Chapter Four



Macramé

Introduction to Macramé

Through macramé, the art of ornamental knotting, you can express your creativity in a constructive way while developing a skill that is relaxing and fun. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about the history of macramé, when and where it originated, how it has been passed down through the ages and more.

You may want to experiment with different yarns and decorations to make unusual articles for yourself, others and your home. Visit with others who do macramé in your community to discover how they learned to macramé, what projects they have made and any suggestions they may have for a beginner. Locate resources through your local Colorado State Extension office, the Internet, library and yarn or craft shops to get new ideas. Most importantly, have fun!

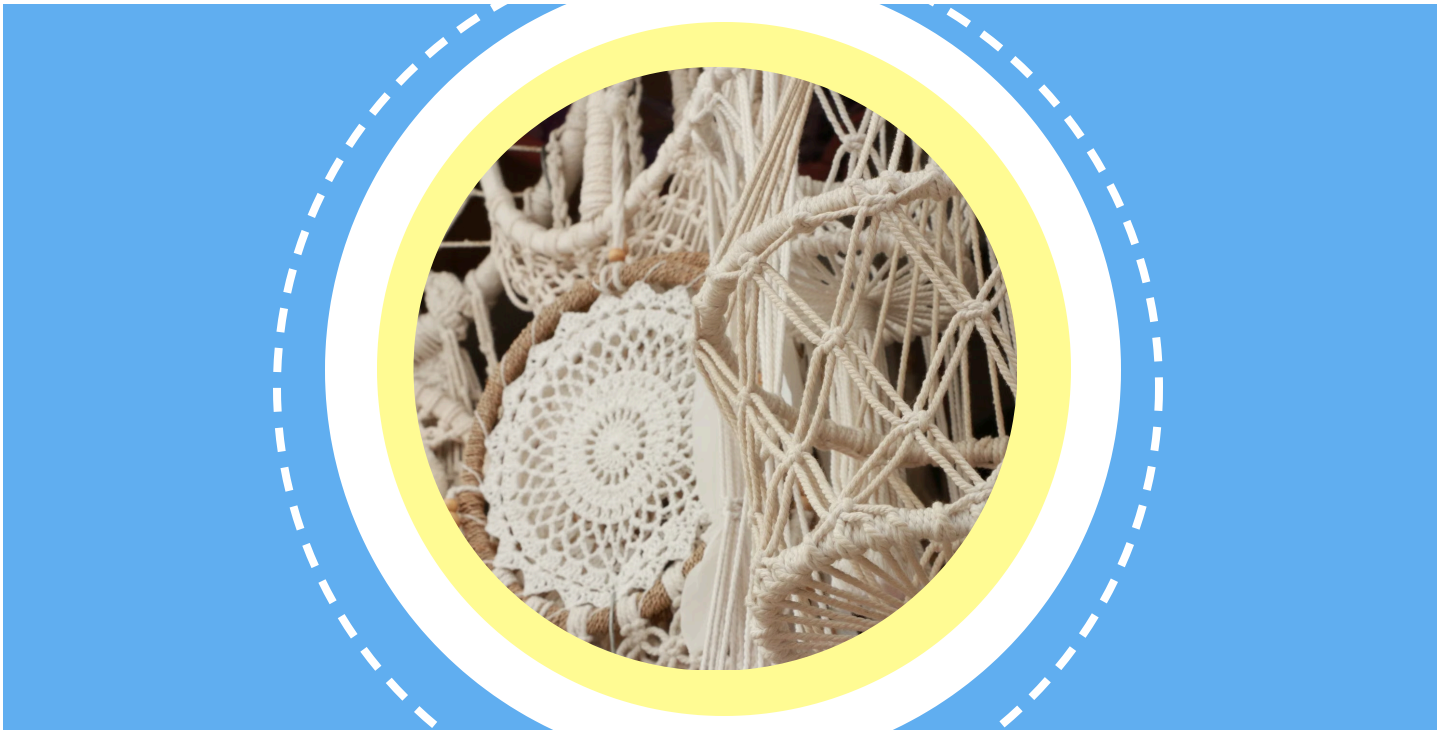
Two good resources to consider using are:

- Kansas 4-H Fiber Arts Challenge: Macramé
- Oregon State University Macramé Knots and Projects









Project Evaluation

Members are encouraged to develop new skills each year in the macramé project. Check the following list to see what skills would-be best for you.

Junior - 8 to 10 years old
Suggested techniques for this age group: lark's head knot, reverse lark's head knot, double half hitches, horizontal, vertical and diagonal half hitch, square knot sinnet, half cast sinnet, square knot button, alternating square knot, and/or gathering knot; measuring and bundling long cords, and preventing ends from raveling.

