to the final section, which defines essential terms that are used throughout the rest of the book. Keep in mind that you can return to Chapter 2 anytime, and you do not need to learn all of the techniques covered there at once.

## EXPERIMENT WITH OFF-LOOM STITCHES

Chapters 3 through 8 demonstrate how to perform the most popular off-loom bead-weaving *stitches*, which are ways that you can weave beads together. Each stitch has a unique name and produces beadwork with a distinct look and feel. You can use most stitches to create beadwork that is flat, tubular, or circular in shape.

Many new beaders begin with peyote stitch, featured in Chapter 3, but you are free to try any stitch that interests you. To learn a new stitch, begin with its flat version and make a practice swatch: Prepare an initial length of thread (see Chapter 2), and then follow the steps for that stitch until you have a length of beadwork. You can use practice swatches to improve your overall skills, and to test alternative methods for beginning and ending thread. Once you feel comfortable with the flat version of a stitch, you can move on to its tubular or circular version, or you can try a flat-beadwork project (see the next section). Later, you can return to that stitch's chapter to learn how to add shape and dimension to your beadwork using increases and decreases.

## TRY THE EXAMPLE PROJECTS

Once you feel comfortable performing a stitch in swatches, you can make one of the beginner-level projects in Chapter 10 that uses that stitch. When you're ready to attempt more complex projects, try those in Chapter 11. Both chapters give you an opportunity to practice following project instructions, reading patterns, using stitches in interesting ways, and adding the decorative details and clasps that are covered in Chapter 9.



Small, glass beads called *seed beads* are most commonly used for bead weaving. They are available in many sizes and shapes, and in hundreds of colors and finishes.

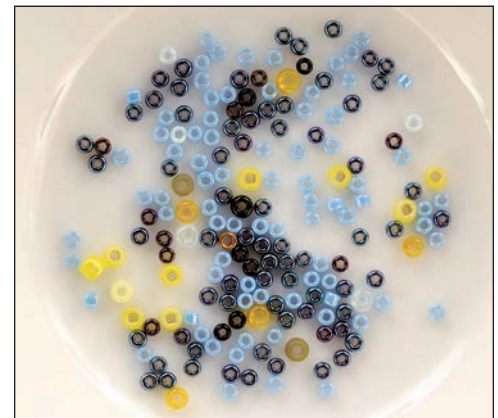


### Varieties of Seed Beads

#### TRUE SEED BEADS

*True seed beads* (sometimes called *rocailles*, *E-beads*, *round seed beads*, or simply “seed beads”) are tiny, slightly cylindrical glass beads that have rounded edges, like doughnuts. The highest-quality modern seed beads are made in Japan, the Czech Republic, and France. Many beaders use only Japanese beads, which tend to be very consistent in size. You can also find *vintage seed beads* in some bead shops and on the Internet. These are typically extra-small beads that were once made in Europe, but are no longer manufactured.

You can use true seed beads for any type of bead-weaving stitch. They produce a textural, flowing style of beaded fabric.



#### FAQ

**My local bead shop sells beads labeled “Rocaille,” which seem different from regular seed beads, and I have some project instructions that call for “E-beads,” but they do not specify a shape or size. Do these terms refer to special kinds of seed beads?**

Yes, in these instances, “rocaille” and “E-bead” have more specific meanings than the general term “seed bead.” The Miyuki company of Japan adopted the name Rocaille for its specialty line of tiny (size 15/0), very evenly shaped, rounded seed beads. “E-beads” sometimes refer specifically to large (size 5/0 or 6/0) seed beads. (To learn about sizing, see “Bead Sizes” on page 8.) When your project instructions or patterns call for E-beads, without providing any other size information, you can normally use seed beads that are either size 5/0 or size 6/0.

