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Kerry Bogart has suggestions for how to choose the right wire for jewelry designs.

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Guest:



Kerry Bogart

What Wire When:

A Guide To Choosing The Right Wire In Your Jewelry Designs

Artist - Kerry Bogert

When you are ready to take the steps to add wire to your jewelry designs, the first time you view the wire category in a catalog can be confusing and overwhelming. Which wire works best in ear-wires? Can one use that same wire for making wrapped loops or links in bracelets? The first time I ordered wire, I knew I wanted sterling, but didn't get the sizing thing. So, I went with what was cheapest and gave me the most footage per ounce, not understanding what I actually *needed*. The following is a collection of tips to guide you through understanding what types of metals wire comes in, gauges, hardness ratings, and which wire works best for which projects or components.



Types of Wire

There are so many types of wire available on the jewelry market today. The classic standbys of sterling silver and gold are still the most common, but have you ever tried brass, anodized copper, or even steel? Look at your individual style of jewelry and see which wire speaks to you. Is your work bright and colorful? Then try experimenting anodized metals. Do you tend to be more rustic or vintage inspired? Oxidized brass or copper can give your work that aged look.

Common Wires On The Market

- Anodized metals – also called colored copper, this wire created with a base metal (usually copper) which is coated in a variety of different colors.
- Sterling Silver & Fine Silver – sterling is 92.5% silver and 7.5% other metals, fine silver is 99% pure silver.
- Gold-filled – created through a process of adding several layers of gold onto a base metal, usually brass.
- Brass & Copper – though brass can be a bit stiffer than copper, both these wire are very affordable and can be used in a variety of beading projects.
- Steel – the newest member of the jewelry wire family, this wire is becoming more and more popular, just don't get it wet, it will rust.

Gauges & Hardness Ratings

The way in which the size of wire is measured is called gauge. The larger the number, the finer the wire is, and vice versa, smaller numbers mean thicker wire. Typically, jewelry makers use wire between the ranges of 14g and 24g. There are always exceptions to the rule, of course, but for these examples, we will use what is most common. Along with gauge, wire is given a hardness rating. Thankfully, these ratings aren't as tricky as gauge. We'll tackle those first.

Hardness Ratings

- Dead-soft – very bendable and pliable
- Half-hard – stiffer than dead-soft but still malleable
- Full-hard – very stiff and can be difficult to bend

Special Note: I always buy dead-soft wire for my wire working projects. It can be work hardened once a project is complete so that it becomes rigid and holds its shape. Full-hard, on the other hand, needs to be annealed with a torch so that it is malleable enough to work with.

Gauges

- 24g – this is fine wire and works best for light-weight dangles or intricate wire coiling over a core wire.
- 20g – another mid-fine gauge of wire that is the standard for ear wires. Works great for dangles as well.
- 18g – this is a mid size wire that really is the most versatile. It works well in clasps, links, bails, or head pins. Does not work well with pearls or other beads with tiny holes though.
- 16g – considered thick wire and used primarily for clasps or links.
- 14g – a heavy gauge wire that provides structure for bangle projects or designs that need a solid core. Even when ordered as dead-soft this wire can be very stiff because of its thickness.

Special Note: When purchasing wire, the smaller the gauge the more footage per ounce you will receive, but don't let that keep you from ordering large gauge wire. You need to order what is right for the job.



Visual Examples

The following images show the do's and don't's of using these different gauges when creating a everything from a simple project like a bracelet with wrapped loops to coiling. Keep in mind that the size of wire you choose needs to balance the size of your beads.



In this application, 14g is just way too big! For simple linking, I like 16g for these beads if creating simple loops rather than wrapped ones, and I love 18g in this style with wrapped loops. You'll see 20g works as well, but you need a chunkier style of wrapping for the loops or the beads can move too freely on the wire. Clearly, 24g just won't work for a project like this, it is much too fine.

Here I created basic ear wires in a ranges of gauges. Unless you have had your lobes stretched, you will have trouble getting 16g in your ear, and even 18g can feel a little heavy or tight. As I said before, 20g is the standard for ear-wires. If you try making them from 24g, you'll find it won't hold it's shape well.



When making clasps, again, heavier gauge will be the wire of choice. Large 16g works perfectly for many styles of S-clasps. When using 18g, you may want to double the wire up to give it added strength for use in clasps. If your project is small and very light weight, you could use 20g, but anything finer is just too small for clasps.

Coils are an application where almost any wire gauge will do!! Avoid 14g or 16g, but all others made lovely coils and the finer the gauge wire, the more intricate the wrapping of the coils will be.



Kerry Bogert ...

...is the author of *Totally Twisted: Innovative Wire Work + Art Glass Jewelry* (Interweave 2010). You can find her tutorials for wire jewelry projects in a variety of popular beading magazines including *Step By Step Wire*, *Easy Wire*, and *Creative Jewelry*. As well as *Wire Style & Wire Style 2* by Denise Peck (Interweave 2008, 2011), *101 Wire Earrings* by Denise Peck (Interweave 200) and *Chain Style* by Jane Dickerson (Interweave 2009)

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