Intermediate - 11 to 13 years old
Suggested techniques are: Chinese crown knot, Josephine knot, Turk's head knot, monkey's fist, berry knot, coil knot, wrapping a ring, scorpion knot; adding additional cords and reverse typing cords.

Senior - 14 to 18 years old
Suggested techniques: combining a variety of basic and ornamental knots from the lists above.

Macramé exhibits will be evaluated on:

- Overall appearance
- Clean and neat
- Construction appropriate, design balanced
- Compatibility with ethnic group (if applicable)
- Use of texture, colors, and materials
- Cord choice - right for project

Quality Workmanship

- Correct knots used for project
- Tightness of knots (appropriate to use)
- Finish (including ends)

History of Macramé

Macramé originated as a decorative way of securing the ends of a piece of woven fabric, creating a lacy edge as far back as the ancient Babylonians and Assyrians. Later macramé was worked separately and attached to both household items and garments as a trim in Arab and African countries. By the Victorian era, entire items were made of macramé. The word macramé is thought to be of Arabic origin from the word miqrama, meaning fringe or from the word makramiyya, meaning striped towel, ornamental fringe or embroidered veil.

Many cultures have a history of knot-tying. The Incas in Peru had no written language but developed a method of knot-tying called quiqu to send messages and to record history. Knotted items in Egyptian tombs have been discovered and dated to be 3,500 years old. British and American sailors knotted to fill long hours at sea and then used the belts, hammocks and bottle covers they had made for bartering when they went ashore. In the 1970s, macramé became a popular craft for use in apparel and household items.



Courtiers facing Sargon, from the citadel of Sargon II, Throne Room, Khorsabad, Neo-Assyrian, c. 720-705 BCE
Image Credit: https://tatter.org/a-brief-history-of-macrame/

Macramé Basics

Materials and Tools

Basic tools and materials are needed for macramé. They are generally available from variety stores, craft shops, supermarkets or hardware stores.
You will need:

- Cord
- Scissors
- T-pins or U-pins
- Rubber bands or bobbins
- A working surface such as a knotting board
- Measuring tape or ruler
- Household glue



Cord

Fiber Content

Cords for macramé can be classified as natural and man-made.

- Natural cords are made from plants such as cotton, flax, hemp, jute, sisal, raffia, manila, linen, wool and silk.
- Man-made cords include the following synthetic materials: rayon, nylon, plastic, polypropylene, polyethylene, fiber-wrapped wire, etc.

Cord Construction

- Cords that are twisted from two or more pieces of fiber are said to be a specific ply. A cord made by twisting three lengths of fiber together is three-ply. A five-ply cord will have five pieces of fiber twisted together. The number of plies to a cord has no bearing on its size.
- Some cords are braided. Polypropylene is often found as a solid braid or with a hollow center. Venetian blind cord is an example of a braided cord.

Diameter and Weight
Cords are measured according to diameter and weight. Diameters vary from three-thirty seconds of an inch and smaller to three-fourths inch and larger. Cords may be sold by the foot, yard or pound, depending upon the supplier.

Proper Use
Take care to select the right cord for each item to be made.

- Cords that are very slippery will not hold knots.
- Items to be used outdoors should be made of materials that can withstand the elements.
- If the item is to be washed, everything used on it also should be washable.
- Weight bearing items such as pot slings, plant hangers, hammocks, etc., should use cord that will not stretch out of shape when weight is added.

Precautions
Some cords, such as baling twine, can have a rough texture and be hard on bare hands. When working with such material, gloves should be worn.

Persons with allergies sometimes have been sensitive to jute cord fibers, dyes or chemical treatments. Eye irritations may be caused by some cords as they fray. Working outside may help. If allergy symptoms occur, an alternate cord type should be used. If irritations continue, consult a physician.

Scissors
Utility shears or heavy-duty scissors should be used to cut heavy cord. If plied cords are very difficult to cut, they can be untwisted at the cutting point and one ply cut at a time.

Pins
T-pins are used to hold cords in place on working surfaces. They are heavier and larger than regular pins or dress pins and do not bend easily. U-pins are good for holding heavy cords and bars or sticks that hold the working cords in place. They are available where upholstery materials are sold.

Rubber Bands or Bobbins
Rubber bands are used to bundle long lengths of cords for easier handling. A thick, pure rubber band will withstand repeated use.

Bobbins hold long lengths of cord and keep the excess cord easier to contain. They can be made from a heavy weight cardboard or from wood. Commercial bobbins are available at weaving supply stores in plastic and wood.



