

Guide To Seed Beads

Seed Bead Shapes & Styles

The majority of seed bead shapes produced in Europe by Preciosa, and in the Far East by Matsuno, Miyuki, and Toho are listed below. Continuous innovation and attempts to out do the competition makes this is an ever changing area of bead manufacture with new shapes, shape refinements, and coatings or finishes released with increasing regularity.

Seed Bead Types & Shapes	
Type	Description
Berry Beads	Newly released by Miyuki this Berry bead is peanut shaped and is very similar to the Matsuno and Toho peanut bead, as well as the Preciosa Farfalle bead in all but name!
Bugle Beads	A long, thin, tubular shaped bead, either twisted or straight, which can be plain, two cut or hex cut. We have a separate article about Bugle Beads in our Guides & Information section
Cylinder Beads	Delica beads made by Mikuki, along with Treasures and Aiko made by Toho, are the highest quality seed beads in production today. They are made using state of the art machinery to give totally consistent shape and size. They have oversized holes, thin walls and are light weight, giving a beautifully uniform and detailed tile like finish to bead weaving and bead embroidery designs. Because of their lightness you also get more beads to the gram but their overall perfection means they are priced higher than comparably sized beads. Toho have also introduced hex cut cylinder beads. Mill Hill is an American company supplying their own brand cylinder beads, but the beads are actually manufactured by Toho. Preciosa also produce a delica and unica tube bead
Charlotte Beads	Similar to a Rocaille but they have part of the surface of the bead ground or cut, to produce a facet for added shine. Charlotte is specifically a term for single faceted beads, but can also be used when 2 or 3 facets are added to the bead to add more sparkle. Charlottes with 2 or 3 cuts to the surface are also known as two cut and three cut beads respectively. Rocailles beads are most popular in size 13/0 or 13° but are available in sizes 8/0 to 15/0
Corolla Beads	A Preciosa shape which has the appearance of a four petalled flower with a round central hole. Corollo also come in twisted lengths
Cube Beads	Cube shaped beads come in three sizes. Those produced by Toho have the added benefit of a diamond shaped hole ensuring the beads sit correctly in a design
Delica Beads	See Cylinder beads
Drop Beads	These beads are drop shaped, come in four sizes, and have a hole in the centre of the bead. They are also known as Fringe beads
Farfalle Beads	Double drop shaped beads named after the Italian word for butterfly, namely <i>farfalla</i> . Preciosa took the lead in their design and production with the Japanese introducing very similar bead designs, named as peanut and berry.
Fringe Beads	See Drop beads
Hex Cut Beads or Hexagon Beads	A six sided bead with regular facets
Macco Beads	A super thin walled bead with a short bugle bead like shape
Macrame Beads	Round beads specifically designed with larger holes to accommodate the thicker cords used in macrame
Magatama Beads	Drop beads but with an offset hole giving them the appearance of curved beads. Toho describes them as looking like a droplet of water. They are made by both Miyuki and Toho and are larger, wider and broader than standard drop beads. Longer Magatama beads resemble Czech glass dagger or spear beads save for the fact that the hole is cut on the slant so that the beads lean into each other in one direction when strung together
Oblong Beads	This shape seems to be unique to Preciosa and is basically an elongated slightly flattened square or cube bead with a central round hole. They are also available with a bevelled hole edge
Peanut Beads	Originally introduced by Matsuno but now also part of the Toho range this bead is peanut shaped and looks like two drop beads combined together. The Miyuki Berry seed bead is also very similar in shape as well as the Czech Farfalle bead which preceded both designs!
Rocaille Beads	Pronounced <i>roh kai</i> these were historically round, silver-lined seed beads with square holes. Today the term simply refers to all round seed

