

Knit One BEAD Too



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Essential Techniques for Knitting with Beads

JUDITH DURANT



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This book is dedicated to
~~knitters and beaders everywhere~~
who continue to innovate
and share ideas.

To present the techniques in this book, I've picked up the threads of countless knitters and beaders, known and unknown, past and present. The history of knitting is somewhat vague: The oldest surviving fragments of knitted cotton are from Egypt and date to somewhere around 1000 AD.

The history of beads begins much earlier than that of knitted fabric. The first known beads, made from animal teeth and bones, were discovered in France, at an archaeological site called La Quina, and date to approximately 38,000 BC. Bead manufacture has come a long way over the past 40,000 years, and today beads are made in every conceivable shape and size and from materials ranging from wood to glass to plastic to metal to clay.

I wish I could tell you who first had the brilliant idea to knit with beads, but that history is a bit elusive. The best theory seems to be that it developed from needlepoint, where one bead is incorporated into each stitch of the work to "paint" a picture. One example dates to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and there are many examples of the technique used for gloves, bonnets, and purses from 1850 onward.

— *Judith Durant*

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The Best of Both Worlds

If there's any such thing as "the best of both worlds," I'd have to say that this is it. Many of us who love to knit are also drawn to beads and beadwork, and now we can do beadwork on our knitting needles!

There are two distinct ways to incorporate beads into your knitting projects: You can add beads to a finished knitted piece as fringe, embroidery, or appliqué; or you can incorporate beads into the knitting as you go. This book will focus on the latter, and there are several techniques you can use. The first two techniques are traditional, dating back to at least the midnineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively, and the last three are more recent developments. All but the last technique require that you pre-string beads onto your yarn.

Bead Knitting



Bead knitting ([chapter 2](#)) is the technique to use for pictorial designs. It was popular with Victorian-era knitters and was used in baby bonnets, gloves, socks, handbags, and other small items. While you may use the technique for one-color and random designs, for pictorial designs you'll have to pre-string the beads according to a chart. Bead knitting is done on a stockinette-stitch background, and each bead is knitted or purled into a stitch.

Beaded Knitting



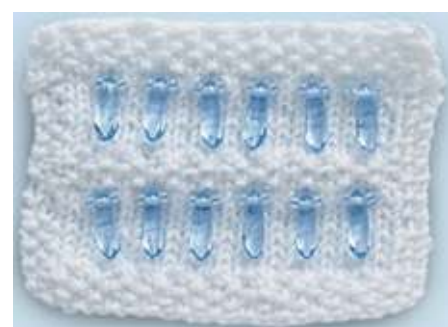
With beaded knitting, ([chapter 3](#)) a bead (or beads) lies on the thread between two stitches. With this technique you can actually shape your knitted piece by adding more beads, and it is the method that was used in many 1920s beaded purses. The beads are usually all one color, so pre-stringing is a lot easier than for bead knitting with a chart. Beads lying between two knit stitches show on the back of the work; beads lying between two purl stitches show on the front of the work. Shaped pieces like the beaded purses are done in garter stitch, and beads are incorporated on both sides of the fabric.

Slipstitch Bead Knitting



Slipstitch bead knitting ([chapter 4](#)) leaves a bead floating on top of a slipped stitch, and you can use the technique to add a bead on top of a knitted or a purled stitch. Beads may be placed randomly or in a pattern, and because the bead lies on top of the fabric it will not affect your gauge. When you get to the place where you want a bead, you bring the yarn to the front, slide one bead up close to the needle, slip the stitch, and work the next stitch. You may place a bead on the front side when working either right- or wrong-side rows.

Carry-Along Bead Knitting



Another option is carry-along bead knitting ([chapter 5](#)). With this method, you string beads onto a separate thread that you carry along with your main yarn. This affords you the possibility of knitting with beads that are too small to thread onto your knitting yarn. You also can use large beads with this method. Because the beads are on a separate thread, they will not affect your gauge.

Hook Bead Knitting



Finally, with hook bead knitting ([chapter 6](#)) you can add beads to individual stitches with a crochet hook. With this method, no pre-stringing is necessary. When you get to the place where you want a bead, you place a bead on a small crochet hook, remove the stitch from the knitting needle, pull it through the bead, and then replace the stitch on the knitting needle. This can save wear and tear on delicate yarn.