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# Beads Used for Bead Weaving (continued)

## CYLINDER BEADS

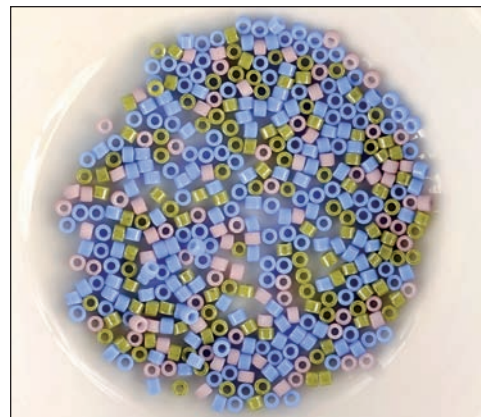
*Cylinder beads* are small glass beads made exclusively in Japan. They are manufactured by a special process that gives them a pronounced cylindrical, or tubular, shape with straight edges (unlike true seed beads, which are only slightly cylindrical and have rounded edges). Cylinder beads are extremely uniform in size and shape, and they have especially large holes to accommodate multiple passes with a needle and thread. Currently, most cylinder beads are produced by two Japanese companies, Miyuki and Toho. You may find these beads for sale under the brand names Delica, Treasure, and Aiko.

Use cylinder beads when you want your beadwork to have a very dense look and smooth feel. They work best with flat or tubular peyote, brick, and square stitches; and they are rarely recommended for loosely woven, or *open*, stitches, such as right-angle weave, netting, and circular stitches.

## BUGLE BEADS

*Bugle beads* are narrow glass tubes that are longer and less uniform than cylinder beads. Standard bugle beads are straight, but you can also find ornate *twisted bugle beads*.

Some bugle beads have unpolished, jagged edges that can cut through thread and damage your beadwork. Look for high-quality, Japanese versions of these beads (which may have polished ends), or “buffer” them by stringing a smooth bead immediately in front of and behind each one, as shown on the far right.



Straight bugle beads

Buffered bugle beads

Twisted bugle beads

## TIP

### Purchasing Seed Beads by the Unit

Seed beads are usually sold in bulk units rather than by the number of beads in a container or bag. Sometimes these are units of weight. For example, most Japanese seed beads and all cylinder beads are sold by the gram, and French seed beads are usually sold by the ounce. In contrast, many Czech seed beads are sold per 10- to 20-inch strand, or by the *hank*, which is a bundle of between 8 and 14 strands. Project instructions normally indicate how many grams, ounces, strands, or hanks of beads are required, and over time you should develop a feel for how many beads it takes to complete a given type of design. See the online Appendix ([www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork](http://www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork)) for some typical beads-per-gram, beads-per-ounce, and beads-per-hank estimates.



Hank

7.5-gram tube

16-gram tube

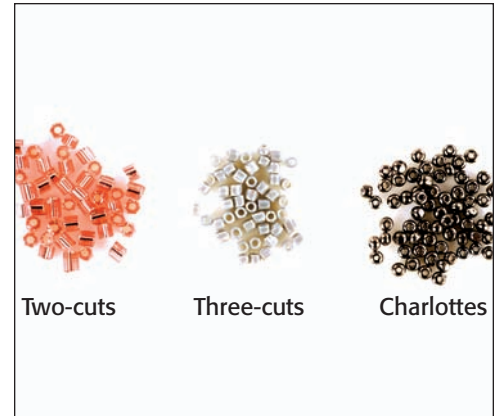
11-gram box

25-gram box

## CUT SEED BEADS

*Cut seed beads* are seed beads with one or more flat edges, which create *facets*. Here are the three most common types:

- *Two-cuts* (also called *hex-cuts*) are similar to very short bugle beads, but have six relatively even facets that run lengthwise.
- *Three-cuts* are two-cuts with extra facets at the ends.
- *Charlottes* (also called *one-cuts*) are true seed beads with a single facet.



## SHAPED SEED BEADS

Shaped seed beads are manufactured in different shapes than true seed beads. Here are the most popular:

- *Triangle beads* have three equal sides and ends that are shaped like triangles.
- *Drop beads* (also called *fringe beads*) are tiny, broad, teardrop-shaped beads used to create texture or to accent the ends of fringe. (These include *Magatamas*, which are manufactured by the Toho company.)
- *Cube beads* (also called *square beads*) have four equal sides and ends that are shaped like squares.



### TIP

#### Using Larger Beads for Bead Weaving

You can use larger glass beads as accents with many bead-weaving stitches. *Czech fire-polished beads* and *Austrian crystal beads* are two popular varieties. With beads made from other materials, check to ensure that the holes are large enough to accommodate multiple passes with a needle and thread—and that they are free from sharp edges that may damage thread—before using those beads in a project.



