



Interweave®

KUMIHIMO

with BEADS

with JILL WISEMAN



WHAT IS KUMIHIMO?

Kumihimo is a Japanese word (kumi = to plait, himo = string or cord) referring to a traditional braid-making technique. Kumihimo braids can be simple and plain, or they can be amazingly ornate. They can be round (the type we'll be working on) or flat. Skinny or fat. Smooth or fuzzy.

What do you do with your kumihimo braids? First, and foremost, you make jewelry! But don't stop there. They can be used as drapery tie-backs, cords for your eye-glasses, belts, a strap for a purse . . . think big!

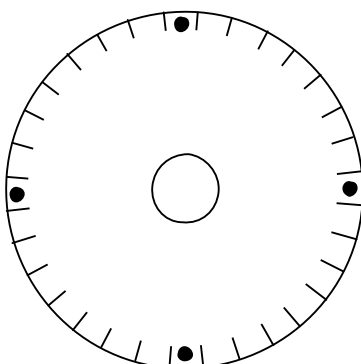
Traditionally, kumihimo braids have been created with a large wooden loom called a marudai. They sit around 24" high and cost anywhere from \$80 upwards, depending on the crafting and type of wood used. This made it cost-prohibitive for those who just wanted to try it out first. But in the last few years, small foam looms have been produced, which allows much wider access to the kumihimo techniques.

TYPES OF FIBERS

Traditional kumihimo braids were made with bundles of silk thread. But there are myriad other choices out there, so be sure to experiment with everything: silk, but also rayon threads, knitting ribbon, cotton embroidery floss, handspun yarn, textured cord. Each fiber's thickness and texture will change the look and feel of your finished braid.

THE LOOM

The foam loom we're using has numbered slots around the exterior and a center hole. The braid will form in the center hole, and the 8 different cords we'll be using to create the braid will sit in the outside slots. Notice that there is a black dot in 4 places on your loom. Those black dots will help us figure out where to place our cords when we begin.



TOOLS & MATERIALS

Foam kumihimo disk loom
Scissors
Plastic bobbins
Tape measure
Wire cutters
Big-eye needle
E6000 glue
Flat- and round-nose pliers
Light gator weight (optional)
Seed beads
Cord (such as C-Lon or S-Lon)
Beading thread (such as Fireline or Wildfire)
Beading wire (such as SoftFlex or Beadalon)
End caps or cones
Crimp tubes or beads
Clasp

MAKING A KUMIHIMO PROJECT

How much cord to start with?

There is a simple formula for figuring out how long the cords need to be in order to make the length for the project you desire.

To be safe, you'll need three times the finished length of your project of EACH cord. That might be a little overkill, and you may have too much cord at the end, but if you run out of cord, there's no way to fix it. So in this case, more is better.

Example: I'm making a 20" necklace. So I will need 60" (5') of cord for each of my 8 cords.

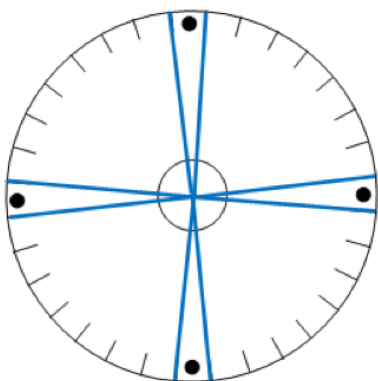
Getting cords set up

After you have all the cords cut to the proper length, gather them together and tie an overhand knot with them at one end.

One cord at a time, wrap each cord around a bobbin, leaving about 6" free between the overhand knot and the bobbin.

Place the knot in the center hole of your loom, with the cords lying over the top.

Now we'll place each cord in the proper slit on the loom to make our pattern. We'll be putting one cord on either side of the black dots.



Tip: Hold the knot with your non-dominant hand from under the loom, and use your dominant hand to arrange the cords. This way you can pull the cords with a firm tension and keep the knot roughly in the center of the inner hole.

Stringing beads

We're finally ready to add beads! The C-Lon or S-Lon is a stiff thread, and you shouldn't have too much trouble placing your beads on the cord without any needle at all. If necessary, you can use a Big-eye needle to assist in stringing the beads.

String the appropriate number of beads on each of your 8 cords. How many is that? Well, I'm giving guidelines below. The only thing to remember is that not all size 8° (or 6° or whatever size) seed beads are the same size. They vary by manufacturer. You can always add or remove the beads later, so this isn't a now or never kind of decision.

