



'I Heart Beads' Brooch *- an exploration*



International Beading Week 2023

This year for International Beading Week I'm doing something different. Instead of the usual chart or tutorial I'm just giving you a template and some ingredients in the form of materials, stitches and techniques. I'm inviting you to take those and join me during IBW over on my Social Media and in the International Beading Week Facebook Group and see what you and I create. I'll be beading different versions all week, talking you through the materials and techniques, and trying to give you the toolkit rather than the complete pattern and encouraging you to play, create, experiment and have some fun.

So - here's the concept - a brooch based on a simple 'insert name here' tattoo. I've been wanting to bead a tattoo for ages, with that characteristic black linework, but had way too many ideas for the rest to know where to start - so indecisive as ever. However, that makes it ideal for this experiment - I can use a basic toolkit of stitches or materials for the line work, in varying combinations, and then draw on a whole other set of materials and techniques for the heart itself, and go wild (or not) with textures and embellishments.

Template



Join me on Social Media during IBW to see what I create (and how I create it)



@theindecisivebeader



TheIndecisiveBeader

I Love Beads Experiment © Sarah Cryer Beadwork

www.theindecisivebeader.com

Techniques and Materials

Base

I'm using Black Beading Foundation or Hard Felt as my base - I can use a white pen to draw the shape on. Sometimes I'll add a coloured layer for the heart, sometimes some felt padding with a velvet or synthetic leather etc over the top. For the white ribbon with writing across the front I'll use a separate piece of Ultrasuede.

Linework

Several options here - back stitch with beads (I'm thinking 15s for the writing, 11s elsewhere) - instructions below. I've got some brilliant 2mm cup chain in my [Etsy shop](#) which I can simply couch down for thicker lines (and so easy), and I can also couch 1 or 1.25mm Pearl Purl from my [Etsy Shop](#) for a really quick thinner line (instructions for couching and using Pearl Purl below). It will be interesting to see whether I can manage letters with that - possibly not. I might have to resort to some simple hand embroidery with thread (probably back stitch) for the lettering as my first version has shown that's quite tough to get even with backstitched 15s....?

Fill & embellishment

This bit will be fun - I can use just about anything with really simple bead embroidery stitches like stacking and seeding - I'm thinking crystals in settings, beads in lots of different sizes for an encrusted look, or perhaps if I've added a padded out velvet heart I'll just use the beads in a few places? I might do a super traditional bead embroidered version with rows and rows of beautiful back stitch? And I have pots and pots of flower beads and sequins, so might do a bonkers floral version, or grab some flat sequins to create a more sophisticated snakeskin look.

Edging and finishing

Once I've finished beading I'll cut out the shape close to the edges using the instructions below, add a brooch back and then back with Ultrasuede (probably black). Then I'll use the edging instructions below to add a 'sunshine' edge, probably in black seed beads, or I might play with some other methods.

The Indecisive Beader - Bead Embroidery Stitch Basics

Starting and ending threads in Bead Embroidery

Change threads when you need to - we all have our own ways of doing this, so feel free to stick with what you've found works, but if you're new to this I like to:

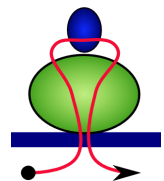
- Start bead embroidery threads with a simple, firm chunky knot, or a few stitches on the backing - similar to standard embroidery. You need a secure strong start, and the back of the embroidery stage will be covered later, so go for security over tidiness.
- If I need to finish a thread during the bead embroidery stage, again I secure at the back, this time with lots of overlapping repeated stitches.
- If I need to finish a thread after the final backing has been added I stitch sideways back into the foundation and across the piece and out of the opposite side's edging, then go back in and repeat a few times until the thread is secure.

Don't work with too long a thread - as you can see changing threads is easy, working with a worn, tangled or metal damaged thread is not, so perhaps use a shorter length than you would for beadweaving (think like an embroiderer).

Stacking

A nice simple bead embroidery technique which can be used to fill spaces quickly and easily with an interesting randomised texture, or as in this piece to create some tidy anchor lines. I use it as a background texture for most of my bead embroidery, particularly when I want a textured, naturalistic effect.

Come up through the backing, pick up a large bead and a tiny bead. Let the beads fall to the base of the thread and make sure they're sitting in the right place on the backing, then stitch down through the large bead (skipping the small bead) into the backing. Repeat, varying the bead sizes and keeping the beads close together until you've filled the desired space.



