

Beading: About Needles and Threads

The range of threads and cords used by beaders includes many different types, but as needlepointers, we basically work with two types of thread: nylons and braided/bonded.

Nylon beading thread is sold under a number of brand names such as Nymo, C-Lon, Superlon, and S-Lon. These threads are made at the exact same specifications; the only difference is that C-Lon is on a taller spool than S-Lon or Superlon and has more yardage on each spool. This is a plied and bonded nylon string sometimes also identified by a TEX number which indicates the width of the thread.

Nymo size 00 is a TEX 33 weight; Its small width is ideal for making multiple passes through a single bead, especially the smaller size 14/15 beads. Nymo size D is a TEX 45 weight, a slightly thicker version, also good for small seed beads. Higher TEX weights are suitable for cording and knotting pearls in jewelry-making, but less appropriate for needlepoint



Nymo/C-Lon/Superlon is strong and relatively easy to use. It is inexpensive and comes in many colors. It is a nylon monochord, which means it is a single bonded strand, not several strands braided together. It won't untwist and separate, but it will fray and can be pierced with your needle. It is helpful to use a conditioning agent such as beeswax or Thread Magic. Nymo has stretch but not memory; it is helpful to stretch it slightly before stitching. Nymo also tangles easily and knots and stitches are not easy to undo. Nymo bobbins contain about 64 yards.

FireLine is a brand of braided nylon made of gel-spun polyethylene, which is extruded in a single strand. These strands are braided together and then fused. Because of this it is strong, abrasion resistant, does not require conditioning, and does not stretch. It is easy to thread on a needle, does not frequently tangle (although it can develop kinks), and is extremely difficult to pierce with a needle.



FireLine is stiffer than nylon beading threads. It is recommended for use with bugle beads where the sharp glass edges may cut or abrade a nylon thread. FireLine is sold by test; the higher the pounds, the stronger the test. The number of pounds is the amount of pressure required to break the thread. A 6-lb FireLine will fit needle sizes from 10 to 13, and can fit through beads up to a size 14/15. However, for multiple passes, a smaller weight such as 4-lb test is easier to use. FireLine is available from 2-lb test to 20-lb test, but the 4- and 6-lb tests are most compatible with needlepoint use.

FireLine comes in limited colors, but a distinct advantage is that it comes in a clear Crystal, which is slightly transparent in color. Another versatile color is Smoke Gray, since it goes well with neutral, bright, and dark color beads. Both will respectively lighten or darken any transparent or clear beads.



The choice of needles for beading can also make quite a bit of difference. Regular sewing or embroidery needles are thicker and have eyes that are slightly bigger in diameter than the shaft of the needle. This may cause problems with fitting through the beads or with making multiple passes through the beads. If you find yourself discarding a lot of beads that don't fit the needle, the problem may be the needle size and not the quality of the bead.

Beading needles are slightly flexible with a reinforced eye and a slightly rounded point. The longer needles will bend and flex more so than the shorter ones, but this is more of a feature for off-loom stitches and jewelry makers. Unless you are stringing long lines of beads together, the shorter needles work better for needlepoint. Beading needles come in size 10 or 12. Japanese beading needles are sold under the Tulip or Miyuki brand names. English needles are sold by Bohin and John James.

Choosing your needle size also depends on the bead size with which you are working. In general, for beads size 14/15 or larger, use a size 10 needle. If you are working with the very small Charlottes (smaller than 15/0) use a size 12 needle.