



## How To Knot A Mala

by Janice Parsons

I have always been intrigued with malas. When I owned The Bead Shop in Palo Alto, clients would come in sometimes desperate to get their prayer beads re-knotted. After daily use and over a period of time, the thread would break. It became a trust exercise... there was usually a protocol for handing them off to me for repair: Only I could touch them, no one else.

I had to re-knot them as quickly as possible so they could be returned asap. And there was always a personal connection the person had with their beads.

I felt both responsible and honored to be entrusted to bring their malas back to a state that made them useable prayer beads again.

I also learned that malas and rosaries are not the same for all people. Some are used for religious rituals, like praying and chanting, and others are touchstones to be worn to bring comfort and calming. I also discovered that I love creating them for friends with my own designs. I put very few limitations on my mala designs; they needed to be 108 beads and join in front with a guru bead and tassel.

Many believe malas and rosaries are not to be worn as jewelry but are intended exclusively for meditation and prayer. I take a more open view that we can take the traditional design and re-imagine it. Whether you are serious about your mala prayer beads or think of them as jewelry, the techniques to knot and close off can be adapted to any design you choose.

I want to share with you how to knot using a variety of beads and also how to knot a traditional mala of just stone beads. Either way, the steps are the same, it's just a slight modification of thread size.

## A Little Bit About Malas

Traditional malas are 108 beads plus a “guru” bead at the bottom followed by a tassel or cord ending. Malas are used in prayer and meditation, very much like traditional rosaries are used by Catholics. In Buddhist tradition, the beads are used for counting chants or mantras. The disciple repeats a mantra and counts off the next bead by moving fingers along the beads. The beads are a way of counting the prayers so the person is free to repeat the chant without concern for the count. There can be stations or different types of beads or hanging cords at regular intervals as aids to help count.

The guru bead is not a bead that is counted. It is there to let you know when you have completed 108 mantras. Once you have, you turn back and retrace your fingers along the beads repeating your prayers one bead at a time.

Malas are also used wrapped around both hands 2-3 times and palms rubbed back and forth to help create healing energy and aid in chanting.



Malas should be knotted using the traditional pearl knotting method with each bead separated by a knot. This protects the beads from unnecessary friction and if your mala breaks, you will potentially only lose one bead.

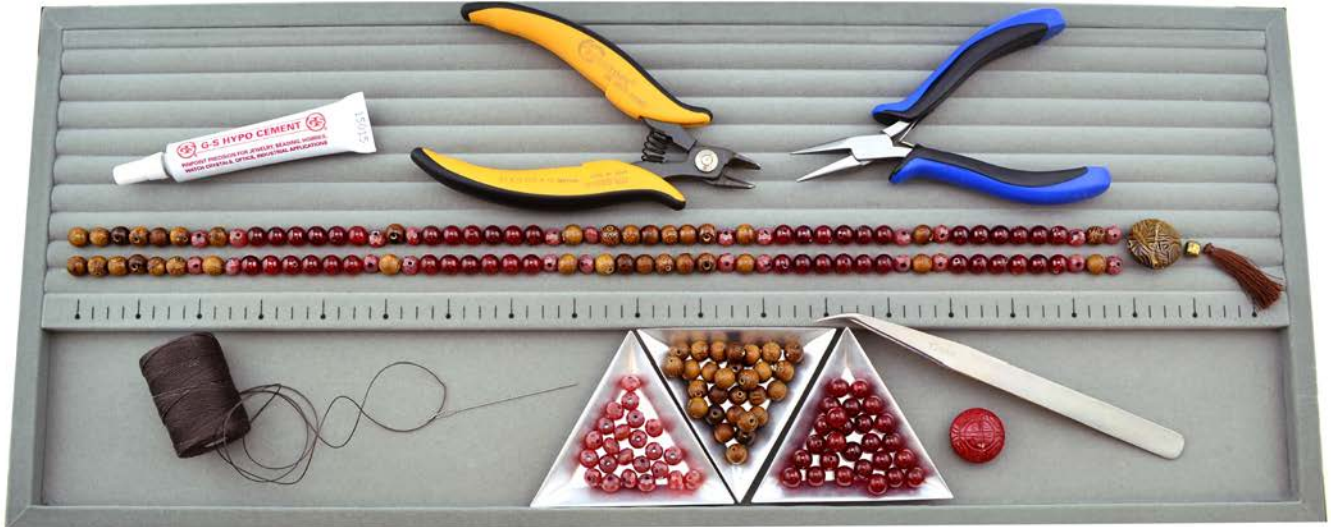
I recommend Regular C-Lon or Fine Weight C-Lon for your cord. Both sizes are strong nylon. Silk and cotton may be “natural” and/or “organic”, but the beads often cut through the thread.