Image Credit: https://www.fiberartistsupply.com/bobbins-for-weaving/

Knotting Board

A knotting board has to be thick enough to support work but porous enough to have pins inserted in it. Some suitable boards are insulating material, fiberboard, cork board or a thick slab of foam rubber. Cover the board with paper marked off in one-inch squares to help keep the cords and knots even. Knotting boards also are sold commercially at craft supply stores.

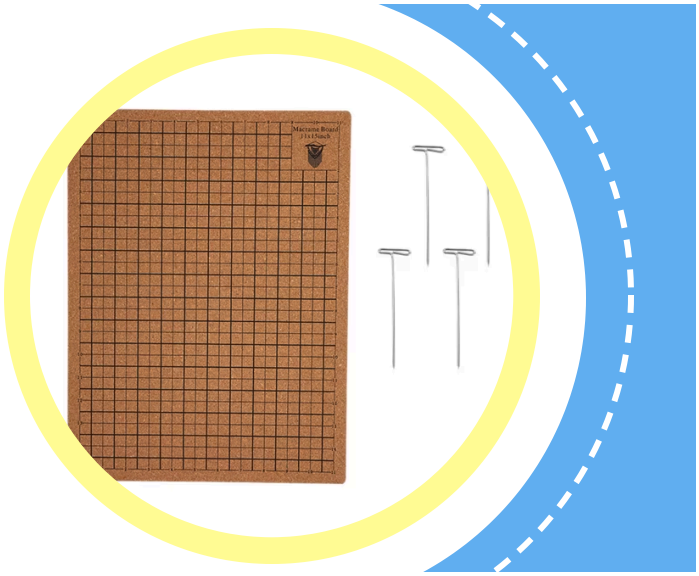


Image Credit: https://www.walmart.com/ip/DIY-Knitting-Craft-Large-Macrame-Board-Set-for-Knotting-Braiding-and-String-Art-for-Handmade-Accessories-and-Home/20216507121?wmlspartner=wlpa&selectedSellerId=102665566



Measuring Tape or Ruler

Use a measuring tape or ruler to measure the specific lengths of cord needed and the length or size of the item as it is being tied.

Glue

Glue is used to prevent fraying of the cord ends and to secure various knots in completed items. White glue that dries clear and pliable is recommended.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are used in patterns so that individual knot names do not need to be repeated. Here are some abbreviations:

ask.....alternating square knot
ddhh.....diagonal double half hitch
dhh.....double half hitch
hdhh.....horizontal double half hitch
hk.....half knot
hc.....holding cord

jk.....Josephine knot
lh.....lark's head knot
ok.....overhand knot
rlh.....reverse lark's head knot
sk.....square knot
vdhh.....vertical double half hitch

General Macramé Techniques

Some techniques are used whether you are making a very simple or a difficult item.

Measuring Cords

- Decide what the length of the finished product will be.
- Multiply this length by eight. (NOTE: For belts or items where the working cords are not folded in half; multiply the desired length by four.)
- Cut the required number of cords this length.

Bundling Long Cords

Easy-pull bundle:

- Hold the cord about twelve inches down from top, with the cord laying flat across the palm of your hand.

- Slide the bundle off of your hand and rubber band it in the middle.

Butterflies:

- Wrap a cord around your thumb and little finger in a figure-eight pattern.

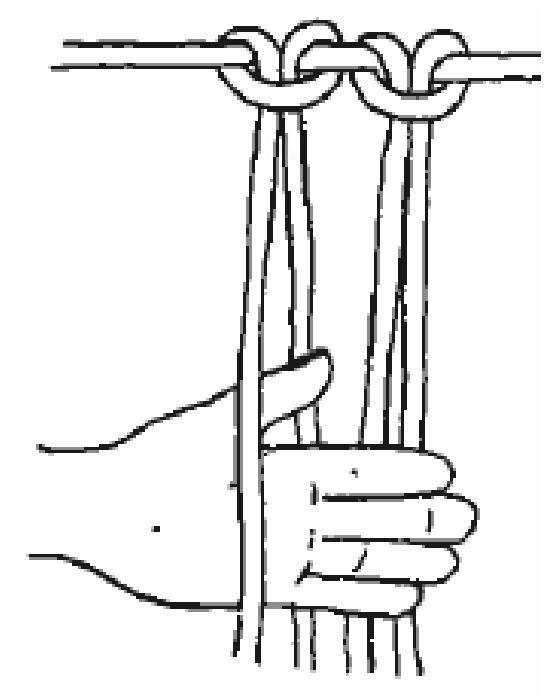
- Remove the butterfly from your fingers and wrap it in the middle with a rubber band.