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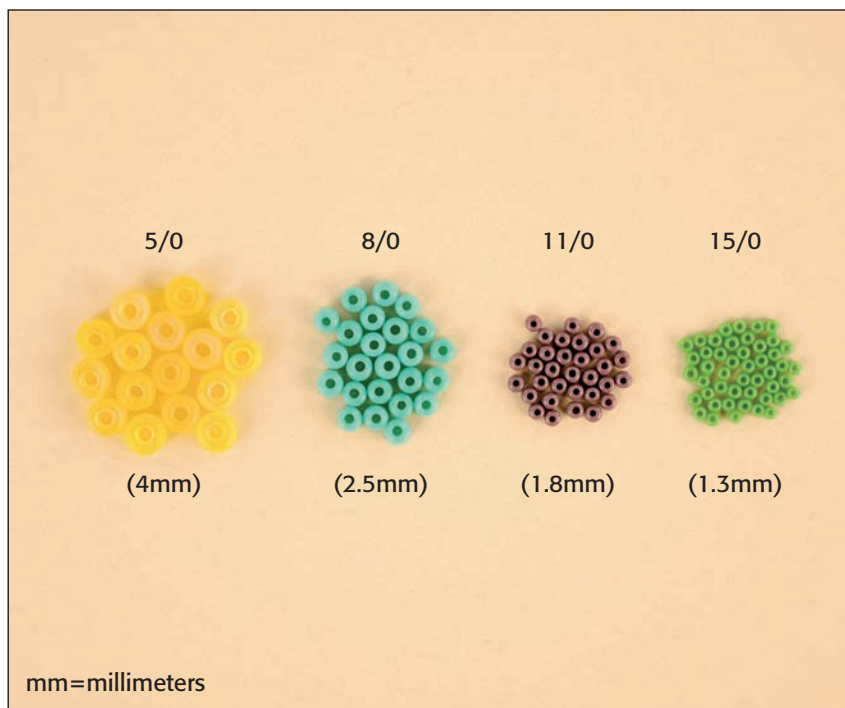
# Beads Used for Bead Weaving (continued)

## Bead Sizes

The sizes of true seed beads, cylinder beads, charlottes, two-cuts, three-cuts, and some triangle beads are denoted by numbers called *aught sizes*. Historically, aught sizes may have corresponded to the number of beads that made up 1 inch of beads stacked side by side (not strung end to end). Accordingly, a larger aught number refers to a smaller bead, and a smaller aught number to a larger bead. (See the online Appendix, at [www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork](http://www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork), for a chart that compares aught sizes with their approximate lengths in millimeters.)

**Note:** Because bead size standards have changed over time, aught sizes are not a good indicator of how many beads make up 1 inch of side-by-side beads in your beadwork. To determine that number accurately, create a test swatch (see page 49 in Chapter 2).

An aught size may be written as a fraction (11/0), as a number followed by a degree symbol (11°), or simply as a number (11). Seed beads range in size from about 24/0 (smallest) to about 5/0 (largest). Originally, cylinder beads were only manufactured in size 11/0, but some are now produced in sizes 15/0, 10/0, and 8/0. Be aware that different manufacturers may size their beads slightly differently. For example, a size 8/0 Czech seed bead may not have exactly the same dimensions as a size 8/0 Japanese bead. For this reason, it's a good idea to use beads from a single manufacturer for a given project.



**Note:** These images are not shown to scale; the actual measurements of the beads are provided.

Cube beads, drop beads, some bugle beads, some triangle beads, and most beads that are larger than seed beads are sized in millimeters rather than in aught sizes. These beads are usually measured lengthwise end to end (hole opening to hole opening), with the exception of drop beads, which are often measured top to bottom.



Some Japanese and Czech bugle beads have their own sizing systems. Their sizes are denoted by a pound sign followed by a fraction or a whole number (such as #1 or #2). These beads are available in a more limited range of sizes than other seed beads. (See the online Appendix [[www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork](http://www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork)] for a chart that matches typical bugle bead sizes with their approximate lengths in millimeters.)



