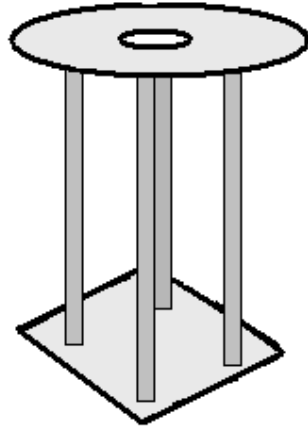


Kumihimo



Kumihimo is a traditional braiding art from Japan dating back over 2000 years to about 550 C.E.. People began to use decorative cords in religious ceremonies when the Buddhist religion spread in Japan. Later, people used brightly colored braids to decorate clothing, to hang banners, to lace samurai armor together. Today it is used extensively to make elegant cords for fashion jewelry and accessories. In the traditional art of braiding, a braiding stool or Marudai is used. The strands of thread are hung on weighted bobbins.

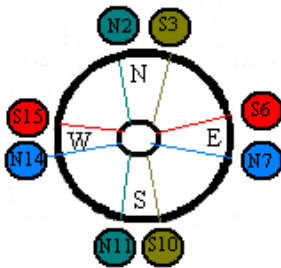
Traditionally, this type of braid would have been made with untwisted silk threads on a wooden frame (called a maru dai -"round stand"), allowing the threads to be draped over a flat doughnut-shaped top kagami (Japanese for "mirror"). The individual threads, as well as the finished part of the braid, would be carefully weighted to produce a balanced tension. Although cotton embroidery floss is a good solid substitute, though most fibers will work

There are hundreds of different kumihimo stitches, some simple and some very complex, using different numbers of strands from 4 to 100. The pattern you get depends on how you arrange the strands and bobbins when starting.

Simple How to Braid Instructions

Cut the threads (warp) of your design at least twice the desired length of the finished cord, plus a ‘finishing’ length on both ends of a few inches. Within the warp are 4 sets of threads, usually denoted by direction. The ‘top’ or side farthest from you is North, South being closest, and East and West to the right and left respectively. Those areas of threads are further broken down into the lower threads, which are the threads in motion, and the uppers, the threads in waiting. Square and flat braids will always have an even number of threads, with the north threads equal to the south, and east equal to west threads

There are 2 methods of working the threads: across (‘exchange’ and around (‘move’). Exchange consists of exchanging 2 bobbins from opposite sides of the stool over top. Most consists of changing the location of a series of bobbins around the sides of the stool. Exchanging bobbins results in a tight, solid braid; moving allows looser braids, which are the basis for the hollow and core braids. The instructions below are for an 8 bobbin EXCHANGE METHOD



Use your right hand to pick up the first bobbin, N2 and its match, N11, in your left and then bring your right hand forward while moving your left hand back across the top of the stool before dropping the bobbins in the new positions. Then you're your right and left hands to pick up the next bobbin set, S3 and S10 respectively, and exchange them across the top of the stool—right hand in front and left in back works best. Repeat the pattern with S15-S6, N14-N7. Repeat that set until the braid reaches the desired length.

Thread set-up using 8 bobbins

Glossary:

Kagami: "mirror", the name for the top braiding surface on a marudai.

Kongo gumi: one of the easiest marudai stitches. Easy to do on a cardboard loom. Literally, kongo = hard, gumi = braid.

Kumihimo or kumi himo: literally, kumi = coming together, and himo = string, cord or rope. This term refers to all the forms of Japanese braiding, made on several different types of stands including the marudai.

Marudai: "round stand", a round braiding stool or stand, usually made with a "donut" of wood and three or four dowels connecting the donut to a square bottom.

Omori: the counter-weight attached to a marudai braid. Usually this is a bag containing weights;

Tama: a specially made, weighted wood bobbin for use with a marudai.