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Introduction

For me, it all started with a little boy and a braid. I was chatting with my mom on the phone when she asked if I had heard of kumihimo. “Kumi-what?” I responded. She explained that a little boy had come into her variety store and bought some yarn to make friendship bracelets using a foam disk.

I soon found myself tearing into a package containing a round foam disk, neon-colored yarn, and an instruction pamphlet written entirely in Japanese (thankfully there were several diagrams). Following along, I made my first brightly colored kumihimo braid.

To be perfectly honest, I wasn’t terribly impressed with the hot pink and lime green acrylic yarn (summer camp throwback, for sure), but it was fun. So I tried again. This time I used hand-dyed silk strings in muted earth tones finished off in sterling caps. And so my obsession began.

It was exciting searching for new fibers to braid: leather, ribbon, embellishment yarn, satin cord. And then beads. I had to try it with beads!

This was in 2009. I started teaching kumihimo classes in my Tucson, Arizona, bead store. One of my earliest class projects, the Classic Elegance necklace, caught on like wildfire. Kumihimo classes started selling out, and I was challenged to develop fresh designs and classes.

It was thrilling to watch the delight on my students’ faces as they watched their first braids grow beneath their disks. My love of kumihimo grew as they returned to proudly show off their creations.

Amazed at how many different designs can be made with such simple means, I eagerly sought out all the kumihimo information I could find and studied with the best kumihimo artists around. It’s fascinating to me how each artist and teacher brings her own perspective to this medium.

I’m thankful to have encountered so many wonderful students and mentors along the way. Please join me as I share my knowledge and we continue this kumihimo journey together.

— Rebecca Combs
Welcome to your new addiction

You’re going to love kumihimo, but I must warn you: Your other hobbies will suffer. So will your housework. Your homework. Whatever other obligations in life you may have.

What is kumihimo?
Kumihimo is traditional Japanese braiding. The techniques go back to the time of the samurai. Next time you’re at a museum with a good Asian art collection, look closely at samurai armor and notice the little braids that lace the different sections together. That’s kumihimo.

The word kumihimo comes from Japanese terms for gathering or combining cords. It is the name of the technique and also refers to the resulting braid.

While the samurai are long gone, kumihimo lives on. These days in Japan, you’ll find kumihimo used for decorative and ceremonial pulls and tassels, embellishments for clothing, and obi jime (the belt that ties a kimono shut). With the techniques presented here you could make any of those things, but we’ll focus on making jewelry.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK
The projects in the book are arranged in a skills-building sequence. Be sure to read through and tackle the first project, the Basic Braid, which begins on page 18, to learn the braiding movements that are used for all of the projects in the book.

Subsequent projects add new skills, techniques, and design concepts by building on what you’ve learned. I highly recommend that you start at the beginning and work your way through. Even if you skip making a project, please read through it so you don’t miss any new information.

Measurements are given in inches and yards for fiber and in millimeters for most beads. Online calculators can give you instant conversions, or you can do a little easy math to figure them out. To convert inches to centimeters, multiply the length in inches by 2.54. To convert yards to meters, multiply by .9144.
This braid is known as *kongo gumi* in Japanese, which means "strong braid." It’s often referred to as the Basic Round Braid or Spiral Braid. It’s the most common braid used for jewelry and the easiest to learn—in fact, every project in this book uses the basic movements you’re about to learn. After working through this project, you’ll have a beautiful necklace, a bracelet, and a great foundation for the rest of our kumihimo adventure.

**Finished braid length: approximately 27”**

**Finished necklace length: up to 20” (including endcaps and clasp)**

**Finished bracelet length: up to 9” (including endcaps and clasp)**
YOU’LL NEED
- Basic Kumihimo Toolkit
- 12 yd. 1mm satin cord (6 yd. each of two different colors)
- Pendant with 6mm or larger bail
- 4 6mm endcaps with loops
- 2 clasps
- 4 jump rings (4mm ID)

Setup
We’ll set up two colors to make a spiraling stripe pattern. Cut eight 1.5-yd. pieces (four each of two colors). Bring the eight ends together so they’re more or less even [A]. Don’t worry about this too much. Tie all eight cords together using an overhand knot: Make a loop and bring the tails through the loop [B]. Make the knot fairly close to the end of the cords. I find it easiest to make a large loop and walk the knot toward the end of the cords rather than trying to make a small loop and knot right near the end.