## TIP

### Culling Beads

The bead-manufacturing process results in beads that have slightly different dimensions, even among beads of the same "size." Occasionally, you may come across a bead that is noticeably smaller or larger than the others, a bead that appears misshapen, or a bead that is chipped or otherwise damaged. To keep your beadwork looking smooth and even, you should *cull*, or remove, those beads from your supply. An easy way to cull beads is to examine the beads in your bead dish or on your mat (see page 16) and use a needle to pick them up and set them aside. You can either discard culled beads or keep them for possible future use. For example, extra-narrow and extra-wide beads are useful for making certain increases and decreases in peyote stitch (see Chapter 3).



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# Beads Used for Bead Weaving (continued)

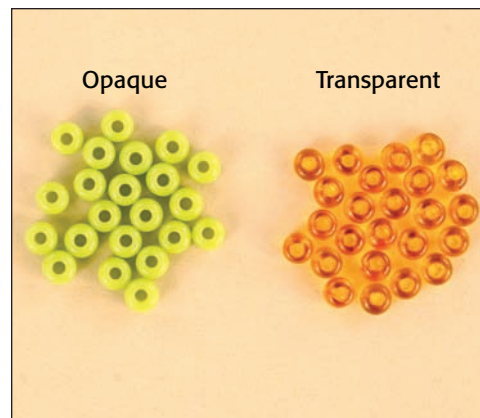
## Seed Bead Colors and Finishes

Seed beads are available in an enormous array of colors and with many kinds of treatments, called *finishes*. Here are the most common types of colors and finishes, and what you should know about them.

### OPAQUE, TRANSPARENT, AND TRANSLUCENT COLORS

These are basic bead colors, with no special finishes applied. *Opaque colors* are solid; they absorb light and very little light passes through them. *Transparent colors* allow much light to pass through. As a result, you can see through most transparent beads, which makes thread color an especially important choice when using them. *Translucent colors* are very similar to transparent colors, but they allow slightly less light to pass through. When you use opaque and transparent or translucent colors together in a design, the opaque colors usually appear to come forward, or be slightly raised, and the transparent or translucent colors seem to fade into the background.

Whether a bead is opaque, transparent, or translucent is usually indicated in its name, often by an abbreviation such as “Opq” for opaque or “Tr” for transparent or translucent (ask your bead supplier for a key to their abbreviations). If a color is a light or dark version of a standard color, the name may also include an abbreviation such as “Lt” for light or “Dk” for dark.



## TIP

### Using Manufacturers' Numbers to Identify Beads

Some major seed bead manufacturers assign numbers to their beads, rather than (or in addition to) naming them with descriptive terms. (For example, Miyuki assigns the number “DB0875” to its opaque, mauve Delica beads that have a matte aurora borealis finish.) Some online bead suppliers provide the option to shop for beads using these numbers, in addition to the beads’ descriptive names. This is a valuable service, because some patterns use manufacturers’ numbers to identify the beads required for a design. Some suppliers also use the numbers to create lists or charts of matching beads in different shapes and sizes, which can help you to develop your own designs.

## SPECIAL FINISHES

- *Aurora borealis* is a multicolored, reflective finish. It is commonly indicated by the letters “AB” in bead names, but it may also be called *iris*, *iridescent*, *rainbow*, or *oil slick*.
- *Dyed beads* are colored at the surface and not all the way through, which makes them prone to losing their color over time. You should coat them with a clear protective spray before using them (see “Apply a Protective Coating to Beads” in the online Appendix [[www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork](http://www.wiley.com/go/tyvbeadwork)]).
- *Color-lined beads* have a colored finish on the inside surfaces of their holes. Be careful not to scratch these linings with your needle, and be aware that beads lined with metallic colors may darken over time as their linings *tarnish* from exposure to air. Lined beads are usually labeled with an abbreviation such as “S/L” for silver lined or “G/L” for gold lined.
- *Matte* and *frosted* beads have a lightly etched surface, which gives them a soft, less reflective appearance than other beads.
- *Satin* beads are manufactured to have numerous tiny bubbles that create a reflective sheen that glistens in different directions.
- *Metallic beads* are finished to look like metal. Lower-quality metallic beads are painted with metal-colored paint and are likely to chip or wear over time.
- *Galvanized beads* and *plated beads* are coated with metal in a process called *electroplating*, which uses an electrical current. Although plating is more durable than paint, it may also wear off or change color by tarnishing.
- *Luster finishes* are transparent surface treatments that add shine to beads. They include *pearl luster*, which has a pearly sheen, and *gold luster*, which reflects a shimmer of metallic gold. *Ceylon* is a special finish that is usually applied to pastel-colored beads to make them look like tiny pearls.
- *Two-tone* beads are made with two distinct colors of glass, where one side of the bead is the first color and the other side is the second color.
- *Combination beads* have two or more special finishes. For example, a “matte galvanized silver” bead is silver-colored with a matte and galvanized finish.