Check that your bead holes match the cord you want to use. Bead holes can vary even from one bead to the next of the same kind.



I recommend having several sizes of cord on hand. It is essential you make test knots with the beads and cords you want to use. I can recommend a general size for the project and beads, but your bead selection may vary depending on what they are and where they are from. I wish I could say “One size fits all”, but when it comes to knotting, it’s not true. You have to experiment.

Whatever you decide to do for your pattern, it is always best to lay it out so you can see it completely before you begin. If you want 108 beads plus a guru bead and you are using a non-traditional pattern, it is critical you check and re-check your bead count and pattern. I love my Ultimate Design Board to help me with this. It does a terrific job of assisting me with my bead count and planning out my pattern.



In all the samples for this project, the pattern is repeated on both sides of the guru bead. See the last page for full view of each pattern. It's up to you if you want to stick to the patterns shown or create your own.

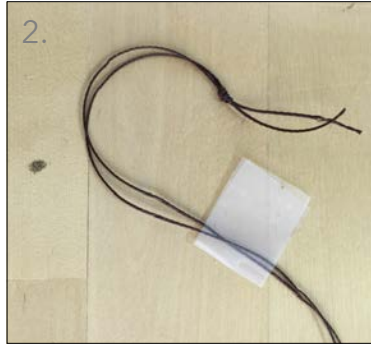


This handout is done using the Carnelian and Wood Beads. It can be adapted to all semi-precious or semi-precious and crystal (Wisdom). All that changes, besides the bead varieties, is the size of your knotting cord. A smaller cord, like Fine Weight C-Lon would be used if you were using only 8mm stone beads with consistently medium-small sized bead holes.

Okay, let's begin!



1. Measure and cut 5 yards of C-Lon. It may seem like too much, but once you start knotting, you'll see how much thread disappears. Thread on your needle to the middle of your cord.



2. Take both tails and tie an overhand knot at the end. This is just for security. About 2 inches up from the knot, secure a piece of scotch tape around the cord.



3. String on 3 wood beads. The first 3 beads are strung with no knots between them. We will be knotting them when we are ready to close at the very end. Bring them down the cord next to the scotch tape.



4. String on a fourth bead and bring it down to sit next to the first 3.



If you are making a mala using only stone beads, you will string on 4 semi-precious rounds (like 8mm Rose Quartz in Wisdom). Test the four beads to make sure the holes are large enough by threading your needle and cord back through, so that when you are ready to close off you are sure the holes are big enough.

## Ready to knot!



5. Not too far away from your beads, make an overhand loop. This is done by making a circle with your thread and taking the needle through the circle.



6. Using your knotting tweezers, position your tweezers so one tip is above the knot and one tip is under the knot.

7. Rotate your tweezers a 1/4 turn so the tips are facing down. Without pinching the cord, move the tweezer tips closer to the fourth bead. Now it's okay to pinch the cords fairly firmly with your tweezers.





8. Push the tweezers against the bead while you pull in the excess thread.

I find it helpful to grab the cords near the knot rather than all the way down by the needle. The needle is so far away and you'll end up with a tired shoulder.



9. Don't worry if the knot is not perfectly close. Just get it pretty close. When you remove your tweezers, it should look something like this. It's close but not finished yet.

There is a tendency to want to push the knot up against the bead with your thumb. Don't give in to this desire! If your knot isn't close enough, doing that will just tighten it but not move it close enough.



10. Now, here's the magic! Separate your two cords with your hands and gently pull on each equally. As you pull and tighten, the knot moves up to where you want it. C-Lon is very forgiving and the knot will almost always move to its final position.