Beads per inch

Remember that this is a guide only—not all beads are created equal!

Size 8° beads: 7 beads per inch

Size 6° beads: 5 beads per inch

4mm bicone crystals: 4 beads per inch

4mm fire-polished beads: 3 beads per inch

When you finish stringing the beads on a cord, attach a bobbin at the end and wind it so the beads are sitting right below the disk and there's no extra cord between the beads and the bobbin. This is temporary, but I find it's easier to add the rest of the beads when the cords are more controlled. I wait until I'm completely finished stringing all my beads before I worry about which cord is in what slot.

Braiding!

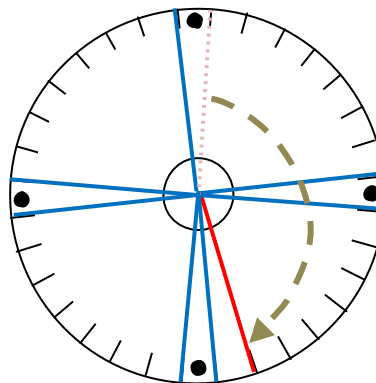
We finally get to start moving our cords in a repetitive pattern, which will make our braid. It is the placement of our beads in the set-up step that makes the design.

We're making what is known as a round braid.

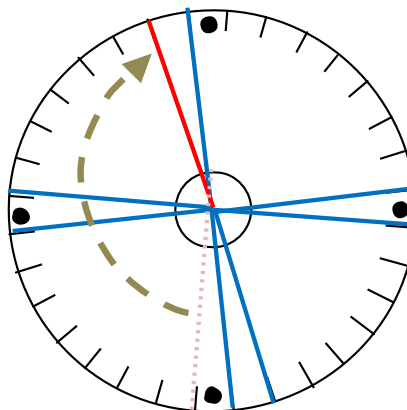
We're going to start by braiding cord only—no beads!

This is so we have a place to tie off and glue the braid to fit in the end cap later.

Step One: Take the cord on the top right, and move it down so it's in the slot to the right of the pair of cords on the bottom.

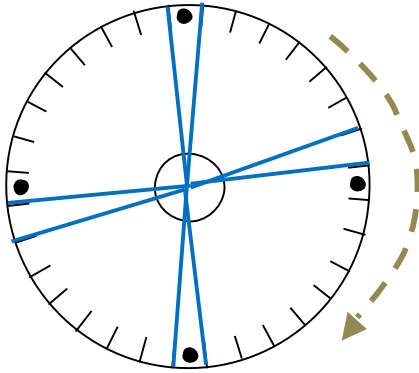


Step Two: Take the cord on the bottom left, and move it up so it's in the slot to the left of the cord left on top.



Tip: To remember the order, try this cheat phrase: It's downright (down right) uplifting (up left)!

Step Three: Rotate the entire loom a quarter turn to the right so the next dot is at the top.



You may want to actually draw an arrow on the surface of your loom to remind you what direction to turn in. You can choose to turn left or right—whatever feels most natural to you—but choose a direction and stick with it the rest of your life!

And that's it—our whole pattern. Repeat all three steps again until you have the length you desire:

1. Right moves down
2. Left moves up
3. Rotate a quarter turn to the right

I lost my place. What do I do?

It's not often you'll get to sit down and make an entire braid uninterrupted. The first way to deal with needing to take a break is to make the first half of your move (right moves down) so you have 3 cords at the bottom and only 1 cord at the top. Go do what you need to do. When you come back, you'll be able to look at it and know that you need to finish the rest of your move (left moves up.)

But what if you don't get a chance to make your half-move to mark your place? No problem. Take a look at the cords on the loom. There will be 2 cords that are on top, moving in opposite directions. If you move the loom so those top cords are sitting in the East/West positions, you will be in the right place to start your next braiding move (right moves down).

Work about $\frac{1}{4}$ " of all cords before you start adding beads in with each move.

Start adding beads

Once you have $\frac{1}{4}$ " of braid with the cords only (and you feel confident you're making the moves correctly), you'll start to add 1 bead to the braid each time you make a move.

Here's my process for moving the beads into place:

Before I take the cord out of the slot, I pick up the bead and slide it upwards.

