

Kumihimo on a Disk

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Background

Kumihimo (pronounced ku-me-he-mo) is the ancient art of Japanese braiding. It means a gathering of threads and can refer to the braid or the technique used to create it. A braid is created when three or more strands of fiber intersect obliquely. Braids have been created and used in cultures across the world since antiquity. The first kumihimo of silk was found in Japan in 1988 and dates from the 6th century. Kumihimo was very popular during the time of the Sumarai warriors. The Samurai used the braids to tie together the lamellar sections of armor as well as for sword belts and sword tassels. Each suit of armor used 800-1000 feet of braid. After Buddhism arrived in Japan kumihimo was used on the edges of scrolls, on sculpture, and for rosaries. In a secular context braid was used for decorations on mirrors, partitions, and chests as well as for trim and ties on clothing.

Setup

The kit contains a foam disk already set up to create an 8-strand spiral braid in two colors. Each strand is about 3 feet long. The base on which you braid is a circular piece of foam with 32 slots cut evenly around the edge. Note that there are 4 dots on the disk. The strands are placed in the slots on either side of the dot in the pattern below:

A A

B B
B B

A A

A is one color and B is the second color. Each pair of threads will be opposite the same color pair on the disk, so you have 2 different colored X patterns.

Make sure the threads are taut on the surface of the disk, but not so tight that they bend the disk. Attach a counterweight to the loop underneath if you want one.

To warp an empty disk, cut 8 threads of the desired length and knot the threads at one end. Place the knotted end through the hole in the center of the disk and hold it on the underside with one hand. With the other hand place the threads in the slots according to the letters in the pattern.

Braiding

Hold the disk flat in front of you at about the height of your sternum with one pair of A threads closest to your body. You will work with the threads of one colored X at a time by moving them into slots on the disk. Think of the disk as being divided into four sections, each of which is a cardinal direction with south closest to your body. These instructions will refer the threads closest to you as lower and those opposite as upper.

- 1) Grasp the thread on the lower left leg of the X and pull it out of its slot. Move it clockwise around the outside edge of the disk and place it in the slot to the left of the two threads in the upper side of the X so that it looks like this:

```
      A  A  A
      B          B
      B          B
      A
```

- 2) Grasp the upper right thread on the X (which now looks like a bird foot), pull it out of its slot, move it clockwise around the outside of the disk, and place it in the slot to the right of the remaining thread on the bottom of the X. You are back to an X formation but one slot counterclockwise:

```
      A  A
      B          B
      B          B
      A  A
```

- 3) Turn the disk counterclockwise so that the pair of threads that were to the left are now closest to your body in the lower position, so that it looks like this:

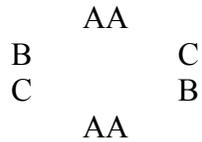
```
      B  B
      A          A
      A          A
      B  B
```

- 4) Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3 until your braid is the desired length or you come to the point where there is hardly any thread to place in the slots and you cannot go any further. Carefully take the braid off the disk. To finish it you can either knot the loose ends together or wrap thread around the edges tightly and cut the threads off even at the bottom to give it a tassel-like appearance.

Other 8-strand Braids

You can create braids with different looks by varying the starting formation, using an unequal number of strands of each color, or by using more than two colors. Here are some suggested patterns. You can also experiment with your own!

Three color spiral:



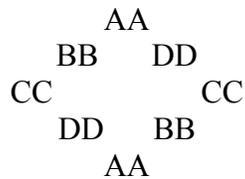
Two color lattices:



16-strand Braids

When you are comfortable with the concept of working each X to create an 8-strand braid, you can create a 16-strand braid using the same instructions. The only difference is that you will be working with 4 "X" patterns instead of 2. Pick any of the patterns below, choose the appropriate number of colors, and cut your threads 2-3 feet long. Remember that the longer your threads are, the more likely they will be to tangle. Here are several patterns for 16-strand braids:

Four color spiral:



Two colors:



Three colors:

```
      BB
     CC  BB
    AA    AA
     BB  CC
      BB
```

```
      AA
     BB  BB
    CC    CC
     BB  BB
      AA
```

Four color spiral with a diamond pattern:

```
      AA
     BB  CC
    CD    CD
     DD  AA
      BB
```

Two-color lattice spiral braid:

```
      AB
     BB  BB
    BA    AB
     BB  BB
      BA
```

Thread Types

The thread in the kit is 100% cotton carpet thread. Cotton and linen can be used to do kumihimo braiding, but the most traditional fiber used to do is silk. Biron is a synthetic thread used in Japan as a substitute for silk. Embroidery floss will give a similar result to very fine thread. You can use any thread for kumihimo, including knitting ribbon and metallic thread. Just remember that if you use wool or acrylic thread with a lot of give, the tension may not be as even and the pattern could be slightly. You can use any thickness of thread or combine several lengths into one strand to make a thicker strand. Don't be afraid to experiment with combining different types of threads in a braid. You can get interesting effects, for example, by using a fuzzy thread with a smooth thread.

