

Knitting and beading can make for a great marriage as long as a few rules of engagement are followed.

And The Bead Goes On

by Maddy Cranley

Memories of the '60's - love beads, hippie beads, beads on a string around necks and wrists, homemade, handmade, swinging with long hair and flowered skirts. Beads were such a strong fashion element of that decade. The subject of beads is a vast one and the hippie incarnation was just a small part of beading history. It is thought that our early ancestors were stringing sea shells as early as 30,000 years ago and the first beads, that developed as a significant trading item, were likely made from seeds. The many materials and methods used in making beads have resulted in an infinite variety. When raw materials of stone, metal, glass, plastic or resin combine with assorted artistic and cultural influences, the bead is in very little danger of becoming boring.

Even with the vast choice of beads available there are a few cautions that should be noted when it come to using beads in your knitting. Along with beads, anything that can have a hole drilled in it or have a shank attached can be successfully worked into your garment. This would include items such as buttons, small charms, mirrors, or even coins. The first consideration is weight. Adding bead ornamentation to your knitted garment will add extra weight whether attached with an embroidery method or knitting in the bead. The trick is to find the beads in the right weight and quantity without causing your garment to sag. So decisions must be made as to what size of bead to use, how many, and is it suitable to the yarn weight. The size of the bead hole must also be considered. A larger bead hole may cause the bead to hang loosely with a dangling effect, unless that is the intent. A bead hole that is too small will not allow for passage of the yarn thickness that you have chosen. Before you begin, it is always best to test your bead choice through whatever cleaning process the finished garment will have to undergo. Join a few of the chosen beads to a knitted swatch and wash or dry clean. Check the sample carefully for dye leakage or staining on your ground fabric.

Beads or decorative objects should be threaded onto the yarn before you begin knitting. If you are working from a chart which will require specific placement and a certain color order, remember that first is last. The first bead to be strung onto the yarn is the last bead to be placed in the knitting. Joining a marker on the yarn to indicate row changes is also helpful. It is advisable to practice the threading and knitting in of the bead to know how the bead will "sit" on the knitting. The proper placement can vary with size, shape, the way the bead is threaded, and direction of the bead hole. Beads can be knit on a variety of stitches but to start, practice on knit stitches, working as follows: Knit to where you wish to place the bead, bring yarn and the bead to front of work, slip the next stitch purlwise, take yarn to back of work, leaving the bead at front, knit the next stitch.

If this experiment gets you hooked on beads, there a number of books which outline the fascinating history of beads as well as tempting projects. A classic standby, both encyclopedic and inspirational, that will give you wonderful lessons in the history and classification of beads is "The Book Of Beads" by Janet Cole and Robert Budwig (Simon and Schuster). A more recent offering from Lily Chin, "Knit and Crochet With Beads" (Interweave Press) will walk you through specific beading and knitting projects.

Placing beads on your knitting can add additional layers of color and texture to your knit and purls, not to mention triggering all those flower child memories.

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Maddy Cranley is a professional knitwear designer, who has created exclusive designs for knitting and craft magazines, authored and published three books on the subject of creating felt garments and projects from handknitting, and produces an ever-expanding line of maddy laine handknitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>