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INTRODUCTION TO SEED BEAD WEAVING

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ESTABLISHED 1954



Seed Beading Basics

Skill Level:

Beginner

WHAT ARE SEED BEADS?

Seed beads are small, round beads that are typically used for bead weaving, stringing, and other types of jewelry making. They are named “seed beads” because they are about the size of a seed and are used to create a variety of patterns and designs.

Seed beads come in a wide range of sizes, shapes, and colors, and are made from a variety of materials, including glass, plastic, metal, and stone. They can be smooth or textured, transparent or opaque, and come in a rainbow of colors to match any design style.

Seed beads are often used in combination with other types of beads, such as larger beads, crystals, or pearls, to create intricate designs. They are also used to create fringes, tassels, and other decorative elements in beaded jewelry.

In bead weaving, seed beads are worked onto thread using a needle and woven together to create patterns and designs. This type of jewelry making requires patience, precision, and attention to detail, but the results can be stunning. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced bead weaver, seed beads are a versatile and essential component of any jewelry making kit.

Designing with seed beads is a beautiful medium to express your creativity! The process is meditative and rewarding, with results that look intricate and amazing. Seed beading techniques are not hard to learn. I think a lot of people get intimidated by what looks like a lot of detail, but once you get the hang of it you'll see how easy it is to make very stunning pieces in no time!

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WHAT DO THE SIZES MEAN?

Seed bead sizes are measured in millimeters and indicate the diameter of the bead. The smaller the bead size, the smaller the bead, and vice versa. Different sizes of seed beads are used for different types of seed bead weaving and for creating different effects in your designs.

You'll see seed bead sizes notated as Number / Number, such as 11/0. The "/0" part of the size is a legacy reference to the manufacturer's base bead size, 0, or "aught" size. For our purposes, this is just a fun fact.

The top number, "11/" can be used as a general guide to the number of beads that will fit, lined up with holes parallel to each other, in 1 inch of beadwork. Note this isn't the strung measurement, but the measurement you would get, for example, if you measured laid out hole sides up, or down the side of a bracelet stitched with peyote stitch, or ladder stitched, for example. 11 beads, or rows, made with 11/0 would equal approx. 1 inch.

Here are some of the common round seed bead sizes and the types of projects they are used for:

Size 15/0, approximately 1mm in size. This is the smallest size of seed bead and is often used for delicate and intricate designs.

Size 11/0, approximately 2mm in size. This is a medium-sized seed bead that is commonly used for a wide range of seed bead weaving projects.

Size 10/0, approximately 2.3mm. Offered mainly in Czech seed beads, this size is sometimes equivalent in measure to a Japanese 11/0, which run larger. Discussed below in more detail.

Size 8/0, approximately 3mm. This is a larger seed bead that is often used for both bead weaving and stringing. It is a great size for beginners. Designs work up quickly.

Size 6/0, approximately 4mm. This is an even larger seed bead that is often used for stringing or working in combination with smaller seed bead sizes in some bead weaving designs.

Size 5/0, typically about 5x4mm. This is one of the largest sizes of seed bead and is often used for creating bold and chunky designs.

There are larger sizes still, such as 2/0.

Seed Bead sizes in the larger ranges are getting on par with the sizes of regular beads, such as a 6mm bead.

Beads larger than 6/0 are often referred to as Pony Beads, or crow beads. They're often more square-ish in shape. The names date to the 17th century and have their roots in the trading of beads with Native peoples, initially by French explorers.

Today, due to the variety of options and manufacturer's, seed bead sizes are close, but not exact, between brands. You will notice variation in the size of seed beads between brands. For example, an 11/0 seed bead from one manufacturer may be noticeably larger than one from another company. In my opinion, the above brands compare in sizing as follows, from smallest to biggest. Let's say you're buying an 11/0 seed bead. Compared to each other, the smallest to largest would likely be:

Preciosa Ornela 11/0, Miyuki 11/0, Matubo 11/0, Toho 11/0.

That slight variation, measured, looks something like this:

Width: 1.2mm, 1.3mm, 1.4mm, 1.5mm.

Diameter (hole side up): 1.8 - 2.0mm

The real variation shows up in the width of the bead. This is significant in something like a loomed or peyote stitch design, where the width of your piece would be greatly variable, would look wavy, if you mixed brands.

