

THE VILLAGES® GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION TO JEWELRY MAKING

This article presents the basic information on jewelry making. The Villages® Gem & Mineral Society presents classes on some of the methods at the Thursday evening workshops. We have some of the basic tools available for the classes, so you do not need to purchase your own tools, until you discover your level of interest. The Society's tools are only for use during the workshops and cannot be taken home. The instructors also will have supplies available to be purchased. You are welcome to obtain your own supplies from other sources for the classes.

Jewelry Making Methods

- **Beading:** Using beads to make earrings, necklaces, bracelets and rings.
- **Perspex:** A fun and funky material to work with, you can cut out shapes and join elements together to make pieces.
- **Stone Setting:** A setting is a metal support for holding a stone. How the setting is made is linked to how a stone will be set. There are many ways to set a stone including bead, cabochon, channels, pave, and prong settings.
- **Silver Jewelry:** You can make all types of jewelry using traditional techniques including silver rings, broaches, bangles & more.
- **Wire Wrapping:** The technique of using different shapes of wire combined with beads and stones to make intricate pieces.
- **Fashion Jewelry:** Combines all types of materials from beads, chain and wire to feather, buttons and fabrics.
- **Metal Clay:** A fantastic material containing millions of tiny silver particles. It can easily be shaped and fired to make silver jewelry from home.
- **Wax Carving:** Using a hard wax a piece of jewelry is carved to create a rough form. Using various tools these rough forms are made into a sculpture that will be used to make the actual piece of jewelry.
- **Resin:** Resin jewelry can be made using a resin casting method. However more often resin jewelry is made by sealing images and/or found objects in bezels to create handmade resin jewelry.
- **Fused Glass:** Thin glass sheets of various colors are layered to create beads and other components for jewelry. These are then placed in a kiln to fuse the glass together.
- **Wood Jewelry:** Wood is cut into pieces for mounting or stringing to make jewelry items. The choice of the piece of wood is important as well as how the piece is smoothed and finished.
- **Fabric Jewelry:** Textured fabric and colored textiles are used to make jewelry items such as necklaces and bracelets. All types of fabric can be used such as cotton, chiffon and velvet.
- **Chain Making & Wire Weaving:** Wire is shaped into links or rings and used to make chains for jewelry. It can also be weaved into various shapes for jewelry.
- **Polymer Clay:** Polymer clay (as opposed to true clay) is sculptured and shaped to create jewelry pieces. Once created it has to be cured in an oven. One advantage is that polymer clay doesn't dry out, and you can sculpt and form it without worrying about a time limit.

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Basic Tools and Supplies for Making Jewelry and Beading Projects

With just a few basic tools for making jewelry and beading projects, you can create items that are wildly artistic, classically elegant, or something in-between. Whatever your style, these are your must-have jewelry and beading tools and accessories:

- Wire cutters
- Round-nose pliers
- Flat-nose pliers
- Crimping tool (crimp pliers)
- Bead organizer with a variety of glass beads
- Beading cord or thread
- Memory wire
- Big-eye beading needle
- Assorted earwires
- Assorted clasps
- Assorted headpins and eyepins
- Crimp beads
- Ruler or tape measure
- Strong adhesive, like E-6000



The tools listed above are the basic items you will use for the first few projects. There are many additional tools you may eventually want to obtain such as chasing hammer, steel block, curved various specialty pliers and shears, and other tools. For more information on tools you may want to refer to [A Guide to Jewelry-Making Hand Tools](#) From the Fire Mountain Gems and Beads® Collection

Making Jewelry: Standard Lengths for Necklaces, Bracelets, and Anklets

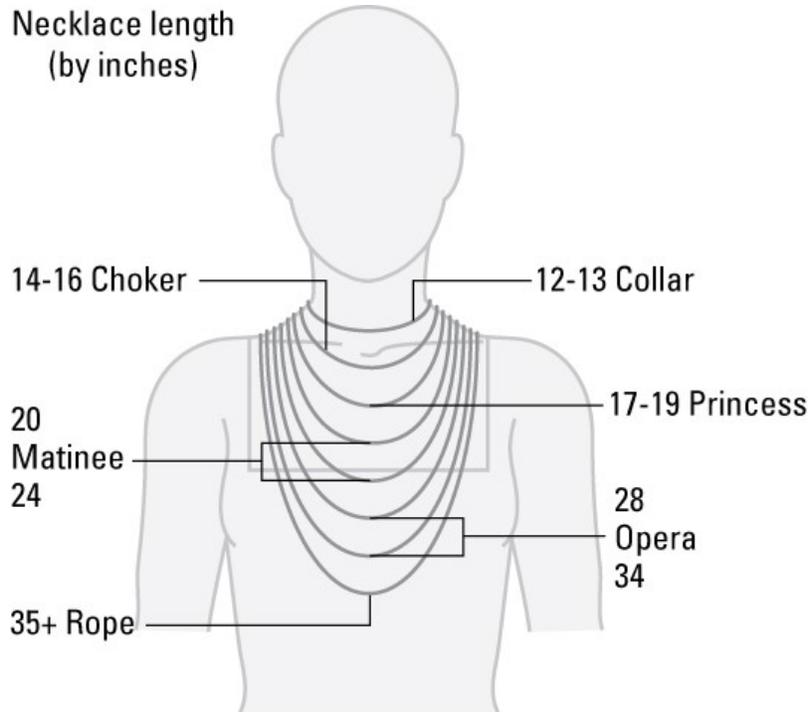
When you put a lot of time into making a standout piece of jewelry, you don't want to end up with a necklace that's too long or a bracelet that will fall off. Use these recommended lengths when making a necklace, choker, bracelet, or anklet.