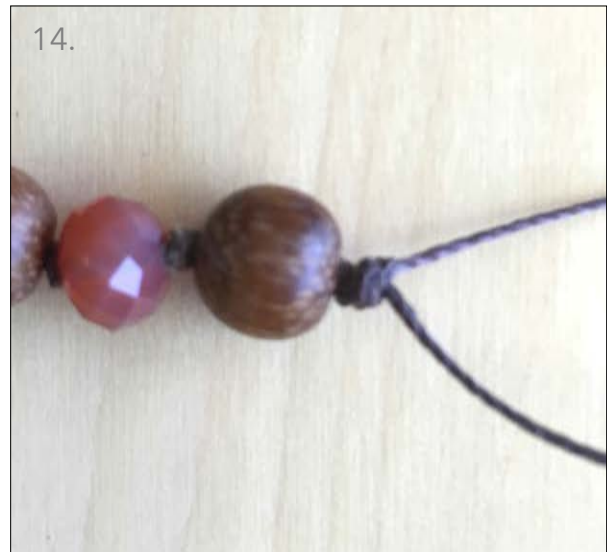
11. Continue knotting between each bead. Each type of bead will give you a slightly different knot. The wood beads have inconsistent holes...some larger holes some regular. It's fairly easy for the knot to get hidden by slipping inside a bead and then it looks like you don't have a knot at all:



The knot is there, it's just being covered up by the large hole of the last wood bead strung on.



12. No Biggie!  
Slide the last wood bead away so you can make a loop of your cord near the knot that ended up hidden.



13. Use your tweezers to bring the second knot on top or as close as you can to the original knot.

14. Separate your threads and tighten the knot.

15. It should look pretty good and not something you should worry about.

I would not recommend this step for traditional knotting of pearls, but with a mala using wood beads, it's a good trick to have in your tool kit. Go ahead...make a knot on top of a knot!



16. Continue knotting each bead. Be sure to check your pattern as you go. It's really easy to just put a bead on and forget the order.

If your beads look a bit "wrinkled". Don't worry! With wear, the cord will relax. But if you want to see some instant results, roll the knotted beads gently across your lap. You should see a mild change in how tight they look.





17. After the last bead before the guru bead, be sure to add a knot.



18. String your guru bead onto your cord.

## Time to Tassel!



19. Set your knotted beads aside for a moment. It's time to prep for the tassel. Using your chain nose pliers, grasp the metal transition bead and press the sides in so the opening diameter is rounder in shape.



20. Prep your tassel by first separating it on the "mother cord", away from the others. Add a drop of GS Hypo-tube Cement to the thread that wraps around the top. The glue will be hidden away.



21.

21. String on your metal transition bead and then carefully thread your needle through the opening at the top of the tassel. Thread your needle back through the guru bead as well.



22.

22. It may take a little effort, but pull in any excess cord. As you do this, the tassel will start to find its home inside the transition bead.



23.

23. When you're happy with the position of the tassel and excess cord has been pulled through, gently but firmly flatten the transition bead with your chain nose pliers. Apply pressure evenly on both sides.



24.

24. BEFORE you string on your first bead to start the second side, add a knot after the guru bead, so it matches the knot you made on the first side.