Tip: New seed beaders will have the easiest time learning by working with the same brand in a piece. When I started seed beading, I used to enjoy playing with this idea. I would design a loom pattern and then recreate it with each of my favorite seed beads, Czech, Toho, and Miyuki beads in size 11/0. I didn't combine brands in the same bracelet, so my designs would work out uniformly, and I could compare the finished products with each other, really getting a feel for the nuances of the different bead types. Below we have included a section comparing major brands.

WHAT IS THE MOST POPULAR SEED BEAD TYPE AND SIZE?

The most used seed bead size is size 11/0 round seed beads. These beads are small enough to create intricate patterns, but large enough to be easily seen and handled. They are also readily available and come in a wide range of colors and finishes, making them a popular choice for many beaders.

That being said, it's worth noting that the popularity of seed bead sizes does change over time and other sizes, such as size 8/0 or size 6/0, may become more popular depending on the current trends and designs in the beading community. Ultimately, the best seed bead size for a particular project will depend on the desired look and feel of the finished product.

I often teach beginners with 8/0 seed beads. These are easier to learn with and designs work up faster.

WHAT IS THE MOST POPULAR SEED BEAD TYPE AND SIZE?

There are many different brands of seed beads available, each with its own unique features and characteristics. Some of the top seed bead brands include:

JAPANESE SEED BEADS



Miyuki is a Japanese company that is well-known for producing high-quality seed beads. They offer a wide range of seed bead sizes and finishes, and their beads are known for their consistent shape and size. Miyuki is the manufacturer of the much-loved Delica bead.



Toho is another Japanese company that is known for producing high-quality seed beads. They offer a wide range of seed bead sizes and finishes, and their beads are known for their consistent shape and size.

CZECH SEED BEADS

Czech seed beads are made in the Czech Republic and are known for their high-quality, stunning colors, and affordability. They offer a wide range of seed bead sizes and finishes, and their beads are often used for their unique shapes and finishes. There are two Czech manufacturers I am most familiar with. They are:

PRECIOSA

Preciosa Ornela is a Czech company that is known for producing high-quality seed beads, as well as other types of beads and jewelry. They offer a wide range of seed bead sizes and finishes, and their beads are known for their stunning colors and finishes.

MATUBO™

TOP CZECH BEADS

Matubo is a Czech company that specializes in producing high-quality seed beads in unique shapes and finishes. Their beads are known for their consistent shape and size, and they offer a wide range of seed bead sizes and finishes.

Each of these brands offers its own unique selection of seed beads, and the best brand for you will depend on your individual needs and preferences. When choosing a brand of seed beads, consider factors such as the size and shape of the beads, the finishes available, and the quality and consistency of the beads. It can also be helpful to try a few different brands to see which one works best for you and your projects.

WHAT OTHER TYPES OF BEADS ARE USED IN BEAD WEAVING?

In addition to seed beads, there are many other types of beads that are commonly used in bead weaving. These include:

Bugle beads: These are long, cylindrical beads that are often used for fringe work and for adding length and movement to designs.

Shaped seed beads, such as cut, triangle and hex, are variations in seed beads that follow the size convention of regular seed beads, but they have a cut shape, aren't round but are cut in shape described.

Two-Hole Beads and Shaped Beads: Two-hole beads and shaped beads are very popular choices for seed bead weaving because they allow for more creative and intricate designs. There are many! Here are some of the most common types of two-hole beads and shaped beads used in seed bead weaving:



TWIN BEADS

Twin beads are small, oval-shaped, round beads with two holes that run parallel to each other. They are often used for adding length and movement to designs, as well as for creating unique shapes, dimensions and textured effects.



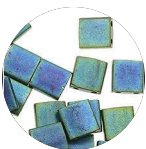
SUPERDUOS

SuperDuos are similar to the Twin bead, a type of two-hole bead known for its unique shape, which features two, rounded cone-shaped halves that come together to form a rounded hourglass shape. They are also used for creating intricate, textured designs.



DIAMOND AND GEM DUOS

Diamond and Gem duos are a type of two-hole seed bead that have a unique diamond-shaped cross section, with the two holes drilled at the points of the diamond. They are a popular choice for seed bead weaving because of their versatile shape and the variety of design possibilities they offer.



