

Kumihimo Tips & Tricks

By Maggie Thompson

Hello to all my fellow kumihimo enthusiasts (both experienced and not so....)! Over the past years I've learned a few tips and tricks that have made my kumihimo experiences more rewarding. Hopefully by sharing these with you I can help to make your next project more enjoyable and successful.

1. Always steam iron your cords before use. This takes out the kinks and curls making them much easier to manage. I use a cotton setting and pull the cords underneath the iron in an even manner. Don't allow the iron to rest on the cords for any length of time - you *will* end up melting them together. As an added advantage steaming also makes the ends stiffer and more resistant to fraying.



I've discovered a wonderful little tool at my local Fleet Farm store. It's a portable hair curling iron that runs on a small butane tube and comes in its own compact carrying case. It works great for straightening your cords on-the-go, such as in a class or anywhere you can't use your steam iron.



The cost is \$15 - replacement butane tubes are about \$8 for a 2 tube pack. I've been using mine for almost 6 months and still have half of the first butane tube left. I highly recommend adding this to your "kumihimo tool kit".



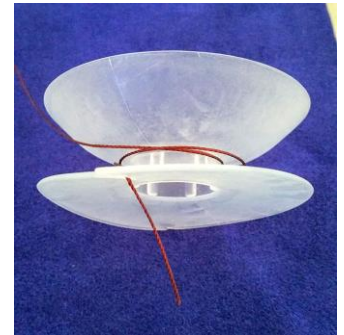
2. Use Instaneedle® on your cord ends as a stiffener. There are many beads where the holes aren't large enough to fit both a needle and your cord. Among these are all the new two-hole beads, stone chips and most Czech glass beads. Instaneedle® is a product made by Paleobond and is actually a 2-part epoxy glue. However I've found that stiffening cord ends with Instaneedle® makes the cord end into its own "needle". I've actually refined the process even further - I use only the liquid in the yellow-topped bottle to dip my cords into. It makes the cords plenty stiff and dries very quickly. When this bottle runs dry use the blue-topped bottle in the same way. It makes the liquid last twice as long! After the cord ends are dried, cut it at a 45° angle to make it even easier to string your beads.

3. Learn your disk numbering. On Beadsmith Kumihimo disks the number is printed to the right of the slot it refers to. Other disk makers may be different - just be sure to learn their system before you use their disk.



4. Cut a slit in your bobbins. By cutting a $\frac{1}{2}$ " slit in the back side of each bobbin you create a perfect way to anchor the cord and keep the bobbin from falling off. Just slip the end of your cord through the slit and snap your bobbin closed.

Just be sure to cut the slit in the (flatter) back side and not in the curved front side.



5. Your "Kumi Kit". I find it essential to have my Kumi Kit always available for any project. It includes a 6" round disk, 8 bobbins, a weight, scissors, bead scoop, bead mat, thread burner, awl, superglue gel, Big Eye needle, tape measure, Instanneedle® and a pen or pencil. I also like to have a tissue handy.

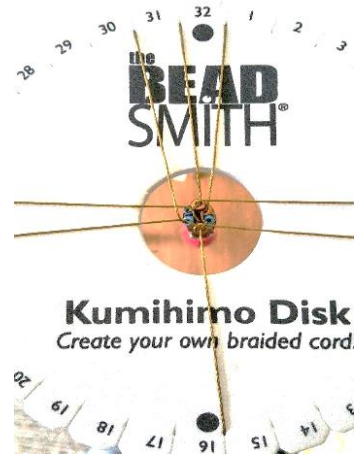


AND - don't forget to have your "Traveller"™ Portable Kumi Stand! It's an essential part of my tool kit.



6. We all get interrupted when we're braiding - whether we like it or not! I've found that by doing only half a sequence I can easily mark my place. For instance, since I move the bottom left cord up first, the picture at the right shows how I "park" my cords. In this way I always know my next move is a "top right down".

Some of you braid in the opposite direction - this doesn't matter. Whatever your sequence, just stop after the first cord is moved. This will always leave three cords together with no doubt about your next move.