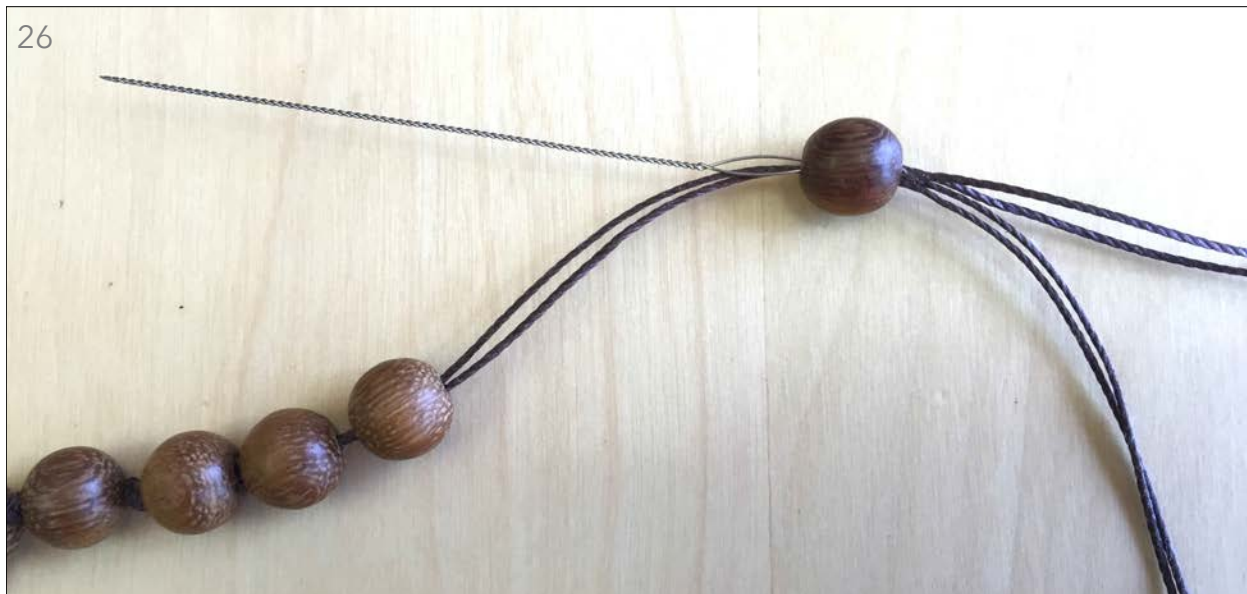
Then continue knotting your pattern up the second side.

And remember...after EACH knot, separate your threads and pull gently but firmly on your cord. This is essential and it's often forgotten.

## Time to End!



25. When you get to the last bead of your mala, string it on, but do NOT put a knot after it. It is hard to see from this angle, but there are knots between the wood beads at the end on the right. Just no knot after the last one. The first 3 beads on the left do not have knots.



26. Bring your needle back through the first bead you strung on the left side.



27. Pull in your excess cord on both ends.



28. With your original tail, make a loop between the two beads.

With your flush cutters, you can now cut off the safety knot you tied at the beginning.

29. Bring the short, original tail under the main cord, then up and through the loop.  
In order to demonstrate this, I loosened the main cord to allow for better viewing. Gently but firmly pull the loop in so it goes away.



30. Separate the two short tails and tighten them.  
Tie the first half of a square knot: right over left. Flip the beads over and tie the second half of the square knot: left over right.



31. Add a small dollop of glue to the knot and give it a few minutes to dry.



32. Once it's dry, take your flush cutters and cut as close as you can without damaging your knot or the beads.



33. With the remaining long cord, make a loop above the beads.



34. Bring the needle under the beads then up and through the loop.

Gently but firmly pull the knot tight. Separate the cord near the knot to tighten it further.



35. Thread your needle back through the next bead. Repeat Steps 34 and 35 for this bead. Thread your needle through the remaining bead that has no knot.



36. For the last bead, repeat Steps 34 and 35 and tighten the knot.

Take the needle and thread it in and through Bead 4 that has a knot after it.

Before you pull in all the excess cord, add a drop of glue on the portion of cord that will live inside Bead 4.

Then pull on the excess cord.



37. Almost done! Cut off the needle, separate your threads and repeat the square knot, glue and cutting excess cord as you did in Steps 30-32. The finished results should be an ending that will last for as long as you need it.



Malas measure approximately 36-38 inches plus the added length of the guru bead and tassel, which is about 2 inches. The pattern is fairly simple. It is two alternating patterns of 6 beads and a station of 3 beads. In the back where you start and end are 12 beads. It is important that the first 3 beads you string on at the back have holes large enough to string your cord back through. Please read the handout for Step-by-Step Instructions on how to start, knot between beads, add your guru bead and end at the back.



Strength



Balance



Wisdom



Serenity



Passion

I truly hope you've enjoyed learning How to Knot a Mala and I meditate daily on how I hope my instructions are clear and understandable!  
 If you have questions or suggestions on how to make it easier to understand, please let me know. And, of course, I would love to see your finished results!

Please send your inquiries to [info@beadshop.com](mailto:info@beadshop.com). I'm afraid if you send it to my email, it will get lost. I answer every question or comment you send me.  
 Thank you so much and namaste!