Kumihimo Braiding for Round Disks
Hira Kara Gumi (Flat Braid)
Caid Award Cord

By Lynnette de Sandoval del Valle de los Unicornios

Kumihimo is the Japanese word for braiding (kumi = to braid, himo = cord). It encompasses many types and shapes of braids and has been done in many different methods with the aid of many different tools. Traditionally Kumihimo is done with dyed silk threads, although current Kumihimo braiders use everything from silk thread to metal wire.

Braiding in Japan can be traced as far back as 7,500 BC. During the Middle Ages the rise of the Samurai warriors created a great need for Kumihimo, with 800-1,000 ft of braid (in 8 ft lengths) used for each suit of armor! The braids were also used for wrapping sword hilts, horse harnesses, tea ceremony accessories, obi ties, and more. They were braided in many different shapes, textures, designs, and widths

Today the most common method of working Kumihimo is on the marudai (maru = round, dai = stand), where the work of braiding is done on top, and the finished braid is weighted to descend through a center hole.

The handheld Kumihimo disks are a modern adaptation of the marudai that allows for portable braiding. Many Kumihimo patterns, including Hira (flat) Kara (Chinese) Gumi (braid) are easily adapted to these disks.

Prepare the disk

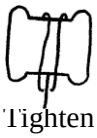
Place a mark between two slots on your round disk; this indicates the side of the disk that you hold closest to you while you're working the pattern. You will not be rotating the disk as you work.

Prepare the bobbins

Cut 8 equal lengths of yarn or thread (such as crochet thread or embroidery floss) in 3 colors – 2As, 2Bs, & 4Cs. Wind each length onto a bobbin (embroidery floss holders or knitting bobbins work well).

Tie off each bobbin thread with a Half Hitch**:**

– Hold the bobbin with the thread coming down in front of the bobbin
– Fold the thread into a loop, with the thread end over the bobbin thread
– Put the left side of the bobbin through the loop, with the back part of the loop in front of the bobbin



When done correctly, the working end will hang down from between a loop of thread

Tighten the half hitch by rotating the bobbin away from the loop you've created. This pulls the thread toward the loop and tightens the loop around the working end.

Attach the threads to the disk

Tie the non-bobbin ends of the 8 threads together and place the knot down through the hole in the center of the disk. The side of the disk that contrasts most with your thread colors should be on top.

Use a Lark's Head knot to attach a counterweight to the threads under the disk, just above the knot**:**

– Tie a loop of thread to the counterweight
– Fold the top down to form 2 rabbit ears
– Fold the left ear onto the right, with the center threads between the 2 folded ears

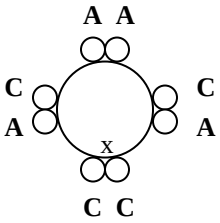
– Place the braiding threads through the rabbit ear loop
– Tighten the loop, and slide it down to rest just above the knot

The weight of the counterweight is determined by the size and weight of your thread. It must be heavy enough to keep the threads straight between the center hole and the slots, and to pull the braid through the center hole.

Fishing weights make good counterweights and come in different weights, shapes, and sizes. But most are made of lead, and you'll need to coat them with varnish, tool dip, or something else that covers the entire lead surface.

Disk set up

Arrange the 8 threads on the disk as indicated by the diagram below. Place each thread in its own slot. The paired threads below sit side by side in adjoining slots.



A is the center colors
C is the edge color
X marks the side of the card that stays nearest you as you work

Arrange the thread lengths so that all bobbins hang at the same level, about 4 to 6 inches below the surface of the disk.

Working instructions

Move the threads, step-by-step, as indicated by the braiding diagrams. Remember that 2 threads never occupy the same slot and threads shown next to each other occupy adjoining slots.

Following the direction of the arrows, move threads from the dotted position to the gray position, in the order indicated by the numbers.

Keep the X on the disk toward you at all times. When you start working after a break, hold the disk with the X nearest you. The pattern will NOT work if you rotate the disk while working, or if the X is in the wrong position.

Keep the tension even as you put the thread in its slot at the end of each move. The threads should lay tightly against the disk, in a straight line from the slot to the center hole. The braid should be centered in the hole, not off to one side. When you return to Step A, adjust the thread tension as needed

As thread is used to work the braid, the bobbins move up toward the disk. When the bobbins get to an inch or less below the disk, lengthen the thread by holding the bobbin in one hand, and the thread in the other; rotate the bobbin toward the half hitch's loop – this pulls the thread away from the loop and loosens the loop. Reverse the direction of rotation to tighten the loop when the bobbin hangs about 4 to 6 inches below the disk.

As you work the braid, the counterweight moves down from the disk with the finished braid. To provide the needed tension, the counterweight must be hanging free, and not resting on your lap or other surface. Each time you lengthen the bobbin threads, move the counterweight up by loosening the lark's head knot and sliding it up the braid. Tighten the knot on the braid, just below the unworked threads.

Completing the braid

When you've finished braiding, remove the counterweight and pull the finished braid out of the disk. Tie a thread around the unbraided threads, as close to the point of braiding as possible or tie the unbraided threads in a knot. Remove the bobbins from the threads ends. Finish the braid ends as desired -- tassels are traditional.

When you've completed the braid, steam it (over the spout of a boiling tea kettle works well) to remove the indentations left by the counterweight thread and to help shape the braid. After steaming, flat braids can be rolled flat with a rolling pin, and round braids can be rounded by rolling with a block of wood.

Resources

Carey, Jacqui. Beginners Guide to Braiding: The craft of Kumihimo. Search Press, 1997. ISBN: 0855328282 **Good place to start, lots of pictures.**

Owen, Roderick. Braids: 250 Patterns from Japan, Peru and Beyond. Lacis, 2004. ISBN 1891656589 **A wealth of braid patterns for marudai and disk.**

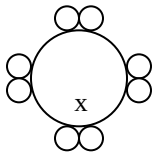
Neilson, Rosalie. The Thirty-Seven Interlacements of Hira Kara Gumi. Orion's Plumage, 1998 ISBN: 0966486307 **A study of how changing thread color and color position affect the braid patterns.**

Kumi2 E-mail group: groups.yahoo.com/group/kumi2 -- **Discussion of Kumihimo and techniques**

Weavershand website:.www.weavershand.com/#K -- **The place to go for Kumihimo on the net.**

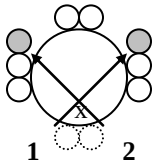
Working Diagrams

Home Positions



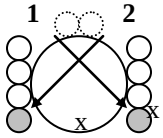
Ready to work

Step A



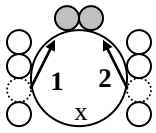
1) Left bottom to right side-top
2) Right bottom to left side-top

Step B



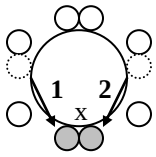
1) Left top to right side-bottom
2) Right top to left side-bottom

Step C



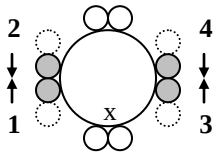
1) Left side (3rd down) to left top
2) Right side (3rd down) to right top

Step D



1) Left side (2nd down) to left bottom
2) Right side (2nd down) to right bottom

Step E



Housekeeping moves, returns Bobbins to home positions
1) Left side-bottom up
2) Left side-top down one
3) Right side-bottom up one
4) Right side-top down one

Questions, problems, want more patterns?

Contact me:
Lynnette (Debbie Coyle)
DameLynnette@earthlink.net

My webpage:
http://www.geocities.com/damelynnette