Then I pop the cord out of the slot and drop the bead down so the bead gets caught under the top (closest) thread sitting in the East/West position. This is the same cord you look for to be on top when you lose your place.

The bead does not need to be completely under the cord. Just "caught" by it, so it won't pop loose. It's okay if it's sitting in a wonky position!

Move the cord to the finish position.

You will add a bead EVERY time you move a cord until you finish your length.

If the bead isn't sitting well, sometimes a small twist of the braid below can help the bead settle into place.

Tips for working with beads while braiding

Take your time while you make your moves. You have long strands of seed beads underneath your loom that can tangle if you don't move in a slow and deliberate way.

When you're making the down right move, you can help the bead fall into place under the thread by holding the cord you're moving up, and sweeping it along like you're following the outside curve of the loom.

When I'm making the second half of the move (i.e., the move from bottom to top), I find I usually have to get the bead into place by using the pinky finger of my top hand to nudge it into place and sometimes the thumb of my bottom hand can help guide it into place also.

Hold some tension in the cords with your bottom hand holding the braid below the loom. Keep the top of the braid a little below the hole.

When you move the cords, place them firmly in the slots.

Try to keep the top of the braid roughly in the center of the hole. You'll need to stop and re-adjust the cords to get it in the middle periodically.

How long do I make it?

If you want to make a bracelet, you should make it $1\frac{1}{2}$ " longer than your normal size to offset the width of the braid (when laid flat and unclashed). Example: I normally wear an 8" bracelet. In this bracelet, I need a $9\frac{1}{2}$ " length.

Your clasp and end caps will account for $2\frac{1}{4}$ " of the length. Example: My bracelet needs to be $9\frac{1}{2}$ " long, so when I subtract $2\frac{1}{4}$ " for the clasp and end caps, the beaded section of my braid needs to be $7\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Whoops! I made it too long and I've already finished off the ends! Now what? You might be able to find a

smaller clasp (for instance, a magnetic clasp takes up less length).

Whoops! I made it too short! Add an accent bead or two near the clasp to add length. How? After you've put the end caps on the ends and wrapped the bottom, shorter wire, string a bead or two on the longer end of the wire and THEN add the clasp.

Finishing the ends

Ah, the big question. I made the braid, now what? Well, first of all, we need to secure the ends.

Remove the braid from the loom. Take a 24" or so piece of beading thread and bind the ends. Here's how:

Fold the piece of thread in half, making a "loop" at the bend.

Lay it across the end of the braid, close to the initial overhand knot you made when setting up the loom.

Take the two ends of the thread and go around the end of the braid, and then poke them through the "loop" end of the thread, and tighten. Repeat six or seven times so it's quite sturdy.

Keep them on top of each other as much as possible to keep the binding small and easy to hide.

Take the two ends of the thread and knot them together several times to finish the binding.

Cut off the thread tails, and then you can cut the braid cords also, very close to the binding edge.

Repeat on the other braid end.

Attaching end caps and a clasp

There are several options for attaching a clasp to your braid. The most common is to use an end (bead) cap or cone of some sort to cover the raw edge of the braid.

Using an end cap with a loop on top

Spread glue over the end of your braid, making sure to cover the binding thread, too. Insert your braid end into the end cap and wipe away any excess glue. Let it dry for 24 hours before attaching your clasp with a jump ring to the end cap loop.

Using an end cap or cone with no loop on top (recommended)

Cones or some end caps will have a hole at the end instead of a loop, which means you need to use a short piece of beading wire to attach your clasp.

Cover the braid end with glue. Let sit for 24 hours before wearing if possible.

Cut a piece of beading wire about 4" long. Poke the beading wire through the end of your braid, one or two rows of beads down, and make one side of the beading wire a little longer than the other (about $\frac{1}{2}$ ").

String an end cap and 1 bead over both ends of the wire. The extra bead helps block up the hole of the bead cap. Then string a crimp bead over both ends of the beading wire.

