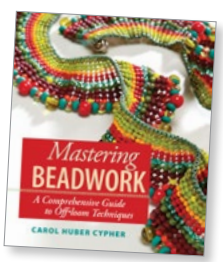
THE BASICS

TRIANGULAR ROPE BRACELET
a FREE pattern from
Mastering Beadwork A Comprehensive Guide to Off-Loom Techniques



Interweave

African Helix

African Helix stitch produces a gently swirling rope of three or more panels separated by raised piping. It has more in common with bead crochet and stringing than with bead-weaving, because once the beads are picked up on the thread they are never passed through again. Unlike other off-loom bead-weaving techniques, the beads are incorporated into the beadwork solely by anchoring the thread that carries them to the thread between two previously placed beads. ("What about brick stitch?" you ask. Brick stitch does rely on anchoring thread to thread, but it also requires passing back through the new bead.)

A stitch in which the beads never have to accommodate more than one thread pass provides a great opportunity to use those beads with impossibly tiny holes. In general, Japanese seed beads have larger holes than their Czech counterparts, making them the top choice for beadwork that calls for multiple thread passes. But there are so many yummy Czech seed beads and reasons to love them. The shadows that their plumper profiles cast can give a subtle stippled effect to the beadwork. They provide texture to a piece that would be rendered sleek if composed of Japanese seed beads.

This stitch begs for those pesky beads with tiny holes. Use size 13˚, charlottes, size 12˚ stripy,

and even marcasite Czech seed beads to your heart's content. Use pearls and even gemstones, but be wary of roughly drilled and abrasive holes.

If the piping is made of the same size bead as the sides, the beadwork is dense. If the piping beads are of a larger size, the work opens up slightly; if smaller, the beads may crowd too much, which can be remedied by adding another bead.

A three-sided rope swirls less, works up faster, and has a smaller circumference than a four-sided version of the same bead and panel size.

The size of the panels can also vary. Use 2 beads per panel for a narrower rope, or 4 or more beads per panel for a larger diameter rope.

We discussed the benefits of using a stick to hold tubular beadwork while weaving the first few inches. A stick is almost essential to weaving African helix, whose integrity is established by thread tension. Choose a knitting needle, straw, tube, or dowel that fits inside the initial ring of beads of your current project. Build each row on top of the previous one, pushing the stick up to extend from the top as you work

Basic African helix

To experiment with the basic African helix stitch, grab a needle and thread, panel beads (A) and piping beads (B).

1 ***Determine the number of panels and diameter of the work.*** Pick up 2B, 3A, once per panel (3 times for 3-panel rope, or 4 times for 4-panel).

2 ***Tie the beads into a ring and slip the ring onto an appropriately sized stick.*** Position the work so that the knot is to the left of 3A and right of 2B, flipping it over if necessary (Figure 1). (It may help to tape the tail to the stick.)

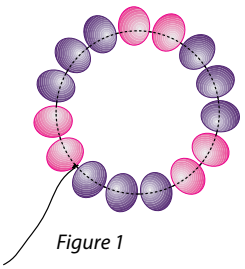


Figure 1

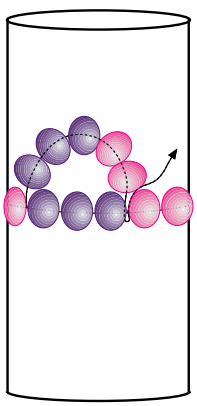


Figure 2

3 ***Weave for the desired length.*** Pick up 3A and 2B. Slide the needle up and under the thread between A and B of the next panel to the right (counterclockwise). Push the loop of 5 new beads up to arch above the work (Figure 2).

Pull the thread, being sure that the thread has settled between A and B.

Repeat until the work is the desired size.

4 ***Finish the piece.*** Finish by passing through the beads of the last row again, if possible, making half hitches. You could also finish by passing down into the next B, making a half hitch, and traveling through another B before making another half hitch. Repeat several times before cutting the thread.

When you slide the work from the stick, the panels will appear to recede slightly while the piping raises up.

Adding new thread

If it becomes necessary to add new thread, follow the line of piping from the last stitch. Enter the piping with the new thread at least an inch from the last bead. Travel through a few piping beads and make a half hitch. Pass through another piping bead and make another half hitch. Do not pull the thread when weaving through the piping; you don't want it to shorten. Place at least 4 knots before exiting the top bead of the piping, right where the abandoned thread was left.

You Say Your Piping Didn't Pop?

You've slid the work from the stick and in your hands is a beautiful piece of beadwork rope bereft of piping, panels, or any sign of relief.

If it's worked to the right (or counterclockwise) and each new addition is pushed up, piping will result. If it feels more natural to bead to the left, or clockwise, allow the work to develop below the previous rows by pushing each new addition *down*. The piping results from the particular combination of the thread passing down-and-over or up-and-under the connecting thread.