In the chapters that follow, you'll find detailed instructions for these five techniques, along with projects that use each one. (Each project contains an alternate suggestion for beads and yarn.) I hope you will be inspired to incorporate beads into your own unique designs. Have fun knitting with beads



1 Tools and Techniques

If you're a knitter, you know how many different yarns are available, ranging in weight from super fine to super bulky, and in fibers from wool to cotton to silk to rayon to bamboo to soy to too many to name!

If you're a beader, you know the same holds true with beads. Beads range in size from miniscule seed beads to large pendants and are made from acrylic, crystal, glass, gemstones, metal, wood, and more. In fact, anything with a hole for stringing can be considered a bead.

Once you get started knitting with beads, it'll be difficult to see an end to your options. This chapter details some suggestions to get you started.

BEADS

A few important things to consider when selecting beads to knit with are weight, smoothness, and finish. There's no question that too many beads can make a garment uncomfortably heavy and also stretch the fabric. Beads that have sharp edges should be avoided because they can fray or cut your yarn. There are also beads out there that look terrific in their little vials, but they have finishes that can rub off over time and affect the appearance of your garment. Most of the beads used in this book are seed beads made from glass, as detailed in the choices that follow.



6° seed beads



8° seed beads



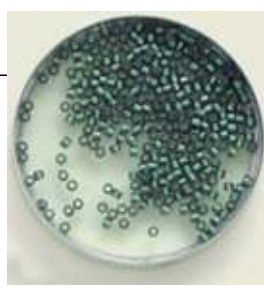
11° seed beads



8° cylinder beads



Triangle beads



11° cylinder beads



Square beads



Magatamas



Hex beads



Drop beads



Paillettes

Bead Shapes and Sizes

Japanese and Czech seed beads come in sizes ranging from 20° to 6°. The larger the number, the smaller the bead. The projects in this book use sizes 11°, 10°, 8°, and 6°.

Cylinder beads are tubular in shape and have a larger hole than regular seed beads, making them ideal for knitting. They are commonly available in sizes 11° and 8°, and size 10° has more recently come out.

the market.

Cut beads have one or more facets, which add to the shine. Beads with three sides are called **triangles**, and beads with six sides are called **hex**. **Square beads** are also available.

Drop beads look like seed beads with an off-center hole. Size 4mm drop beads are called **magatama** and look like 6° seed beads with an off-center hole.

Paillettes look like large, plastic sequins with an off-center hole. You'll need the large-hole version for knitting, and they are generally available in 10mm and 20mm sizes.

Seed Bead Colors and Finishes

Seed beads are available in many colors and finishes. The color/finish choices shown here are those used for the projects in this book.

Transparent beads are made of colored glass that lets light shine through. Be aware that the color of your thread can change the color of your bead. This is not necessarily a bad thing. One of the Carpet Coasters (see [page 32](#)), for example, uses transparent topaz beads on red thread. The result is that the bead appears to be a shade of red when viewed straight on, but when viewed from an angle, the bead “turns” topaz.

Opaque beads are a solid color that doesn't let light through; therefore, the yarn color won't affect the bead's appearance. Opaque beads can be shiny or matte.

Iridescent beads seem to change color when viewed from different angles.

Lined beads shine from the inside out. They may be clear or colored, and the lining may be a dyed color, silver, or gold. I love these beads for knitting, but you should use them only on yarn that is thin enough to allow them to slide without being pushed. Pushing lined beads along the yarn can wear the lining right off.

Metal and metallic beads are very tempting to work with, but many of them have surfaces that will rub off or dull through contact with skin oils or dry-cleaning chemicals. Check with your bead shop or the manufacturer to find out what to expect in terms of durability.



Transparent beads



Opaque beads



Iridescent beads



Silver-lined beads



Color-lined beads



Silver-lined beads



Metallic beads

YARN

Yarn used for knitting with beads needs to be strong and durable. Most importantly, it needs to be thick enough to accommodate your beads. Here's a rough idea of what will work.

Size 8 perle cotton, size 20 crochet cotton, size E silk, and lace-weight yarn all work well for bead knitting with 11° seed beads. Silk will last a lot longer but is also much more expensive.

Size 5 perle cotton, size 10 crochet cotton, size FF silk, and most fingering yarns are compatible with 8° seed beads.

DK and sport-weight yarn will accommodate 6° seed beads and many other novelty beads such as paillettes.