SQUARE BEADS

Square beads, such as Miyuki Tiles and Czech Tiles: Square beads are a type of shaped bead that feature a square shape, with two holes that run parallel to each other. They are often used for adding texture and interest to designs, as well as for creating square stitch patterns.



RULLA BEADS

Rulla beads are a type of shaped bead that feature a cylindrical shape with two parallel holes. They are often used for adding length and movement to designs, as well as for creating unique, textured effects.



BRICK BEADS

Brick beads are a type of shaped bead that feature a rectangular shape, with two holes that run parallel to each other. They are often used for adding texture and interest to designs, as well as for creating brick stitch patterns.



TWO-HOLE CABS

There are a few brands making a round and oval shaped flat backed, two hole cab. Sometimes called Candy beads, and there are even some new ones on the market with flowers or "rosettes" carved intricately into the top.

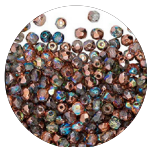


CRESCENT BEADS

Crescent beads are a type of shaped bead that features a crescent-moon shape, with two holes on opposite sides of the bead. They are often used for adding length and movement to designs.

Ginkgo, Paisley, and similar... there is no limit to the variety of shaped beads. There are many, mostly two-hole but some with three, and in so many shapes and dimensions. It is a sport among us seed beaders to experiment with the shapes.

These are just a few of the many types of two-hole beads and shaped beads that are commonly used in seed bead weaving. The specific types of beads that you use will depend on the look and feel that you are trying to achieve in your designs.



FIRE-POLISHED BEADS

Fire-polished beads are round glass beads that are faceted and then polished to create a smooth surface. They are often used for stringing and for adding sparkle and shine to designs..



PEARLS

Pearls are a classic type of bead that are often used in bead weaving, both for their natural beauty and for their symbolic significance.



CRYSTALS

Crystals are glass beads that are cut and polished to create a sparkling, multi-faceted surface. They are often used for adding sparkle and glamour to designs.



STONE BEADS

Stone beads are made from a wide range of natural materials, including agate, jasper, and turquoise, and are often used for adding color, texture, and interest to designs

WHAT IS SEED BEAD WEAVING?

Seed bead weaving is a type of jewelry making that involves weaving together small seed beads to create patterns and designs. There are many different seed bead weaving stitches that can be used to create a variety of effects. Some of the most popular seed bead weaving stitches include:

Peyote Stitch: The peyote stitch is a tubular stitch that creates a flat or three-dimensional fabric. It is one of the most versatile and widely used seed bead weaving stitches.

Right-Angle Weave: The right-angle weave is a stitch that creates a dense, flexible fabric with a weave pattern that resembles a grid.

Ladder Stitch: The ladder stitch is a stitch that creates a flat, flexible fabric that can be used to create a variety of jewelry components, such as straps and chains. It is used as a base in many other stitches.

Herringbone Stitch: The herringbone stitch is a stitch that creates a zigzag pattern and is often used to create bracelets and necklaces.

Square Stitch: The square stitch is a stitch that creates a flat, rigid fabric and is often used to create earrings, pendants, and other types of jewelry. Finished it is indistinguishable from loomed pieces.

Looming: In seed bead looming, the loom is set up with threads running vertically, called warps, that look like guitar strings. The bead weaver then strings seed beads onto a thread called the weft, which passes under the warps, arranging seed beads between the horizontal “warp” threads, following a pattern to create the desired design. A specialized needle, called a looming needle, is often used.

Rope stitches: Many of the above stitches can be done in the round to create a rope effect.

Spiral Rope Stitch: The spiral rope stitch is a stitch that creates a spiral rope effect and is often used to create necklaces and bracelets.

Netting Stitch: The netting stitch is a stitch that creates a flexible, open fabric and is often used to create jewelry components such as fringes, tassels, around shapes and over forms, and flat such as in mandalas, and beaded flowers.

These are just a few of the many seed bead weaving stitches that can be used to create a variety of effects. The specific stitch that you use will depend on the type of jewelry you are making, as well as your personal preferences and the level of skill required. Each stitch has its own unique characteristics and can create different looks.