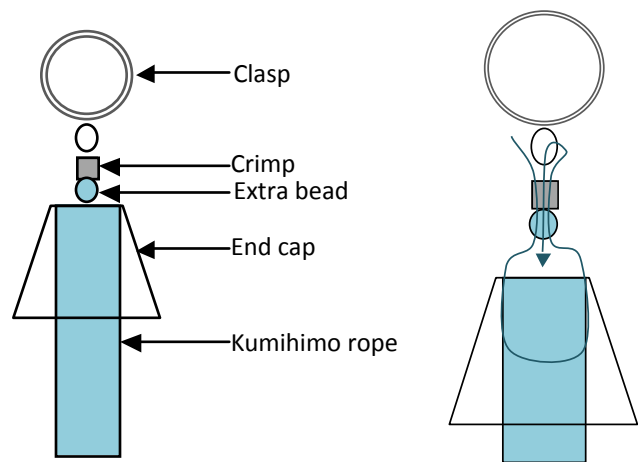
String one half of your clasp on the longer end of the beading wire.

Fold the beading wire over and string it back down through the crimp bead, the extra bead on the end, and your end cap (if possible—if you can't get it down the end cap, just getting it through the extra bead on the end is okay).

Tighten by pulling on the longer end of the beading wire and wiggling the crimp bead down so that your clasp can still move, but there's not a huge amount of excess bead wire showing.

Using a flat-nose pliers, flatten the crimp bead. Cut off the extra beading wire with wire cutters.

Repeat on the other end of the bracelet.



If you prefer, you can use a piece of wire and make a wrapped loop instead.

Cut off 4" of 22-gauge wire and poke the wire through the end of your braid, one or two rows of beads down.

Make one side of the wire a little longer than the other (about $\frac{1}{2}$ ") and bend each end upward, crossing the wires into an X above the braid. If the hole of your end cap is large, you may want to string a size 6° seed bead over both ends of the wire.

Using flat-nose pliers, bend the short wire into a 90 degree angle so now the long wire is vertical and the short wire is horizontal. Then wrap the short wire around the base of the longer wire at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ times.

With the tip of your flat-nose pliers, grasp the vertical wire directly above the previous wire wrap. Bend the wire (above the pliers) into a right angle. You are leaving a short vertical length below the bend as a place to put the wire wraps.

Position your round-nose pliers in the bend, and bring the wire over the top jaw of the pliers. Then reposition

the lower jaw of the pliers snugly in the curved wire. Wrap the wire down and around the bottom of the pliers.

String your clasp into the wire loop before you add the wraps!

Grasp the loop with flat-nose pliers. This will be awkward because you've got the clasp to maneuver around, too.

Wrap the wire tail around the wire stem, covering the stem between the loop and the top of the previous wire wrap. Trim the excess wire, and press the end close to the stem with flat nose or crimping pliers.

What if my end cap or cone doesn't fit?

There are a few ways to work around this. First, plan ahead:

- When using size 6° seed beads, you need an end cap with a 12mm opening
- When using size 8° seed beads, you need an end cap with an 8mm opening
- When using 4mm fire-polished beads, you need an end cap with an opening around 14mm

My cone or end cap is too small

Use a smaller size seed bead for just the first two rounds of each end. For example: if you're making a bracelet with size 6° seed beads, but only have end caps with an 8mm opening, use size 8° seed beads for the first two rounds. (When loading the beads on the strands, put 2 size 8°s on each strand and then change over to your size 6° seed beads.) Once you're close to your final length, remove any remaining size 6° seed beads from your cords and put 2 size 8° seed beads on each cord to finish the length.

My cone or end cap is too big

After putting glue on the cord, wrap some wire around the outside of the cord until you've filled it out enough to fit nicely inside the cone.

Making an end cap with wire

You can use 20-gauge wire to create a coil effect on the braid end (after covering it with glue) and then use the end of the wire to attach the clasp.

End cap sources

Tapestry Beads, www.tapestrybeads.com
Fusion Beads, www.fusionbeads.com
Pacific Silverworks, www.pacificsilverworks.com
Ornamentea, www.ornamentea.com
Sonoran Beads, <http://shop.sonoranbeads.com/>

VARIATIONS

Here are some things you can do to play with this new skill of yours.

You can make patterns by putting different colored seed beads on different cords.

You can put seed beads on as many or as few cords as you wish. If you put them on all 8 cords, the finished look will be much like bead crochet.

You can make the same round braid design using more than 8 bobbins! Simply use a number of bobbins divisible by 4 (8, 12, 16) and move them the same way. This will create a different thickness of braid.

Add a random mix of beads! You are not limited to seed beads. As long as you can string them on the cord, you can braid them in. Throw any combo of beads on the cords and see what happens! You'll have more cord showing this way, so just plan that into your design. The bigger the beads are, the more sticky-outy they will be, so keep that in mind too.