# Beading Needles and Thread

*Beading needles*, which are the most common needles used for bead weaving, look like sewing needles with especially narrow eyes. *Beading thread* is a sturdy, smooth thread that is intended for use with beads. You can find beading thread and beading needles at bead stores and on the Internet. Be aware that different brands of needles and thread have slightly different characteristics. You may want to experiment to determine which you like best.

## Types and Sizes of Beading Needles

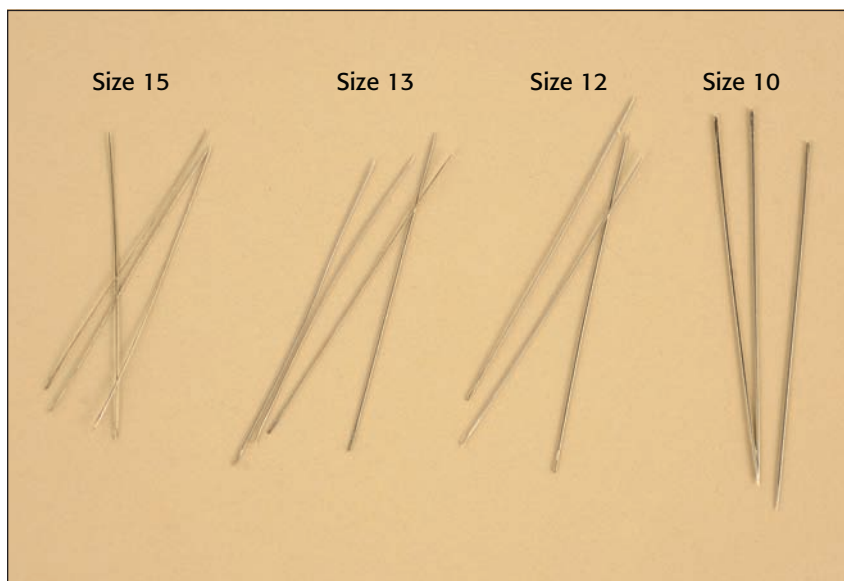
### TYPES OF BEADING NEEDLES

Most beading needles are manufactured in England or Japan, and they often include the country of origin in their names—such as *English beading needles* or *Japanese beading needles*. Some manufacturers produce beading needles that are stiff and remain relatively straight while you stitch beads, and others produce softer needles that can become curved. Stiff needles are usually easier to work with, but they may be more prone to breaking than softer needles.

### SIZES OF BEADING NEEDLES

English beading needles have a traditional sizing system that uses numbers to indicate needle thickness. These range from #16 (thinnest) to #10 (thickest), with #12 the most versatile. The size numbers approximate the sizes of seed beads that you should use them with (see the Needle and Thread Size Recommendations chart on page 15). English beading needles are also available in different lengths: *short beading needles* (also called *sharps*) are usually 1 inch to 1¼ inches long, and *long beading needles* (also called *normal beading needles*) are about 2-inches long. The length of needle you use is typically a matter of personal preference.

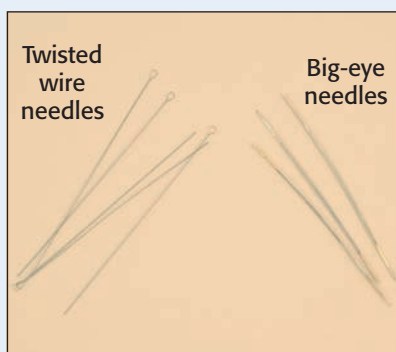
With needles made in different countries, such as Japan, ask your supplier how their sizes compare to the traditional English sizes.