TOOLS

Seed bead weaving requires a few specialized tools in addition to the beads themselves. Some of the most common tools used for seed bead weaving include:

Beading Needles: Beading needles are thin with a sharp point, used for passing through the seed beads and weaving them into patterns.

Beading Thread: Beading thread is a type of thread specifically designed for seed bead weaving. It is strong and durable and comes in a variety of colors to match your beads.

Beading Scissors: Beading scissors are a type of small, sharp scissors specifically designed for seed bead weaving. They are ideal for cutting beading thread and for making precise cuts in your work.

Beading Mat: A beading mat is a soft, foam mat that provides a non-slip surface for seed bead weaving. It protects your work surface and helps to keep the beads from rolling around.

Beading Loom: A beading loom is an optional tool that can be used to help with seed bead weaving. A beading loom is a frame with pegs or hooks on which the beads are strung, making it easier to work with large or complex designs.

These are the basic tools that you will need for seed bead weaving, although there are many other specialized tools and supplies available to help you with your projects. The specific tools that you will need will depend on the type of seed bead weaving that you are doing, as well as your personal preferences and the complexity of your design.

THREADS

Beading threads come in a variety of materials, thicknesses, and strengths, each with its own unique properties and best uses. Here are some of the most common types of beading threads and their best uses:

Nylon beading thread: Nylon beading thread is a strong, synthetic material that is ideal for bead weaving. Threads come in a variety of brands, colors, and sizes. Some are coated to resist knotting and fraying.

Fused, Bonded, and/or Braided threads: Wildfire and Fireline are examples of beading threads made of fused fibers. They are known for strength and durability and are a good choice for giving structure and support to bead weaving. They resist tangling and knotting. Beginners find these threads best and easiest to learn with. The only real downside of threads of this type is they are not flowy, so aren't great choices for designs that require movement, such as fringe earrings.

Silk beading thread: Silk beading thread is a luxurious, natural material that is ideal for bead weaving with smaller beads or for delicate, high-end jewelry designs. It is known for its soft texture and sheen, but it is also strong and durable. The downside is extreme fraying and stretch.

Beading wire: Beading wire is a flexible metal wire that is often used for stringing beads and for making jewelry with a permanent, structured shape. It is available in a variety of gauges and can be used with crimp beads and crimp covers to secure the wire and finish the design. Some beading wire comes in a small enough diameter to bead weave with larger seed beads.

Elastic beading cord: Elastic beading cord is a stretchy material that is ideal for making bracelets and other jewelry items that need to stretch to fit over the hand. It is also great for stringing beads that need to move and have a bit of give.

Monofilament: Monofilament beading thread is a type of synthetic beading thread made from a single, continuous strand of nylon or polyester. It is clear and nearly invisible when used in bead weaving, making it a popular choice for jewelry making and other bead weaving projects. Monofilament beading thread is a great option for jewelry designs that will be exposed to the elements. One of the main benefits of using monofilament beading thread is that it is less likely to fray or knot than other types of beading threads, such as multi-strand beading thread. Additionally, it is less likely to become tangled or knotted during use. The downsides are it can be slippery to work with, will come unknotted, and has a great deal of memory if folded or compressed.

These are just a few of the most common types of beading threads, and the specific type that you use will depend on the look and feel that you are trying to achieve in your designs, as well as the type and size of the beads you are using. It's always a good idea to experiment with different types of threads to find the one that works best for your specific needs.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT SIZES OF BEADING THREAD AND WHAT ARE THEY USED FOR?

The size of the beading thread you use can greatly affect the overall look and feel of your bead weaving project. It is always a good idea to check the manufacturer's specifications and product information for exact sizes and details. The right size of thread for your project will depend on several factors, including the size and weight of the beads you are using, the type of stitch you are doing, and the overall look and feel you want to achieve in your design. Here are some common sizes of beading thread and their best uses:

NYLON AND SILK THREADS:

THREAD SIZE A:

Thread Size A: This is the thinnest size of beading thread and is ideal for bead weaving with small seed beads or for stringing very delicate beads. Use with Size 15/0.

THREAD SIZE B:

This is a medium-weight thread that is ideal for bead weaving with a variety of bead sizes, including medium-sized, such as 11/0 seed beads.