7. Develop an even braiding tension. If you're a beginner at kumihimo braiding it's very important for you to discover your braiding tension. The easiest way to do this is by choosing a pattern where the gauge is listed (just like a knit or crochet pattern).

If you don't have one, use my gauge for size 8° seed beads. Set up a test project with 4 - 24" cords folded in half with a knot tied in the middle. This will give you 8 - 12" cords. Hang the weight from this knot and place the 8 cords on your disk in the appropriate slots. String 12 size 8° beads per cord on all 8 cords. Braid all the beads and measure the length of your braid. It should be 2" (within 1/16" - 1/8"). If it's significantly shorter, you have "tight" tension. If it's significantly longer, you have "loose" tension.

To change your tension, continue practicing until you can get a 2" braid. If you don't change your tension you'll always be adjusting every pattern you use in order to get the correct length.

8. Stretch braided cord sections before measuring them. Some patterns call for a length of braided cord without beads, such as in the buttonhole loop pictured at the right. Whether it's at the beginning, end or somewhere in the middle of your project, always be sure to stretch this braided section before measuring it. If you don't stretch it beforehand, it will surely stretch after you've completed your project making that particular section longer than was called for. Keep in mind that the artist has a reason for specifying that length and changing it will definitely change the outcome of your project.



9. A Note about cords: There are 3 basic sizes of cords - Fine, Medium and Heavy weight. I use Superlon and their corresponding numbers are Fine Tex #135 = .4mm, Medium Tex #210 = .5mm and Heavy weight Tex #400 = .9mm. I use the Medium Tex #210 weight in almost all of my designs.

Also when measuring cords for a project I double the length needed for 8 cords and cut 4 at that double length. This will save you time and make your beginning end look neater as well as being easier to handle.

10. Bobbins: Bobbins come in 3 common sizes and either weighted or unweighted. The smallest measures 1-7/8" diameter, the medium measures 2-1/2" diameter and the largest is 3" diameter. I almost always use the 2-1/2" bobbins because they will fit both bracelet and necklace lengths for cords. Some kumi braiders prefer weighted bobbins. I happen to prefer the unweighted ones. In the end it's personal preference - with one caveat - weighted bobbins will tend to give you a tighter tension in your braid. If you're using a marudai and not a foam disk with slots in it weighted bobbins are an absolute must as a counterweight to the central weight on your braid.

11. Disks: As with bobbins, disks come in different sizes and thicknesses. There are 4" and 6" diameter round foam disks with 3/8" density. There are also 6" round disks with 3/4" density sometimes referred to as "double density disks". Again, your choice will be based on personal preferences. My preference is for the 3/8" density in a 6" diameter disk.

Also - keep one disk for your cord projects and another one for your larger ribbons, leather, rattail, etc. This will ensure the slots in the disk you braid with cords will remain tight.

Note: there are also square disks that are mostly used for making flat braids. I've used them but prefer the round disk.

12. Dirty Disks: If you do any amount of braiding you'll invariably end up with a dirty disk. I've had good luck putting them in my dish washer in the top rack. This can sometimes also help with "shrinking" down the slots when they become stretched out. If your slots don't shrink and remain very loose it's probably best to keep that disk for larger cords, ribbons, leather, etc.

13. Splicing Superlon: If you've ever come up short on your Superlon cord lengths in the middle of a braid you might want to try this technique. It doesn't always work, but could be the answer in an emergency.

Cut the very tippy ends of both your original cord and the new cord to be added at 45° angle. Now overlap them about 1/4" and apply a small amount of Superglue Gel® to these ends. Press them together so they adhere along this 1/4" length. (Your fingers will get the gel on them - a necessary sacrifice!) Let it dry for at least 4-5 min. The cords should be very solidly attached to each other at this point. You'll be able to fit size 8° seed beads and larger over this splice. Size 11° seed beads **WILL NOT** go over it.



That's what I have to offer at the moment. As new ideas come around I'll add them to this list.

Happy Braiding!