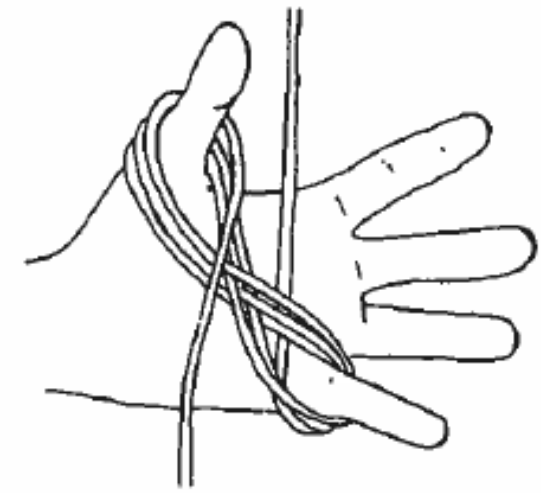
Bobbins:

- Wrap bobbins from the end of each cord up toward the point of attachment.

Finishing Ends

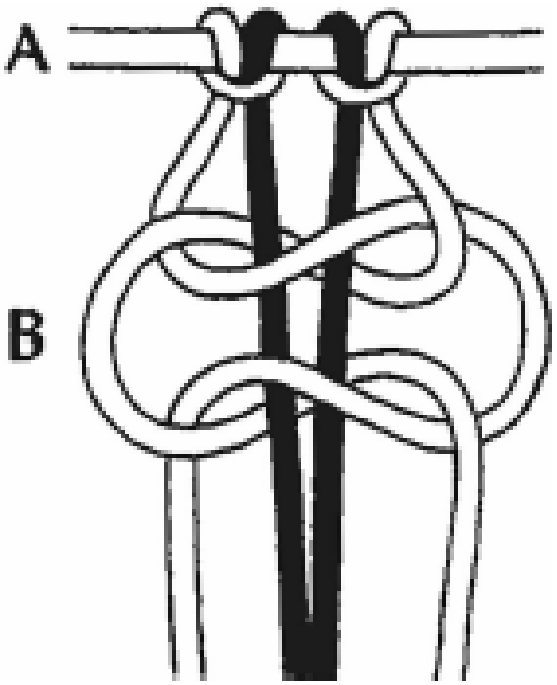
Ends of cords may be treated when you begin the project to prevent them from unraveling or fraying. You also may treat the ends when you have completed your project. Ends may be treated by dipping them into lacquer, glue, varnish or nail polish.





Terms

Terms used relate to the function of the cord being worked.



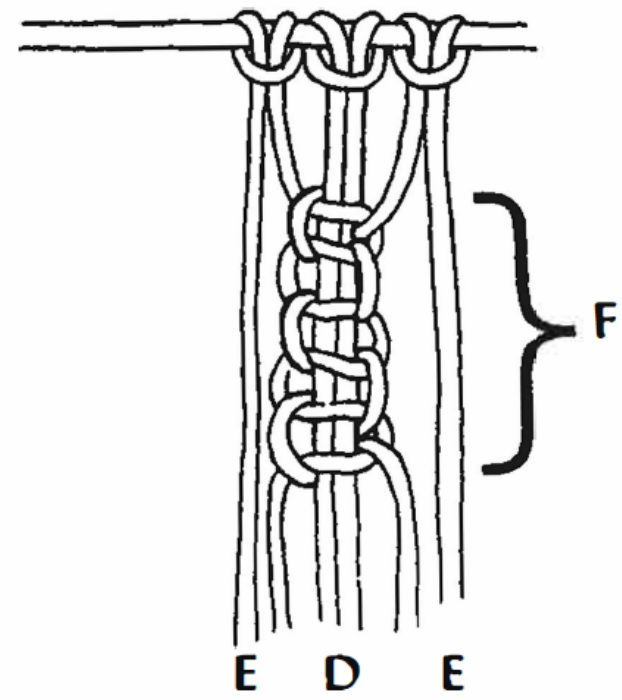
Mounting cord
Support on which the other cords are tied. It may not always be a cord. It may also be a ring, dowel or a buckle.

Knotting cord
Cords that are actually tied into a given knot.

Anchor cord
Cords that run through a knot that are not tied.

Holding cord or knotbearing cord
A cord on which other cords are tied.

Floating cords
Any cord within a design that are not knotted.



Sennit
A chain made up of a series of one kind of knot.

There are online tutorials and YouTube videos that will help you learn how to tie the various knots in macramé. Make sure you have permission from your parent/guardian before searching the Internet for resources or before doing research on your Macramé project. Your 4-H leader can also help you find reliable websites with knot tying tutorials. The variety of projects you can make with macramé are only limited by the materials you have and your imagination!