



# Knot hard

*Use tweezers to perfect your bead knotting skills*

by Sarah K. Young

For hundreds of years, people have been stringing pearls and semi-precious stone beads on silk with knots between each bead. The knots protect the beads by keeping them from rubbing against each other. If a necklace breaks, one bead might slip away, but the knots will hold the rest together. Knots also enhance the design by spacing beads slightly so their shape and color show to best advantage. Silk is ideal because it drapes better than any other kind of cord; for stones and other beads that may have sharp holes, nylon beading cord is a good alternative.

## stepbystep

Before you launch into your first knotting project, make a sample piece to practice the technique. Knotting isn't difficult; untying knots is. So be sure you can land that knot in the right place every time.

**1** Determine the finished length of the necklace. Cut the beading cord 5 times the finished length and use it doubled.  
**2** String the beads and move them to about 10 in. (25cm) from the tail end. Knot the tails temporarily around the end bead to keep the beads on the cord. If you are working with graduated beads or have a centered design, set aside about 1½ in. (3.8cm) of beads at each end so you can adjust the length before finishing the necklace.

**3** Working about 10 in. from the needle end of the cord, make an over-hand knot (see "Basics," p. 136). Slide a bead tightly against the knot. You should have at least 12 in. (30cm) of cord between this bead and the others.

**4** Hold the bead in your left hand and loop the cord around the middle three fingers of your left hand. Drop the bead through the loop from back to front. To keep the knots slanted in the same direction, make every knot exactly the same (**photo a**).

**5** With the knotting tweezers in your right hand, reach through the loop and grab the cord right next to the bead with the tweezers' tip (**photo b**). Keep the tweezers perpendicular to the cord or you'll damage it on the tweezers' edges.

**6** Once you have a secure grip on the cord, let the loop slide off your fingers.

With your left hand, pull the cord slowly so the knot slides toward the bead. Use your thumbnail to push the knot into place next to the bead (**photo c**). Remove the tweezers and pull on the cord to tighten the knot. Grab the individual cords and pull them apart gently to tighten the knot and push it against the bead (**photo d**).

**7** Slide the next bead against the knot and repeat steps 4-6. Don't change your looping technique as the knotted strand grows, even though you'll be dropping more than a foot of beads through the loop. Continue until you have knots between all but the last few beads.

Check the necklace's length and make any adjustments by removing beads or adding back the reserved beads from step 2 before you finish knotting. Be sure to make an overhand knot after each end bead.

**8** String a bead tip onto the needle and cut the needle off the cord. Tie the tails with several surgeon's knots (see "Basics"), dab with nail polish, and trim the ends. Attach the hook on the bead tip to the clasp loop. Repeat on the other end of the necklace.

### knotting tips

**1** Silk sizes are usually designated by a letter—from O or A (thinnest) to FFF (thickest), with F (medium) the most commonly used size. Nylon beading cord is designated in numbers—from 0 (thinnest) to 6 (thickest).

**2** The size of the holes in pearls and semi-precious stones varies greatly, but it's crucial to know what you're working with before you purchase your cord. If the silk or beading cord is too thin, the knots will slip uselessly into the beads. If it's too thick, you can't string beads.

Always string on doubled cord.

**3** Start with a longer piece of silk or cord than you think you'll need. Knots take up a surprising amount of material, so work with 5 times the length of the finished necklace. If you run short, the only solution is to start over.

**4** Choose a cord color slightly deeper in tone than the predominant bead color, unless the thread color is part of the design. White or light-colored pearls are usually strung on white or ivory silk.

**5** If stones have been drilled from

opposite sides, the hole will be much narrower in the center. Use a thin thread, but tie double knots so they won't slip into the bead hole. To make a double knot, pass the bead twice through the overhand loop before gripping the cord with tweezers (**photo e**).

**6** For stones that have larger holes on one side, string them all small-side first. The knot will be swallowed if two large holes are adjacent.

**7** If your design incorporates metal beads, don't knot next to them because the metal will quickly fray the cords. To protect the cord, put a seed bead between the metal bead and the knot.

**8** To extend the life of a silk knotted necklace: don't let it get wet; don't store it hanging; and don't apply perfume or hairspray while wearing it.

**9** Periodically inspect the knots with a magnifying glass. If you see a bit of silk sticking out between beads, one of the strands has probably broken. Wear usually shows first near bead tips or metal beads. Restrung the necklace.

**10** Silk is strong and comes in many beautiful colors, but don't use it to string glass or ceramic beads. Their sharp edges will fray this natural fiber rapidly. String these beads on nylon beading cord.

### about tweezers

Tweezers designed to remove splinters have rough gripping surfaces and will shred your silk. Buy proper ones from bead stores, jewelry supply catalogs, or medical supply houses. Use a fine sharpening stone to smooth the tweezers' edges, and you'll never break through the silk again. ●

### materials

- 1 16-18 in. (41-45cm) Strand semi-precious stones or pearls
- Silk thread or nylon beading cord, size to fit bead hole
- 2 Bead tips
- Clasp (this one comes from Eclectica, 262-641-0910)
- Clear nail polish
- Twisted wire beading needles
- Tools: Knotting tweezers with long, tapered points and smooth jaws, round- or chainnose pliers, bead design board (optional)



a



b



c



d



e