

An introduction to jewellery making tools

What are the basic tools you need for making handcrafted jewellery?

There are three basic tools you need to get started making wire jewellery. They are; a pair of round nose pliers, a pair of chain nose or flat nose pliers and a pair of wire cutters.

What are round nose pliers and what do you do with them?



Round Nose Pliers have this name because of the rounded shape of their jaws. They are ideal for making loops and spirals but not so good for gripping.

The jaws taper towards the point which allows you to position your wire to get the size of loop that you want. For a large loop place your wire near the handles, for a small loop place your wire towards the tip of the pliers.

If you want to make consistent sized loops it is a good idea to mark the pliers with a permanent marker so that you always place your wire in the same place. If you don't want to mark your pliers place masking tape around them and mark on the tape instead.

What are chain nose pliers and what do you do with them?



Chain nose pliers are similar to round nose pliers but the inside edge of the jaws is flat. This makes them more suitable for gripping wire as the flat edge gives them more grip.

They are very useful for opening and closing jump rings or for gripping wire. Like round nose pliers, they taper towards the tip, which makes them invaluable for getting into small spaces, for example to tuck in a wire end.

When buying chain nose pliers make sure that the inside edge is not serrated as this can mark your wire.

What are flat nose pliers and what do you do with them?



Flat Nose Pliers are very similar to chain nose pliers but the jaws do not taper towards the tip. This gives a greater surface area to hold the wire and hence more grip.

You will probably find them less essential than chain nose pliers but they are useful when you want to hold a piece of wire very securely.

What are wire cutter pliers and what do you do with them?



Wire cutters are an essential pair of pliers for the jewellery maker. They allow you to easily trim and cut your wire and headpins to length.

It is important not to use normal wire cutters for cutting memory wire as it can damage them. It is possible to buy special memory wire cutters (known also as parrot beak cutters) for cutting memory wire instead.

Other useful jewellery making tools

Crimping Pliers



Crimping pliers are used with **crimp beads** to secure a clasp on the end of **beading wire**. This involves placing a crimp bead, or tube, on the end of the beading wire, passing the wire through the clasp and then back through the crimp bead. The bead is then **crimped onto the bead wire** using crimping pliers or chain nose pliers.

The most noticeable thing about crimping pliers is that they have two notches in their jaws. You use the first notch, the one nearest the handles, to 'squash' your crimp bead onto the wire. This turns it into a 'U' shape ideally with one piece of wire in each side of the 'U'. You then use the notch near the end of the pliers to shape this 'U' shaped bead into a round. I find that placing the crimp bead or tube in the outer notch first to turn it into a slight oval makes it easier to keep it in position when you place it in the inner notch and squeeze it together.

Remember though, if your budget is tight, you can always use chain nose pliers to flatten a crimp bead, although you might not get such a neat rounded result.

You can also use crimping pliers to neaten the wire when making a **wrapped loop**. Place the 'rounding' notch, the one at the end of the pliers, over the cut end of wire and squeeze.

JEWELLERY FINDINGS

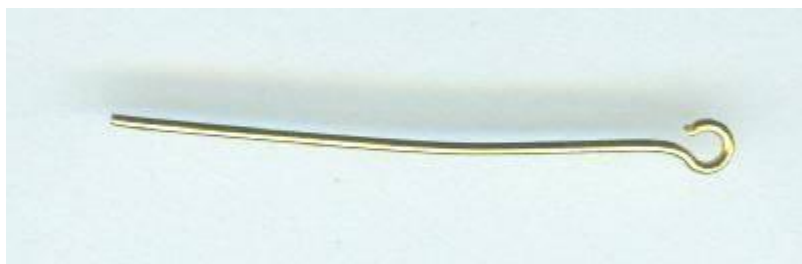
[Jewellery findings](#) may seem insignificant to most non-jewellery makers but they are essential requirements when it comes to jewellery bead making. They help make a piece of jewellery look more finished and professional looking.

Headpins



A head pin is a long or short wire with a cap at one end. Jewelry makers use the head pins to stop beads, stones or crystals from falling off at the end of the wire. These pins come in a variety of sizes and metals sterling silver, gold, brass or metal. Head pins are used to make a variety of jewelry pieces like earrings, bracelets or necklaces. They come in various lengths and usually expressed in inches.

Eyepins



Eye pins have the same basic function as head pins, but instead of a horizontal piece on the end of the pin there is a loop. This is helpful when you want to add an extra dangle to the end of an earring. You can also make your own eye pins with a little wire and the [Simple Loop](#) method.

Clasps

Probably just about the most common of clasps, this spring ring clasps are used on beaded items like necklaces and bracelets. There is actually a little spring inside of the round part of the clasp that allows it to open and close. These come in silver, gold, gold-filled, and base metals. Spring ring clasps are available in different diameters.



A toggle clasp has two sections: the "T" part and the "O" part. The "T" is inserted into the "O" when connecting the two ends of a piece of jewelry together. Just like most findings, there is a huge variety of designs and metals available for toggle clasps.



LOBSTER CLASPS

A lobster clasp, also known as a lobster hook, is a [fastener](#) that is held closed by a [spring](#). The lobster clasp is opened or closed by holding a small lever, usually with a [fingernail](#), long enough to apply, then it is attached (or removed from) a short [link-chain](#) or a ring-like structure. Lobster clasps are often used for [bracelets](#), handbag charms and [keychains](#).

Lobster clasps are named as such because of their "[pinching](#)" mechanism, and they are often shaped like a [lobster](#)'s claw.