Look at your disk and notice the four black dots. (If you’re working on the blank side, take a pen and transfer the dots from the front.) These are there to help us evenly space the cords during Setup.

TIP When reading kumihimo patterns, the top position (farthest from your body) is called North. The bottom position (closest to your body) is called South. Left is West and Right is East.

Position the knot so that it’s in the middle of the hole in the disk [C]. Now pick a cord—any cord. Lock it in one of the slots adjacent to the top dot. It doesn’t matter which side of the dot. If your disk is brand new, it may take a little umpf to get it secured. Now take a cord the same color as the first and lock it in the slot on the other side of the top dot. That’s one per slot—no sharing.

SATIN CORD
Satin cord usually comes on a spool or coiled. If you’re working from a spool, the easiest way to proceed is to measure and cut one piece and then simply cut the others to match. In bead stores, rattail is often sold in 6-yd. coils. If you cut the six yards into four equal pieces, you will get 1½-yd. lengths without having to measure.

The easiest way to handle it is to keep it coiled as you remove it from the package. Drape the coil over a finger or thumb of one hand and use your other hand to hold the end of the cord as you unwind the coil. Bring the ends together to fold the piece in half. If you were to cut the folded end, you’d get two equal pieces. You want four equal pieces, so fold the piece in half one more time. Before you cut the ends, check if the folded pieces are about a hand-to-hand length (remember that we’re shooting for 1½ yd.). If the cord is significantly shorter, you’ve folded too many times.
A few of the most popular color patterns

Two Colors—Stripes

Wide Stripe

Stair-Step Stripe

Two Colors—Polka Dots

Three Colors

Four Colors

Five Colors

Variegated Fiber
You have two options when it comes to variegated fibers: Just let the colors fall where they may, or match up the repeats so the colors change in unison, as I did in this piece.
YOU’LL NEED
- Beaded Kumihimo Toolkit
- 12 yd. size 18 nylon string
- 30–35 grams 8" Japanese seed beads, single color or mix
- Cone finish: 2 25mm cones, 2 2” headpins, and 2 4mm oval jump rings
- Endcap finish: 8mm endcap set
- Clasp

TIP You’ll have beads left over, but the bead spinner is easier to use when the bowl is full. You’ll use about 20 grams.

Setup
Cut eight 1 1/2-yd. pieces of nylon string, tie them together using an overhand knot, and lock them in place on the kumihimo disk in the standard starting position. To keep everything from tangling, wind all but one of the strings on a weighted bobbin. On the remaining warp, thread a Big Eye needle and string 8” of 8/0 seed beads by hand or by using a bead spinner (see below).

Tie a knot at the end of the string to keep the beads from falling off [A]. Push the beads together as a group toward the disk so that they are about 2” below it [B]. Keep the beads together so they don’t get tangled with the string. Starting at the loose end, wind the string and beads onto the bobbin [C]. Do this for each of the eight warps.

Bead spinner
Although using a bead spinner can be tricky at first, after you get the hang of it, you’ll find it’s a real time saver. To use a bead spinner, pour the seed beads into the bead spinner bowl. Cut a 6” piece of beading thread (not size 18 nylon; use the thin thread you use for binding). Thread the bead spinner needle. Tie the two ends of the thread together using an overhand knot; this loop of thin thread becomes the new eye of the needle. Unwind one bobbin. Thread the loose end of string through the thread eye of the bead spinner needle [D].
If you are right-handed, turn the bead spinner clockwise with your left hand and hold the needle with your right hand [E]. Left-handers should turn the bead spinner counterclockwise with the right hand, holding the needle with the left. Point the hook of the needle down and toward the outside of the bowl. Skim the surface of the beads. If you scrape the bottom, you won’t pick up any beads.