Note: These are guidelines only — all beads are not created equal. Unfortunately, one 8° seed bead

may not have the same size hole as an 8° seed bead with a different finish or from a different manufacturer. If possible, check your yarn and beads for compatibility before making your purchases.



KNITTING NEEDLES AND HOOKS

There are no special needle requirements for knitting with beads — just use whatever you'd use without the beads. For bead knitting with small seed beads, choose steel needles, which come in sizes 00000 through 0, with 0 being the largest. Size 00 works well with size 10 crochet cotton and 8° seed beads, as in the Turquoise Mixed Bag (see [page 36](#)), and size 0000 is the choice for 11° seed beads and size 8 perle cotton, as in the Carpet Coasters (see [page 32](#)).

For hook bead knitting, choose steel crochet hooks for small seed beads. These hooks range in size from 00 to 14, with 14 being the smallest. Any size crochet hook that will fit through your bead and pick up a stitch will work.

BEADING SURFACES

You'll need a cloth surface to pour your beads onto, so they won't roll off the table while stringing. My favorite type is made with Vellux fabric, but you could also use a piece of terry cloth or felt. Once

your beads are strung, you won't need the cloth as you knit the project, but if you're hooking, you should have your beads on a cloth and at-the-ready when you need them.

WINDING YARN

It is very important to rewind your yarn before beginning to string beads. There is nothing more maddening than pushing the beads down the yarn only to find them stopped because there's a knot in the yarn.

If you're using a ball winder, loosely hold the yarn with your idle hand, letting it run through your fingers on its way to the winder. If you discover a knot, stop winding, cut the yarn at the knot, and begin a new ball. You'll have to estimate how many beads to string on your partial balls, but it's better than having to stop the knitting and transfer the beads from one ball to another. (Obviously, you should also cut out any knots from yarn you are rewinding by hand.)



Vellux is a foamlike fabric that keeps beads from rolling around



If you run into a knot in the yarn when winding, cut it out and begin a new ball.



A finer yarn or thread is used as an intermediary loop when stringing beads into heavier-weight yarn.

PRE-STRINGING BEADS

For all of the techniques, except hook bead knitting, you'll need to pre-string the beads onto the yarn. You may like to use big eye beading needles, which come in 2½" (5.5 cm) and 4½" (11.5 cm) lengths. The needle is split down the center, creating an eye that's almost as long as the needle and will accommodate any yarn.

When you're doing pictorial bead knitting, you'll have to string the beads in order according to a chart (see pages 26–29). To string large quantities of either same-color beads or random mixes, pour the beads out onto a beading surface (see Beading Surfaces, page 19) and pick them up from there, or pour them into a shallow bowl and scoop them up. Either way, pick up the beads with the needle; don't pick up a bead with your hand and place it on the needle because this method is tedious and takes a very long time.

If the bead hole is too small to slide over a big eye beading needle and doubled yarn, try using an intermediary loop of thread between the needle and the yarn. Thread a beading needle with a length of fine, strong thread. Tie the ends into a small knot, forming a loop. Thread the knitting yarn through the

loop of thread. Now string beads onto the needle, slide them over the intermediary thread, then onto the knitting yarn, as shown in the photo above.

You may find that you need a firmer grip on the needle than you can get with your bare hands to get the beads started onto the yarn. Simply grasp the needle with a pair of needle-nose pliers with one hand, and slide the beads onto the yarn with the other.



Determining How Many Beads to String

You'll want to estimate how many beads you'll need on each skein of yarn. The best way to do this is by swatching.

Once you've chosen your pattern and determined where you're going to place beads, string a few dozen beads and knit a 4" (10 cm) square swatch. If you're satisfied with the result, count the beads, undo the knitting, and measure the length of the yarn. Let's say you have 10 yards (9 meters) of yarn and you used 20 beads. That's two beads per yard, so if the ball of yarn is 160 yards (146 meters) long you'll need to string 320 beads on each ball. Rather than counting the beads out, string a 4" (10 cm) length of beads and count them. If you're using 8° seed beads, there should be about 44, or 11 beads per inch. Divide the total number of beads required by 11 to learn how many inches of beads to string. In the given example, you'd string about 29" (74 cm) of beads.