THREAD SIZE C:

This is a heavy-weight thread that is ideal for bead weaving with large or heavy beads, or for designs that require a stronger thread to support the weight of the beads. Use with 11/0 or 8/0.

THREAD SIZE D:

This is an extra heavy-weight thread that is ideal for bead weaving for designs that require the strongest possible thread. Use with 8/0.

You will also find that some of the bonded and monofilament type threads are sold by sizes in inches, millimeters, or by pound test. This type of information has its roots in the original use for these types of threads, the fishing industry. For seed bead weaving, the size thread most used are:

4lb test, .004 inches, .101 mm

6lb test, .006 inches, .15 mm

8lb test, .008 inches, .2mm

For our purposes in bead weaving, the important thing to know is that a 4lb thread is best for size 15 seed beads, 6lb for 11/0 and delicas, and 8lb for larger beads. The most useful and versatile is the 6lb, .006 size. It is equivalent in use to Size D beading thread.

WHAT IS THE EASIEST BEAD-WEAVING STITCH FOR A BEGINNER TO LEARN?

There are several seed bead weaving stitches to choose from, and the easiest one for you will depend on your personal experience and preferences. However, some of the most beginner-friendly seed bead weaving stitches include:

FLAT PEYOTE STITCH:

Flat peyote stitch is a simple and straightforward bead-weaving technique that creates a flat, even surface. It's a great stitch for beginners to learn, as it only involves two basic steps repeated over and over.

BRICK STITCH:

Brick stitch is another easy-to-learn seed bead weaving stitch that creates a firm, even fabric. It's like peyote stitch, but the beads are woven in a slightly different way, resulting in a slightly different look.

LOOM WEAVING:

Loom weaving is a method of seed bead weaving that uses a loom to hold the beads in place. This method is a great option for beginners because the loom helps keep the beads organized and in place, making it easier to see the pattern and to keep track of where you are in the project.

SQUARE STITCH:

Square stitch is a simple and versatile seed bead weaving stitch that can be used to create a wide variety of jewelry pieces, from bracelets to earrings. It's easy to learn, as it only involves a few basic steps repeated over and over.

Regardless of which stitch you choose, the key to success with seed bead weaving is practice. The more you work with seed beads, the more comfortable and confident you'll become, and you'll soon be able to create beautiful, intricate designs.

WHAT IS THE MOST POPULAR BEAD WEAVING STITCH?

The most popular seed bead weaving stitch is the peyote stitch. Peyote stitch is a bead-weaving technique that creates a flat or tubular fabric. It's a versatile stitch that can be used to create a wide variety of beaded jewelry, such as bracelets, necklaces, and earrings, and is easy to learn, even for beginners. The stitch is made by weaving seed beads together in a repeating pattern that can be worked in a variety of different bead shapes, sizes, and counts. Its popularity might be attributed to the possibilities in patterns. Flat peyote stitch offers a big opportunity for expression and personalization through peyote patterns. There are many patterns sold and designers love to make their own in patterns ranging from geometric shapes, to flowers, landscapes, animals, letters, and anything else you can dream up.

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT BEADING NEEDLE FOR MY PROJECT?

Beading needles are specialized needles used for stitching beads and seed beads in jewelry making. There are several different types of beading needles, each with its own specific features and uses. When selecting a beading needle for your seed bead project, it's important to choose a needle that is the right size and style for your beads, and that matches the needs of your project. Some needles are better suited for delicate work, while others are better for projects that require more strength and durability.

Hard Beading Needles: Beading needles are a type of needle that are specifically designed for seed bead weaving. They have a very fine point and smaller eye than your standard sewing needle, making them ideal for passing through small seed beads. They also tend to be slightly more flexible than other types of needles, which can help make it easier to maneuver through tight spaces and around curves.

Big Eye Needles: Big eye needles have a large eye, making them easy to thread with thicker beading threads or multiple strands of thread. They are often used for bead stringing, and for working with larger beads. These needles are more flexible than hard beading needles and can be sharp and flatter at the tips.

Short Sharp Needles: Short Sharp needles are a type of needle with a sharp point. They are often used for seed bead weaving on fabrics such as in bead embroidery and for other bead-weaving techniques that require a shorter needle.