Stacking tips

- The downwards stitch is the critical one for placement - only at that stage have you seen the bead in place, so use this stitch entry point to control the placement (it doesn't have to go back down in the same place you came up if that place turned out to be wrong). Use a 15 as the tiny bead for 11s and 8s, and an 11 with 6s as a 15 will fall through.
- Use seeding with 15s to fill in any spaces too tiny for stacking.
- You can stack with more than two beads to create a vertical effect - if you use enough it will look like fringing.
- The bead finish for the base bead really changes the impact of stacking because you see the bead end on - it looks very effective with transparent and colour lined beads - if you mix the sizes you can get a 'bubbly' effect.
- And you can also use the tiny bead colour to vary the finish - use a consistent base bead with a varying tiny, or vice versa to get waves and patches of colour.
- Stacking is most often used as a space filler, with one or many bead sizes at a time (have a look at my Jelly tutorial as this uses it extensively with mixed sizes). You can work with flowers and other shaped beads, sequins or anything with a hole in, and really have fun (again, I use this a lot so have a look at my Instagram @theindecisivebeader and it's everywhere).



Seeding

The simplest bead embroidery technique, seeding uses single beads edge onto the fabric in a random pattern. Just come up through the backing, pick up a single bead, let the beads fall to the base of the thread to check their position, then stitch back down on the other side of the bead.

It's a really useful basic technique and the stitch pathway can also be used to secure just about any size of bead, mounted stones and our two hole cabochons..

Place the cabochon/bead/sequin etc onto the foundation where you want it to be, bring your needle up through the foundation next to a hole, pass through the hole and then down back into the foundation just to the outside of the object side. If it's a heavy bead or cab, repeat a couple of times to secure.

Seeding for big beads tips:

- If the item has two holes, alternate between them (one stitch through the first, one through the second, then back to the first etc). This allows you to adjust the positioning as you work.
- Once again, don't crowd the beads, and don't overdo the tension and distort the foundation.
- Between each stitch check the position and then correct - it's easy to move the item accidentally whilst you're working, but providing you've not stitched it down too firmly you can use the next stitch to slightly adjust the position.
- If your thread is visible (and it will be if you're seeding with sequins or flat beads rather than seed beads), then overlap the beads to hide it).



Couching

Couching is a simple embroidery technique used to attach a wire, line of beads or thread to the fabric surface.

Couching pearl purl

You'll need a length of wire about 2cm longer than the finished line (add a bigger margin for the longer lines like the edge). Hold one end between the first finger and thumb of each hand and gently stretch it before you start so that the small curls or sections of wire (which are supposed to mimic tiny pearls) open up and make room for your thread.

Stitch over the end of the purl about 1cm from the end with a tiny couching stitch - make sure the thread drops in between the curls of wire. Couch this first section twice to make sure it's secure, but don't cut off the excess yet. Carry on couching down the purl every 5 to 6 sections.

When you get back to the beginning, trim off the excess purl from both ends, and make sure you've used extra stitches to secure both of the wire ends tidily so they sit together almost invisibly.

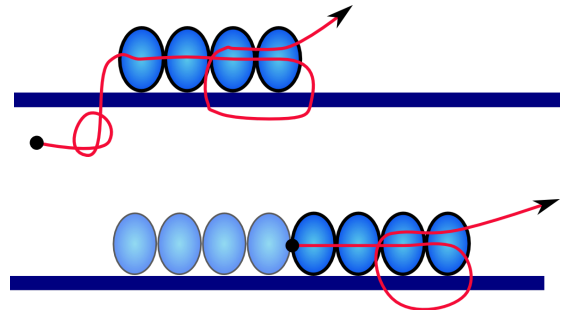
Goldwork Couching tips

- Proper Goldwork embroiderers wax their threads (to prevent snagging) and use a general sewing thread. Do take the time to swap from our standard beading threads as beading threads are thicker and flatter, so can get stuck on the outside of the coil - I've learnt that not swapping really slows you down.
- Purl arrives very tightly curled, so stretch your purl before you start as I've said, as otherwise there won't be room for the thread will slip down between the curls. This will smooth out any kinks as well.
- You can stretch your purl as you work if it's still too tight, but be very careful not to damage the stitching you've already done.
- Couching is great for adding clear outlines quickly, much faster than back stitch with beads, so take a little care over it, no need to rush.

Back Stitch

Back stitch is another of the core Bead Embroidery techniques. Come up through the foundation, pick up the required beads, let them drop to the foundation end of the thread, and laying them down against the side of the existing work, go back down into the foundation.