No matter what the math says, I usually don't string more than 6 or 7 yards (5.5 or 6.5 meters) of beads at a time, unless I'm using a strong yarn with beads that easily slide along it. That's because when you start knitting, you'll have to continually push the beads down the length of the yarn to pull

up enough yarn to form stitches. This process can be tedious with too many beads, and all the extra pushing can take a toll on your yarn.



TAMING STRUNG BEADS

After the beads are strung, your knitting project once again becomes portable. However, if you just toss everything into your knitting bag, you could end up with a tangled mess. I use a separate project bag when knitting with beads, one that has nothing in it but my beaded yarn.

To keep the unknitted yarn from unwinding from the ball and becoming entangled with the strung beads, place the ball in a ziplock plastic bag and close the bag, leaving only a small opening for the yarn to come through. Toss the plastic bag in your knitting bag and let the strung beads pool around the bottom of the bag. When you need to push the beads down the yarn, the beads will stay outside the plastic bag where they won't interfere with the yarn ball.

2 Bead Knitting



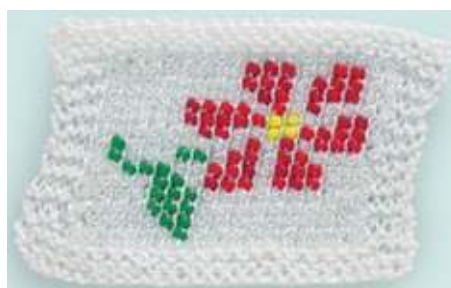
Traditional bead knitting, which dates back at least to the midnineteenth century, calls for a bead to be knitted into a stitch as it is worked. Beads may be worked into all of the stitches, as in the Carpet Coasters (see [page 32](#)), or into only some of the stitches, as in the Colorful Diamonds Gloves (see [page 40](#)).

Bead knitting is worked in stockinette stitch, and you can work circularly or flat, incorporating beads into both knit and purl stitches.

The work emulates needlepoint and often follows a pictorial chart in the same manner. However, unlike needlepoint, where you pick up and incorporate beads one at a time, with bead knitting, you pre-string the beads for the project before you begin to knit. If you're not following a chart, as in the Turquoise Mixed Bag (see [page 36](#)), simply string beads randomly. If you're knitting from a chart, you'll have to string the beads according to the chart. One bead should be about the same size as one knit stitch. Because it is difficult to keep edge beads in line, always include at least one or two nonbeaded edge stitches on each side of beaded motifs.



PREVENTING BIAS SKEW



▲ Because the beads sit at an angle on one-half of a stitch, knitting back and forth in the “normal” way will cause the finished fabric to skew on the bias.



▲ This bias occurs with both flat and circular bead knitting. This sample is knit in the round with plain, unbeaded stitches on the back.



▲ To prevent the fabric from biasing, you can twist the stitches in every other row of the work. When knitting back and forth, you may simply work the knit rows through the back loop and work the purl rows as usual. This method may make the fabric lean slightly in the opposite direction.

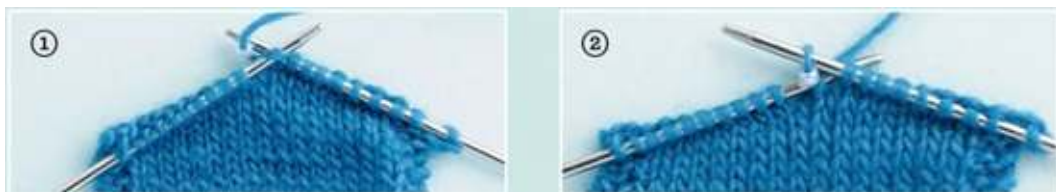


▲ You also may work the knit rows in the Eastern method (so-called because it is the method used in Eastern Europe) and work the purl rows as usual. I think using this method produces the best results: The work does not lean one way or the other.

When knitting circularly, work every other row in one of these twisted methods and work alternate rows as usual.

Note how the flower motif changes appearance, depending on the knitting method used. When all rows are knit in the usual way, the beads are all tipped in the same direction and line up with each other like tiles. When a twisted method is used to compensate for bias, the beads in every other row tilt in the opposite direction, making beads in a vertical line zigzag somewhat, rather than run in a straight line.

KNITTING WITH A BEAD



▲ **To work a regular knit stitch,** ① insert the needle into the front of the stitch as usual, wrap the yarn around the needle, and slide a bead up against the needle. ② Push the bead through the stitch on

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