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PROJECTS

How to make jewellery - a bead cluster.

When Michelle showed me her sweet earrings from one of her Mimy Designs collections, I just knew we had to do a tutorial/project. These bead clusters are simple to make and yet so effective when finished. They are versatile and can result in earrings, bookmarks and pendants. You can gain different finishes by using wire and folding the ends, or using varied head pins, such as ball or flat. So let us begin and make ourselves a bead cluster.

We are going to make a beaded bookmark. Many bookmarks have lovely long dangles displaying beautiful beads so we decided to try something a little different.

Materials:

- 1 x 8 mm bead
- 15 x 6 mm beads
- 1 x bookmark blank
- 22 gauge wire
(we used German silver plated copper)

Tools and equipment:

- Round nose pliers
- Chain nose pliers
- Cutters (I prefer flush cutters)
- Ruler
- Optional nylon jaw pliers

Tip: We are going to be making wrapped loops and simple loops, if you are not sure how to do these we have covered these techniques previously, just pop back to our Bead tutorials.

The first thing to make is our core, it is from the core that the beads will cluster.

You will want to cut a length of wire between 10 to 12 cm in length. If you like you can straighten your wire with nylon jaw pliers or if you don't have these use a cloth and you fingers, this will also harden your wire a little so don't over do it.

Tip: Don't forget to use your safety glasses when cutting wire.

You now have a length of wire, about 3.5 cm in from one end make a right angle bend with your chain nose pliers.
Thread on your large 8 mm bead, now leaving another tail of about 3.5 cm make another right angle bend.
Do the first part of a wrapped loop as in the picture left, we are going to leave this end as it is now and finish it off latter when we are ready to secure our cluster to its base ie earring, bookmark etc.

With your other tail we are going to make a larger than normal loop for the beads to cluster on and wrap it for a nice secure finish.
Make the loop as you normally do for a wrapped loop but use the wider part of your round nose pliers, the bigger the loop the more beads you can add therefor the bigger your cluster.
When you wrap around the base be sure to leave some room so that you will be able to wrap the other end, we have shown this in the picture to your right.

Now we are going to use our 6 mm beads and make the cluster. The easiest way to ensure you have the correct length for a simple loop and don't waste wire is to first thread your bead before cutting. What we have done is to take our spool of wire, thread an 8 mm bead (we use this to measure our cutting distance) then the 6 mm. While still connected to the spool fold the wire end over with a pair of chain nose (for flat finish). Cut the wire behind the 8 mm bead then remove this bead leaving only the 6 mm on the wire. Fold the tail over against your bead to a right angle and proceed to make a simple loop.

If you are using wire and not head pins to secure your bead you need to fold the ends of your wire over. We have simply folded once (see pic) using chain nose pliers and then flattened it by squeezing with the pliers. You can make spirals, round loops, coils, it is limited only by your imagination.

You now have your first bead ready for your cluster, keep going making as many as you need, we used 15 x 6 mm beads but it will depend on what size your core loop is, and if you are using 6 mm beads or have gone for another size.
Secure the beads onto your core loop by opening the simple loops sideways and closing them around the core loop. It can get a little cramped when doing your last bead or two, it may be easier if these last few have a little larger simple loop to work with.
Now work with your half finished top wrapped loop, secure onto your jump ring and wrap back around to the base of your 8 mm bead.

And here is our finished piece, a lovely beaded cluster representing grapes with its purple Amethyst and pink Rose quartz beads. This gift would delight any avid reader as this one did for one young reader.

But don't stop here, have a go making a pair of bead clusters and make a pair of earrings, even make three and have a matching pendant. Try smaller beads for bushier clusters, try shaped beads for an eclectic look and experiment with colours.