Whenever possible, take measurements before crafting pieces for friends, family members, or customers so you can be confident that the masterpiece you create will fit perfectly:

Project Type	Women	Men	Plus sizes	Kids	Baby
Necklace	17"-35+"	20"	18"-36"	12"-14"	10"-12"
Choker	14"-16"	18"	17"-19"	8"-10"	n/a
Bracelet	7"-7 1/2"	8"-11"	8"	5 1/2"-6 1/2"	3 1/2"-5"
Anklet	9"-9 1/2"	11"-14"	10"-10 1/2"	7"-8"	4"-4 1/2"

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And if necklaces are your specialty, check out this image, which specifies the names assigned to various necklace lengths.



Seed Bead Bracelets

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Wire Hardnesses

Jewelry wire is typically offered in three harnesses: Dead Soft, Half Hard, and Full Hard. A metal's hardness is basically a measure of how much it resists bending, so you can see how that is an important factor in making wire jewelry.

The first important thing to keep in mind is that these terms are relative to the particular metal or alloy which they are describing. So, dead soft sterling silver will not feel the same to work with as dead soft 14k white gold. Also, not all wires, like artistic wire (craft wire) and aluminum wire will be offered in different harnesses – they are most often just soft.

'Dead soft' (or just 'soft') means the metal offers little or no resistance – it's very easy to bend. Now that might sound like a good thing, but it actually can work against you in most cases. Dead soft wire doesn't form hard angles- it's nearly impossible to form a nice sharp bend. It doesn't hold its shape very well, so it should not be used for anything structural, but you can use it to coil around another object or piece of wire. It is great for forming spirals and other soft bends, as long as they can be work hardened or are not structural. In my opinion, dead soft wire has limited use unless you plan to spend a lot of time work hardening it, but in most applications, it's simply not possible to work harden the wire enough after the project is complete which means all your hard work will go to waste!

'Full hard' means there is a lot of resistance – it is very difficult to bend but any shape you can manage to form it into will be retained very well. However, it is also very brittle and has less workability before it will break – which means it is not forgiving at all if you make a mistake. Full hard wire will not be able to form spirals or many other tight shapes.

'Half hard' is like the Goldilocks wire – the perfect middle between the two. It is soft enough to bend easily but is hard enough to hold its shape afterwards. It can also be used for wrapping and coiling wire, as well as some structural work, depending on the gauge of the wire. Half hard wire is great for making ear wires, jump rings, hoop earrings, and other shapes. It will also retain a sharp bend very nicely and has a good 'springiness' factor, which is good for latched hoops, kidney earwires, and clasps, and it works great for making spirals. In some cases, half hard wire may require minimal work hardening but hardening half-hard wire is a breeze compared to dead soft wire!

Work Hardening Wire

'Work hardening' is the term used for a variety of techniques which serve to harden up softer metal. Some ways to 'work harden' your metal include tumbling it with steel shot, hammering or pounding it with a rubber mallet against a steel bench block, twisting the wire, pulling it through a drawing plate or even pulling it through a polishing cloth. In fact, simply working with the wire and the process of wrapping or coiling it will tend to harden it up a bit as well. The softer the wire, the more work hardening it will require to ensure it will retain its shape.

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Bead Types Explained

There are so many bead types that the terminology can sometimes flummox even the most experienced beader! Here we've summarized the most common types of beads.

Acrylic Beads is the umbrella term for any bead that is made of plastic or polymerised materials such as Fimo Polymer Clay, resin and other plastics. They are usually light, inexpensive and suitable for a wide range of applications, and some rival glass and wooden beads in their quality.

Charms are often die-cast metal beads that come in a huge range of designs, shapes, sizes and color finishes. They are named from the good old traditional "charm bracelet" you'll remember from childhood. They usually have a loop built into them for easy attachment to jewelry, and can even have clips such as lobster clasps attached to them so that they can be quickly and easily changed by the end user. Although charms are often premade, you can make your own using beads slotted onto headpins!

Crystal Beads are high quality glass beads that have facets cut into their surface. Crystals can be cut into many different shapes such as bicones, rivoilis, rounds and rondelles to name but a few.