### FAQ

#### What are twisted wire needles and big-eye needles?

These needles are commonly used for stringing beads, rather than for bead weaving. Twisted wire needles have soft wire eyes that you can collapse with your fingers to fit them through bead holes. Big eye needles are slit vertically down the middle so that you can use them with wide stringing materials, like ribbon.





## Types of Beading Thread

### NYLON THREAD

*Nylon thread*, which is available in a wide variety of colors and sizes, is one of the most popular types of beading thread. It consists of many thin strands of nylon plastic, which are either stacked and bonded together, or twisted together like tiny rope. Untreated nylon thread may stretch out over time, so you should treat it with beeswax or thread conditioner and pre-stretch it before use (see the section “Prepare a Length of Thread” in Chapter 2). Popular brands of nylon thread include Nymo, C-Lon, and Silamide.



### GEL-SPUN POLYETHYLENE THREAD

*Gel-spun polyethylene thread*, or *GSP thread*, has some benefits over nylon thread in that it is stronger, isn't as prone to stretching, and is less likely to fray at the ends. However, it is available in a more-limited range of colors and sizes than nylon thread. You can use a “plied” variety such as Power Pro or DandyLine to stitch larger glass beads, crystal beads, or non-glass beads. The brands Fireline and Wildfire work well for beadwoven designs that may experience extra wear, such as finger rings.



## TIP

### Beading Wire as an Alternative to Beading Thread

It is possible to perform some bead-weaving stitches using stringing materials other than beading thread. The most common alternative is size .010 (very thin) *beading wire* (also called *bead stringing wire*). Beading wire is composed of many tiny metal strands that are woven or wound together, and then covered with a thin layer of nylon. Popular brands of beading wire include SoftFlex and Beadalon. You can make knots with .010 beading wire, but it does not work with a regular beading needle. You must use it without a needle (it is stiffer than beading thread), or use a special needle made by the beading-wire manufacturer.



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

# Beading Needles and Thread *(continued)*

## Sizes of Beading Thread

Beading thread is available in a range of thicknesses, also called *weights*. The thicker (or “heavier”) a thread is, the stronger it tends to be. Most nylon thread weights are denoted by letters, with the very thinnest threads denoted by zeros, as noted in the following chart.

<b>Thinner</b>	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	<b>Thicker</b>
000	0	A	AA	B	C	D	E	EE	F

Gel-spun polyethylene thread may be sized based on its actual thickness in fractions of inches or millimeters, or by its strength, as determined by strength tests performed by its manufacturers. The larger a thread’s *pound test number*, the stronger and thicker it is. For instance, thread labeled “30 pound test” (or “30#”) is stronger and thicker than thread labeled “8 pound test” (or “8#”).

You should use the thickest thread that is reasonable for your project, both for strength and to ensure that the beads lie properly. After you select the type and size of beads to use, try to determine the maximum number of times you need to pass the needle through any bead in your design. All stitches require you to pass through some beads twice, and most require at least three passes. Factor in any thread ends that need to be woven in, whether you need to attach fringe or findings, and whether you have increases or decreases that require weaving through the beadwork extra times. Use that number as the basis for determining which thread to use. For example, if you need to pass through some beads four times, test to make sure that the thread (and needle) you choose can do this without the needle becoming stuck in a bead. You can use the chart on the next page to narrow your options of thread sizes to try.

## FAQ

### How should I select a color of beading thread?

When you use nylon beading thread, you have a large variety of colors to choose from. Here are some things to consider when making your selection:

- Typically, your thread should be as invisible as possible within your beadwork, and you should therefore select a color that matches (or nearly matches) the most prominent beads in your design, or a slightly darker color that will blend in.
- When you perform a stitch where some thread always shows (like right-angle weave), you can either use a matching color to disguise it, or break the rules by using a coordinating color that becomes part of the design.
- If your design will ultimately lie on top of another material, use a thread color that matches the color of that material if you would like the thread to “disappear” into the background. For instance, use black thread for a beaded tube that you plan to string onto black cord.



Gel-spun polyethylene thread is typically available in neutral colors like black, white, gray, and olive green. You should experiment to determine which color you prefer to use with various bead colors and stitches.