Looming needles: A looming needle typically has a large eye and a long, slender shaft. The large eye makes it easy to thread with beading thread or string, while the long, slender shaft is useful for stringing many beads at a time and holding them stable while they are maneuvered under the warp threads on the loom. The tip of the needle is usually rounded or slightly blunt, which helps to prevent the needle from piercing or damaging the thread. Looming needles are also useful for creating long, fringe earrings, for their ability to string many beads at a time, and their blunt tips prevent snagging on the pass back through stringing fringe strands.

WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENT SIZES OF BEADING NEEDLES, AND WHAT ARE THEY FOR?

There are different sizes of beading needles because each size is designed for a specific type of bead or a specific type of bead weaving thread or technique. The size of the needle should match the size of the beads being used, as well as the type of thread and the stitch being used.

It is somewhat intuitive. Here are some of the factors that influence the size of a beading needle:

Bead Size: Larger beads can use larger needles for ease of threading. Smaller beads, on the other hand, require smaller needles to fit through the bead holes. In general, beading needles come in a range of sizes, most popularly size 10 (the largest) to size 13 (the smallest).

Thread Size: The size of the needle should also match the thickness of the thread being used. Thicker threads require larger needles, while thinner threads require smaller needles.

Type of Stitch: Certain seed bead weaving stitches, such as the peyote stitch, require a needle with a slightly different shape, flexibility, and small eye or the end of the needle. This allows the needle to maneuver more easily through the beads and makes it easier to create the stitch.

Personal preference: Some bead weavers prefer a certain size of needle based on their level of comfort and familiarity with the needle.

Most patterns and teachers will share what size needle they recommend for a given project. You can go with that until you develop your own preferences.

HOW DO I THREAD MY NEEDLE?

Hold the needle in one hand and the end of the thread in the other hand. Carefully bring the eye of the needle to meet the thread. If you're having trouble seeing the eye, you can hold the needle up to the light to make it easier to see. Thread conditioner and wax, along with a fresh trim on the end, can help with a fraying end of thread. Thread conditioners such as bee's wax, thread heaven work by running the thread over them to coat the strand, focusing on the ends.

If you're using a thermally bonded thread, you can flatten the end with a flat plier, known as chain nose pliers. This makes the thread flat like paper and easy to feed through the needle's eye.

SEED BEADING TERMINOLOGY

TAIL:

This is the length of thread left behind the first bead when starting a stitch.

REINFORCE:

This is a step where you weave back through all the beads again to make the stitch stronger. It's typically done at the end of each repeat in a stitch.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ACROSS TECHNIQUES

WEAVING IN:

When you finish a design, the remaining thread is commonly brought back into the work by following the existing thread path through the last few rows, or repeats, in the piece. Depending on the stitch, this can mean going through three rows or changing direction two or three times, then trimming the remaining thread.

FINISHING:

Finishing techniques are a big topic in seed beading. We are always looking for new and improved ways to finish work. It is one of the challenges in a project to discover how to finish it. Sometimes this step is more challenging than creating the piece itself. It's an opportunity to personalize your work. The main goal of finishing is typically to attach a closure such as a clasp or ear wire.

ADDING THREAD:

There are many methods of doing this, but the most popular way is to bring a new string into the work, following the existing thread path until the tail of that new thread stops moving when pulled. Several rows or repeats are then made with the new thread, and the old working thread is worked up into the new rows / repeats. Tails of the old and new thread are then trimmed.

KNOTTING:

Some seed beading can use a weaver's knot, or even a regular square knot to finish. It is best to weave the tails of the knot into the adjacent beads before trimming.

BEST CLASSES AND REFERENCE VIDEOS

For someone just starting out in seed beading, in addition to this guide, the following beginner classes are recommended:

Basics Shorts – There are a collection of short videos showing some basic stitches:

Ladder Stitch - <https://youtu.be/DTPZbAwtxtw>

Peyote Stitch - <https://youtu.be/3dEjllfDOCs>

Herringbone Stitch - https://youtu.be/MTbZ0bs_ZkU

Project Videos

Beginner Ladder Stitch - <https://youtu.be/emRGUaYI3Oc>

Beginner Peyote Stitch - <https://youtu.be/Cjqvxna4C8g>

Beginner Herringbone Stitch - <https://youtu.be/7lrJN9u3EB8>