Stop spinning after 1–3" of beads have climbed up the needle. Tip the needle so the beads slide over the thread eye and onto the string (you may have to give them a push). Spin and load beads until you have as many beads on the string as the project calls for. Tie a small knot at the end of the string to keep the beads from falling off.

**Check the setup**
You have eight nylon-string warps tied together and locked on the disk. Each warp is strung with 8" of seed beads. At this point, all of the beads are below the disk. There’s an inch or so of working thread (empty string) between the underside of the disk and the start of the beads. Clip the centerweight just below the knot [F]. Does your setup look like mine? Good.

**Braid a nubbin without beads**
Every beaded braid starts and ends with a short section without beads. This braided nubbin is where you’ll bind and cut the braid. Using the standard top-right down, bottom-left up sequence, braid about ½" without adding any beads [G].

This Beaded Rope necklace features a large-hole focal bead.
YOU’LL NEED

- Beaded Kumihimo Toolkit (use lightest centerweight)
- 12 yd. size 18 nylon string
- 20–25 grams 60 seed beads
- 10mm magnetic endcap

**TIP** The nylon string is very firm, and two thicknesses create enough bulk to support the large seed beads. It’s easy enough to string the beads by hand, but you can still use a Big Eye needle or bead spinner: Treat the two strings as one as you pass them through the eye of the needle or the thread loop.

**Setup**
Cut 16 27” pieces of nylon string. Tie them together using an overhand knot. Use two strings per warp and lock them in place on the kumihimo disk in the standard starting position. To keep everything from tangling, wind each warp or pair of strings onto a weighted bobbin.

Take the bobbin off one warp. String 40 60 seed beads on both strings. Tie a knot to keep the beads from falling off. Push the beads together as a group toward the disk so that they are about 2” below it. Starting at the loose end, wind the beaded string onto the bobbin. Keep the beads together as a group so that they don’t get tangled with the string. Do this for each of the eight warps.

**Braiding**
Clip the centerweight below the knot. Braid a ½” nubbin without any beads. Begin adding beads by pushing one bead into the center every time you move a cord. Lock each bead in place by catching it under the cross-warp [A].

**Finishing**
After you reach your desired length, braid a ½” nubbin without beads. Remove all of the bobbins and the centerweight. Remove the braid from the disk and tie the warps together using an overhand knot. Bind the braid very close to the beads. Cut off both nubbins and glue a magnetic endcap onto each end of the braid.
TECHNIQUE: USING DIFFERENT SIZES OF BEADS

Classic Elegance

I may be biased, but this necklace seems to complement every outfit I wear. It pairs just as well with jeans and a T-shirt as it does with a nice dress. I like the contrast in textures between the faceted fire-polished beads and smooth seed beads.

Finished length: 19” (including clasp)
My bracelet is 7" long and fits a 6" wrist. The teardrop center section is 3" long. On each side is 1" of beaded braid with 110 seed beads. The cones and toggle clasp add about 2".

The easiest place to add length is in the seed bead sections. For every inch of finished braid you’d like to add, you’ll need 10 additional seed beads per warp. It’s best to make this bracelet snug so the mini teardrops don’t roll to the bottom of your wrist.

### Amber Sunset bracelet length options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finished length</th>
<th>Setup for warps A &amp; B</th>
<th>Setup for all other warps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7&quot;</td>
<td>10 11&quot; seed beads, 25 mini teardrops, 10 seed beads</td>
<td>45 seed beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&quot;</td>
<td>15 seed beads, 25 mini teardrops, 15 seed beads</td>
<td>55 seed beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&quot;</td>
<td>20 seed beads, 25 mini teardrops, 20 seed beads</td>
<td>65 seed beads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>