Kumihimo – One Up / One Down - Braid

By Debbie Coyle

Kumihimo is the Japanese word for braiding (kumi = to braid, himo = cord). It encompasses many types and shapes of braids and has been done in many different methods with the aid of many different tools. Traditionally Kumihimo is done with dyed silk threads, although current Kumihimo braiders use everything from silk thread to metal wire.

Braiding in Japan can be traced as far back as 7,500 BC. During the Middle Ages the rise of the Samurai warriors created a great need for Kumihimo, with 800-1,000 ft of braid (in 8 ft lengths) used for each suit of armor! The braids were also used for wrapping sword hilts, horse harnesses, tea ceremony accessories, obi ties, and more. They were braided in many different shapes, textures, designs, and widths

A traditional method of working Kumihimo is on the marudai (maru = round, dai = stand), where the work of braiding is done on top, and the finished braid is weighted to descend through a center hole.

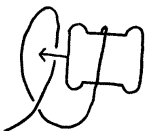
The handheld Kumihimo disks are a modern adaptation of the marudai that allows for portable braiding.

Prepare the bobbins

Cut 8 equal lengths of yarn or thread (such as crochet thread or embroidery floss) in any color combination.

Wind each length onto a bobbin (embroidery floss holders or knitting bobbins work well).

Tie each bobbin with a Half Hitch



– Hold the bobbin with the thread coming down in front of the bobbin

– Fold the thread into a loop, with the thread end over the bobbin thread

– Put the left side of the bobbin through the loop, with the back part of the loop in front of the bobbin

When done correctly, the working end will hang down from between a loop of thread

Tighten the half hitch by rotating the bobbin away from the loop you've created. This pulls the thread toward the loop and tightens the loop around the working end.

Attach the threads to the disk

Tie the non-bobbin ends of the 8 threads together. With the side of the disk with the "x" marking on top, place the knot down through the hole in the center of the disk.

Attach the counterweight

Use a Lark's Head knot to attach a **counterweight** to the threads under the disk, just above the knot**:**

– Tie a loop of thread to the counterweight

– Fold the top down to form 2 rabbit ears

– Fold the left ear onto the right, with the center threads between the 2 folded ears

– Place the braiding threads through the rabbit ear loop

– Tighten the loop, and slide it down to rest just above the knot

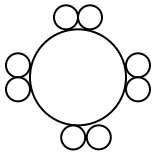
The weight of the counterweight is determined by the size and weight of your thread. It must be heavy enough to keep the threads straight between the center hole and the slots, and to pull the braid through the center hole.

The HEAVIER the counterweight you use, the LOOSER your braid will be. Use the same counterweight for the entire braid to prevent the tension from changing.

Metal nuts make good counterweights and come in different weights, and sizes.

Disk set up

Arrange the 8 threads on the disk as indicated by the diagram below. Place each thread in its own slot. The paired threads below sit side by side in adjoining slots.



The threads sit in adjacent slots on the top, bottom, and sides of the disk

Arrange the thread lengths so that all bobbins hang at the same level, about 4 to 6 inches below the surface of the disk.

Working instructions

Move the threads, step-by-step, as indicated by the braiding diagrams. Remember that 2 threads never occupy the same slot and threads shown next to each other occupy adjoining slots.

Following the direction of the arrows, move threads from the dotted position to the gray position, in the order indicated by the numbers.

Keep the tension even as you put each thread in its slot at the end of each move. The threads should lay tightly against the disk, in a straight line from the slot to the center hole. The braid should be centered in the hole, not off to one side. When you return to Step A, adjust the thread tension as needed

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As thread is used to work the braid, the bobbins move up toward the disk. When the bobbins get to an inch or less below the disk, lengthen the thread by holding the bobbin in one hand, and the thread in the other; rotate the bobbin toward the half hitch's loop – this pulls the thread away from the loop and loosens the loop. Reverse the direction of rotation to tighten the loop when the bobbin hangs about 4 to 6 inches below the disk.

As you work the braid, the counterweight moves down from the disk with the finished braid. To provide the needed tension, **the counterweight must be hanging free**, and not resting on your lap or other surface. Each time you lengthen the bobbin threads, move the counterweight up by loosening the lark's head knot and sliding it up the braid. Tighten the knot on the braid, just below the unworked threads.

Completing the braid

When you've finished braiding, remove the counterweight and pull the finished braid out of the disk. Tie a thread around the unbraided threads, as close to the point of braiding as possible or tie the unbraided threads in a knot. Remove the bobbins from the threads ends. Finish the braid ends as desired -- tassels are traditional.

When you've completed the braid, steam it (over the spout of a boiling tea kettle works well) to remove the indentations left by the counterweight thread and to help shape the braid. After steaming, flat braids can be rolled flat with a rolling pin, and round braids can be rounded by rolling with a block of wood.

Books

Carey, Jacqui. **Beginners Guide to Braiding: The craft of Kumihimo.** Search Press, 1997. ISBN: 0855328282 Good place to start, lots of pictures.

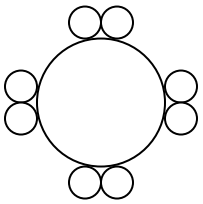
Owen, Roderick. **Braids: 250 Patterns from Japan, Peru and Beyond**. Lacis, 2004. ISBN 1891656589 A wealth of braid patterns for marudai and disk.

Carey, Jacqui. **Beads and Braids**. Carey Company, 2001. ISBN 978-0-9523225-2-8 If you want to add beads to you kumihimo, this book is the one for you!

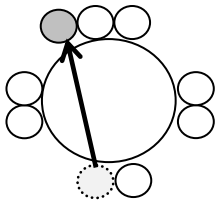
My Resources

- Website: **lynnette.housezacharia.com** – Class Handouts, Links, and Other Info about Kumhimo & other fiber arts
- Sales Site: **https://unicorn-fiber-arts.square.site** – Selling Kumihimo kits, and more!

Working Diagrams

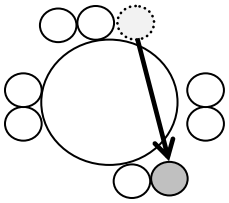


Home Positions



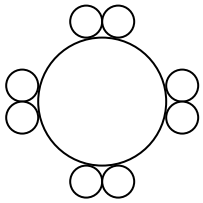
Step A

- Move the **Bottom Left** thread
- Up next to the **Top Left** thread



Step B

- Move the **Top Right** thread
- Up next to the **Bottom Right** thread



Step C

Rotate disk 1/4 turn
(left or right)

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