*Then pass your needle up through the foundation between the 2nd and 3rd bead of the set, then pass through the 3rd & 4th beads of the set** (or the beads listed in the full tutorial).



This means your group of four is now attached at either end and in the middle and will give you a good solid base for your bezel - it's called 'back stitch' because the second pass takes you back behind the end of the first.

Your thread will be coming out of the end of the 4th bead in the group - next pick up 4 more 11As and repeat from 2a * to **.

Repeat 2b for as long as you need to:

Back stitch tips:

- Don't crowd the beads - you want an even finish and if you put them too close together they won't sit nicely - better to give them a little bit of space.
- Back stitch is the base for peyote bezels - if you'd like to learn how to do these they're covered in my Sunstar and Squidy tutorials. If you're going to be making a bezel, then make sure you use an even number of beads, as you'll need to use alternating beads to work the first row of peyote.
- You can vary the size of beads in each pick up to create a line which thickens and thins - useful for filling in uneven spaces, and for creating interest and shape.



Backing your work



Take your brooch back and glue or stitch it to the back. Be generous with the glue - this will be covered. If you have the type of brooch back with holes, feel free to stitch down instead as these tend to be narrower so don't have as good a surface area for the glue - that's what I tend to do (also helps if you're a bit paranoid about glue failing). This can be messy, it will be hidden.



Next take your backing fabric (don't cut to the finished size just yet) and carefully cut out small slits and shapes for the brooch hinge, catch and bails if it has one. A good way to size this correctly is to fold the fabric along the line of the pin and cut small vertical slits. Take this slowly - the smaller the cuts the better the finish, but you'll need to get them large enough to avoid distortion.



Wiggle the backing down, over and around the pin. You may have to enlarge it slightly, or make small cuts sideways to accommodate the workings of the brooch - go gently, a little at a time, and then once you are happy, remove it.

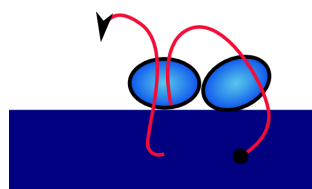
Apply glue (I use E6000) to the whole of the back of the embroidery, including over the brooch back's metal plate, and then fix the ultrasuede backing fabric down.

Wait for the glue to dry, and then trim the backing fabric to match the beading foundation (carefully again!).

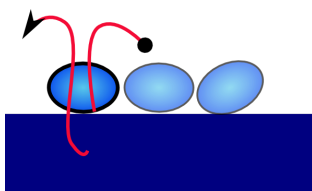
Once you're happy, take your ultrasuede piece (not cut to size yet), and following the manufacturer's instructions, glue it to the backing.

Edging

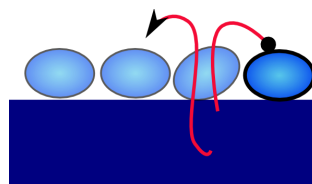
Once you've attached the backing you'll need to both join the edges of the ultrasuede and foundation fabric for security, and also cover them up, using an edging stitch similar to brick stitch (sometimes known as 'sunshine edge').



Come through to the front of the fabric about 1mm in from the edge (just inside your Pearl Purl or the last row of beads). Pick up 2 edging beads, let them fall down to the fabric and then come back through the backings to the front so that the thread sits in the centre of the second bead - so about 2mm from the previous stitch and again 1mm in. Come back up in the opposite direction through the second bead to secure it. As you stitch, make sure that your thread is falling down in between the curls of wire - effectively couching it down again and sitting it snugly against the edging beads. Make sure the second bead sits neatly against the edge, with the hole facing out - don't worry too much about the first bead as that will sort itself out when we get to the end of the edging.



Pick up another bead, let it fall down to the fabric, and then again come up through the backing and through the new bead so it sits next to the previous one. Repeat from * to * until you've got about 1cm left to edge.



Before you complete the last cm, check to see how much space you have left to fill, in case you need to space out your beads a bit more. Once you've added the last bead you need to tidy up that very first bead added by stitching through it as if it were a new bead.

Edging tips

- Start somewhere inconspicuous if you can to allow for any gapping at the end.
- Anything you can add to brick stitch, you can add to this edge - you can carry on outwards in brick stitch, or add single beads edge on and then convert to peyote to add say daggers, rizoos etc.
- Once again, don't crowd the beads or you'll get a rippled edge.