Tips

- If you need to set the disk aside, make sure you stop with three threads together (as after Step 1 above). That way when you pick it back up, you know that the side with one thread goes closest to your body.
- If you are unsure which thread you moved most recently, check the pattern over the hole in the center of the disk. The thread lying on top of the others is the one you moved most recently.
- To test how a braid will look before warping it, twist the colors together and lay it across your hand.

- The length of the finished braid will be roughly half the length of the warp. The final length will vary according to the number of strands, the type of thread, and the counterweight used.
- When you cut your threads, if you have more than one strand of the same color, measure double the length and fold it, leaving the loop at the end you tie to go through the center hole.
- For long lengths of thread wind the excess onto yarn bobs or spools, which will hang from the edges of your disk
- You can attach a small weighted spool or other object to the tied end of the threads below the center hole to act as a counterweight and keep the threads from sliding when you pull them taut.
- The heavier the counterweight, the more flexible the braid.
- When creating a spiral braid, you can turn the disk clockwise instead of counterclockwise. Just make sure that you keep turning the same direction once you start going in one direction.
- When using fine thread the pattern will stand out better if you use bright colors.

Going Further

The patterns in this handout are only a few of those you can use on your card. You can vary them by trying different color combinations, different thicknesses of thread, or different types of threads. Consult the books listed in Resources for additional patterns.

If you have any questions, please contact me at ealdthryth@yahoo.com and I'll try to help.

Most importantly, have fun creating beautiful braids!

Resources

BraidersHand. 21 Aug. 2007. Saunders Solutions, Inc. 17 Oct 2007.

<<http://www.braidershand.com>>

Makers of kumihimo stands and tama. Sells books, jewelry clasps, video/DVD, kumihimo disks and plates, kumihimo silk and metallic threads for kumihimo braiding.

Carey Company. 4 Jan. 2007. Saunders Solutions, Inc. 17 Oct 2007.

<<http://www.careycompany.com/>>

UK company specializing in Kumihimo, supplying threads, equipment and book.

Carey, Jacqui. Beginner's Guide to Braiding: The Craft of Kumihimo. Torquay: Search Press, 1997. ISBN 0855328282.

Great beginner's book covering materials and equipment, square, round, flat, honeycomb, and hollow 8-strand braids.

--. Braids & Beyond: A Broad Look at Narrow Wares. Devon: Carey Company, 2005. ISBN 0952322544

Introduction to a range of narrow textiles with photographs, diagrams, and instruction. Covers Braids, Twisting, Knotting, French Knitting, Lucet, Weaving, Tablet or Card Weaving, Kumihimo or Bobbin braiding, Loop Manipulation, Sprang and Ply-Split. Published for the Braids & Beyond Exhibition in England in 2003.

--. *200 Braids to Twist, Knot, Loop, or Weave.*

Instructions on twisting, knotting, interlooping, weaving, braiding, ply-split darning, beads, finishes and uses with well illustrated braids and bands. Each example has a materials list, step-by-step instructions and clear easy-to-follow color illustrations.

Kumihimo Email List. <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kumi2>>.

Discussion of Kumihimo and techniques.

Kumihimo: Japanese Braiding. Perf. Rodrick Owen. DVD. Yarn Barn of Kansas. 2005.

Excellent video workshop showing setup of maru-dai and instructions for creating 8-strand spiral, square, hollow and flat braids with tassel ends, blunt ends, braided loop ends or wrapped ends and finishing them.

Owen, Rodrick. Braids: 250 Patterns from Japan, Peru and Beyond. Berkeley, CA: Lacis Publications; Petaluma, CA: Unicorn Books, 2004. ISBN 1891656589; ISBN 1893063089.

Comprehensive book about Andean braids and kumihimo. The first section contains history, equipment, methods, and materials. The second section has step-by-step diagrams and instructions for a variety of patterns for 4-strand, 8-strand, and 16-strand braids plus one for 31 strands. Also includes instructions for making braids on the disk (round) and plate (square).

Tada, Makiko. Comprehensive Treatise of Braids I: Mau-dai Braids. Tokyo: Texte Inc, 1999. ISBN 4925252119

120 diagrams plus color photos of braids and history of kumihimo. Japanese with English translation.

--. More Kumihimo for Disk and Plate. Ondori, 2005. ISBN 4277430546.

Five braids for disk and five for plate, including a Zig Zag Braid. Japanese with diagrams. BraidersHand includes sheet of English notes.

--. Kumihimo Disk Mini Book. 2006.

Ten braids, including a flat spiral and a braid with beads. Japanese with diagrams. BraidersHand includes sheet of English notes.

The Yarn Barn of Kansas. 2005. The Yarn Barn of Kansas. 17 Oct 2007.

<http://www.yarnbarn-ks.com>

Website for full-service knitting, weaving, spinning, and dyeing store that sells equipment, books, videos, and supplies.