Bugle Beads are often grouped with seed beads; they are small tubular beads that typically range from 3mm up to 12mm in length. They are most commonly used in bead weaving projects, and can either be Japanese precision cut beads or Chinese beads that offer good value for money.

Czech Glass Beads are often deemed the best quality pressed glass beads in the world. The dominant brand is Preciosa (formerly Jablonex), and pressed glass comes in a huge range of shapes, colors and finishes. We stock Czech glass leaves, flowers and hearts as well as glass shape mixes from Preciosa.

Fire Polished Beads are also Czech glass beads, but they have a faceted surface, so are often called fire polished crystals. These beads are formed and facets are cut into the surface, then the entire bead is passed back through a raw flame to partially melt the surface. This leads to hugely increased shine and quality to the bead, making fire polished beads some of the most desirable faceted crystals you can buy.

Glass beads are one of the commonest materials for beads to be made of; they range from cheap all-purpose round, square or shaped beads, right up to top quality cut crystal such as Swarovski Crystals and Preciosa Pressed Glass Beads. Glass beads often evoke a more expensive look and feel due to their weight and finish so are more often than not the most logical choice

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for professional and amateur jewelry makers alike. Glass beads can also be made to look like other types of beads at a fraction of the price, such as Glass Pearls and Semi-Precious beads.

Spacer Beads is the term most often applied to metal beads as they are frequently used between other types of beads to make them stand out more. Metal beads can be plain plated metal, die-cast into shapes or even made of wrapped wire.

Pandora style beads are beads that are designed to fit the classic Pandora Bracelet. They are usually around 10mm - 20mm in size with roughly a 6mm hole to be able to cope with the threaded sections of the genuine Pandora bracelets. They vary greatly in their design and materials, and range from very inexpensive acrylic, glass and plated metal right up to exact replicas in sterling silver.

Pearl Beads come in either genuine freshwater pearls or coated glass pearls. Either type have varying degrees of quality associated with them, but generally freshwater pearls are more expensive, and therefore often more sought after than glass pearls. Freshwater pearls are often dyed to different shades to make them more marketable and versatile, whereas glass pearls are a generic glass bead beneath a pearlescent high-resistance coating.

Pendants are (generally) large focal charms that are placed in the center of a necklace. We carry a range of metal pendants, but you can also buy pendants in semi-precious stones, acrylic and glass. You can even make your own pendants by threading beads onto headpins or pendant builders ([click here to see how](#)). Sometimes, you'll find people call "charms" pendants. This is generally due to the way they have a loop attached for easy attachment, and the only thing that divides a charm from a pendant is size and use; the definition of a charm or a pendant is in the eye of the beholder!

Rivoli beads are beads with a pointed back and, usually, no hole running through them. This can often make them seem quite limiting in terms of design, but we have come up with some great ways of how to use rivolis in your jewelry making. Our Rivoli Workshops teach you new ways of using rivoli beads in your jewelry and get you thinking outside the box with your designs.

Seed beads come in a huge range of styles:

- Rocailles are "round" seed beads and range from very tiny size 15 (or 15/0) up to relatively large size 3 (or 3/0 - you get the idea!). They can (generally) be one of three types; Japanese seed beads are considered to be the best quality of the three, and can be used in high precision bead weaving projects such as peyote, brick stitch and other weaves. Czech seed beads are generally considered to be the lowest quality seed beads you can buy. They have irregular shapes and sizes and should only ever be used in stringing and wirework that calls for random design - for this type of work they are great value for money!

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- Hexagons or hex seed beads are, as the name suggests, hexagonally formed seed beads with the hole running through the center of the hexagon, like a candy cane. Size 8 hex seed beads are the most common sizes, but others are also available.
- Cube or square seed beads are cuboid seed beads and often come in 4mm, 1.8mm and 1.5mm but others are available.
- Drop beads are, again as the name suggests, beads that have an off-centered hole to allow them to hang to one side of a thread. Examples of these are Long Magatamas, Miyuki Drops and dagger beads.
- Twin beads made by Preciosa, and are an oval shaped bead with holes at either end of the bead, allowing two threads to run through them. This enables highly complex bead weaving patterns to be created, or used simply to tie two single threads together in an interesting way!
- Czechmates tiles are pressed glass squares that have two holes running through them in parallel. This, again as with twin beads, means that complex and interesting designs can be accomplished at relatively lost cost. They add a very different look to most bead weaving patterns that use Japanese seed beads, as Czech pressed glass has a much more organic shaping and coloring to it, so adds a wonderful contract to your work.

Semi-precious beads are made using semi-precious stones. This is a huge genre and includes almost any naturally occurring mineral that can be made into a bead, such as agate, hematite, turquoise etc. Freshwater pearls and shell beads are also often categorized with semi-precious beads.

Wooden beads often have a reputation as "cheap" looking and not very desirable. However, wooden beads come in a huge variety of shapes, colors, sizes and designs, as well as quality. Wood is very versatile material to use during manufacture as it can be turned, sanded, drilled, painted, dyed and coated with ease, so keep an eye out for interesting ones.