Aside from eyepins, headpins and clasps, the following are some of the other most basic jewellery findings:

Jewellery wire

Types of Wire

The most common wires available are brass, copper, silver and gold.

Copper and Brass Wire

Round copper wire is inexpensive, easily sourced and is soft and pliable to use. It is a good wire to practice with. Brass wire is usually stiffer than copper.

Silver wire

Silver plated wire is one of the easiest wires to obtain. It is usually made from sterling silver over a copper core and is easy to use and relatively cheap.

Precious metal silver wire is more expensive and is available in two grades, Sterling Silver and Fine Silver.

Sterling Silver wire, is 92.5% pure silver, and for this reason is often called 925 silver, Fine Silver Wire is 99% pure silver. The other 7.5% of Sterling Silver is usually copper; this makes the wire harder but also more prone to tarnishing than Fine Silver. Sterling Silver wire is easier to find than Fine Silver wire.

Gold wire

Pure gold wire is very expensive and hard to find, alternatives are Gold plated wire or Gold-filled wire.

Gold plated wire has a layer of 10k or higher gold over a core of base metal, usually copper. Gold-filled wire has a thicker layer of gold (10k or higher) over a core of base metal. The gold must account for at least 1/20th of the weight of the item to be referred to as gold-filled.

In both cases the gold will wear off over time, although it should last longer on gold-filled wire, as the plating is thicker.

Enamelled wire

Enamelled wire comes in a variety of colours and can be used to make some very beautiful jewellery. It is made by coating copper or silver-plated copper wire with a thin layer of coloured enamel. It can be an advantage to use **nylon jawed pliers** with this wire as the enamel can mark easily.

Memory Wire

Memory wire is a strong resilient wire that keeps its shape even after bending and twisting. You can buy it in bracelet, necklace and ring sizes.

Memory wire is made from heat-treated steel and is useful for making jewellery to fit any size. It is a very hard wire and it is important not to cut it with your favourite wire cutters because it will ruin them. You can buy special memory wire cutters (parrot beak cutters) or you can keep an old pair of strong wire cutters just for cutting it.

To finish the ends of memory wire the best solution is to turn a small **simple loop** at each end. These are permanent and can be disguised by adding a dangly bead on a head pin.

Beading cord

There are various types and thickness of beading cord, including elastic nylon cord which is good for bracelets and rings where you don't want to fuss with a clasp as the bracelet stretches to go over the wrist. The ends are usually knotted or glued to provide a 'stop' for beads.

Invisible cord (or illusion cord) is a strong nylon product that is almost see through so is good for illusion necklaces, where beads seem to float invisibly against the skin.

Leather cord comes in several thicknesses and is good for modern casual designs and larger beads and pendants. To finish either knot or use some cord

ends (similar to crimp beads). Glue and crimps can also be used.



Cord ends

Nymo is a waxed nylon thread most commonly available on small bobbins (64-72 yards). It has various sizes from 00-FF. 00 is very fine but can snap, whilst FF is too thick for many beads. B and D are most popular. Nymo is a good choice for bead weaving (on or off loom) or any other beadwork that demands a tough yet fine thread.

Polyester cord won't shrink from moisture and is less likely to fray than silk.

Rattail, Mousetail and Bugtail are names for 3 thicknesses of satin cord which comes in many colours and knots well. Good for use with large beads and Chinese knotting techniques.

Silk thread is versatile and comes in many colours and sizes. It is sized from 0 to 16 with 0 being the thinnest. Silk is easily knotted and is the best choice for delicate beads such as freshwater pearls. Because it will stretch, you may need to pre-stretch it before use. **Nylon** thread is less expensive than silk.

Silver / gold wire has similar sizing and application to the coated copper wires but is made fully of precious metals.

Suede cord tends to be flatter and thicker than leather. It also comes in a manmade form called faux suede which is stronger and more consistent.

Tigertail is the colloquial name for flexible stranded wire sold by companies such as Beadalon, Acculon. It's good for beads with sharp edges that might cut thread and for heavier jewellery designs. It drapes, but not as softly as thread. It is very versatile but cannot be knotted. It comes in sizes from .012 to .024 with .012 being the finest. It is available with different numbers of strands, 3 being the cheapest and 49 the top quality. The extra strands make it more flexible and less likely to kink, as well as providing quite significant strength. It is used with crimps to secure beads and findings.

Crimp Beads



To use a crimp bead to attach a clasp, thread the crimp bead onto the bead stringing wire and then thread on the clasp. Pass the bead wire back through the crimp bead.

Squash the crimp bead onto the bead stringing wire using either crimping pliers or chain nose pliers.

They are an essential part of every jewellery maker's toolbox, especially for those who are working with beads. These simple beads, usually in silver, are used to cover knots in the thread as well as secure a loop in a necklace or bracelet string so that the jewellery maker can attach a jump-ring to the loop in order to complete a clasp. The metal is typically soft. After putting the crimp bead in position, a pair of crimping pliers or flat-nose can be used to compress the bead and secure it in place. Try practicing a few times until you get the hang of compressing the finding without distorting it. There are a number of ways in creating styles and it all depends on how you hold your pliers.

Humble Jump Ring



This is the kind of jewellery finding that everyone used without exception. With a circle of silver wire, cutting in its circumference, it allows the ring to be opened and closed again. This makes it act as a loop between the end of a necklace and the clasp. Actually, without the jump ring, making jewellery can be more difficult. They can be purchased gold and copper plated as well as silver.