	beads of the type that most people readily associate with seed beading. These modern beads normally have round holes, but Toho have recently re-introduced Rocailles with square holes to provide greater accuracy when placing them in designs
Spiral Beads	A tubular bead which has been turned a stage further than a twist bead. Preciosa and Matsuno both manufacturer this shape of bead
Square Beads	Are square or cube shaped with a relatively large hole meaning they can fit on a narrow leather cord if required. Preciosa squares have a diamond shaped hole for better placement. They also provide twisted squares
Star Beads	A Preciosa shape which is similar in appearance to the Corolla but has six rounded petals forming a star shape with a round central hole. They also come in twisted lengths
Tila Beads	A square flat bead with two holes running in parallel made by Miyuki
Three Cut Beads	These beads with three random cuts creating a lot of reflective surface sparkle but with quite an irregular look to them
Triangle Beads	Triangular shaped beads with triangular shaped holes ensuring the beads sit correctly in a design. Hole size also means they can be used on leather cord. Toho have introduced a new variant of the triangle bead which has sharper more defined points. Preciosa also manufactures twisted triangles
True Cut Beads	A one cut bead in sizes other than 13/0 or 13°
Two Cut Beads	These beads have two random cuts creating more reflective surface and therefore added shine and extra sparkle

Seed Bead Sizes

Regardless of country of manufacture seed beads do have a uniform guideline for sizing, though the origins of those guidelines have become clouded. There are two schools of thought:

1) The size of the bead is based on the size of the metal rods or mandrel used in forming the beads 2) The size refers to the number of seed beads that sit end to end in a row over an inch (2.5cm) in length. Meaning, for example that there should be 10 size 10/0 or 10° seed beads in an inch.

Both options are historically feasible but time has now made both options outdated. With seed bead production now a highly automated process the mandrel no longer has a place in the production process, and in terms of beads per inch this may well have held true when beads were hand-cut and an average was used. However, with today's modern manufacturing methods and machine cutting, there tends to be closer to 16 beads per inch at size 10/0 or 10°, and the other sizes are just as inaccurate. Measurements are now further complicated because seed bead sizes vary slightly between manufacturer, with Japanese beads tending to be slightly larger than Czech beads of the same given size. Add to this the fact that surface coatings and finishes also increase the physical size of a bead and the whole process seems ripe for a new universal standard of measurement!

Seed beads are classified with a number that relates to their size, and whilst there is doubt as to their actual size the most important thing to remember is that the smaller the bead number the larger the bead. The most common size is an 11/0 (approximately 1.8mm to 2.2mm wide depending on manufacturer), but seed beads can range from a size 3/0 to a very tiny grain of sand like size of 24/0. The 0 here is pronounced *aught*. This number is based on the fact that, historically, bead manufacturers used to refer to the *standard sized* beads that they made in the largest quantities as size 0 or null. Smaller size beads such as a 10/0 were therefore beads that were 10 times smaller than the size 0 or null bead. So for example size 14/0 is smaller than 11/0. Aughts are denoted by a slash and a zero, or a degree mark, so size 11 is written 11/0 or 11°.

Seed Bead Size Conversion

Due to the differing manufacturing processes, coatings and finishes employed in seed bead production these measurements can only ever be an approximation.

Seed Bead Size Conversion			
Aught Size	Millimetre Size	Beads Per Inch	Additional Notes
Seed Beads 6/0 or 6°	3.3 mm	10	
Seed Beads 7/0 or 7°	2.9 mm		
Seed Beads 8/0 or 8°	2.5 mm	13	
Seed Beads 9/0 or 9°	2.2 mm	15	
Seed Beads 10/0 or 10°	2.0 mm	16	
Seed Beads 11/0 or 11°	1.8 mm	19	
Seed Beads 12/0 or 12°	1.7 mm	20	Including Miyuki Delica and Toho Treasure or Aiko 11/0 or 11°
Seed Beads 13/0 or 13°	1.5 mm	27	
Seed Beads 14/0 or 14°	1.4 mm	24	

Seed Beads 15/0 or 15°	1.3 mm	25	
Seed Beads 16/0 or 16°	1.2 mm		Special Order or Vintage Seed Beads Only
Seed Beads 18/0 or 18°	1.1 mm		Special Order or Vintage Seed Beads Only
Seed Beads 20/0 or 20°	1.0 mm		Special Order or Vintage Seed Beads Only
Seed Beads 22/0 or 22°	0.9 mm		Special Order or Vintage Seed Beads Only

Seed Bead Coatings & Finishes

The table below presents the more common coatings and finishes from the four main seed bead producers. As is the case with bead shapes and shape refinements, the coatings and finishes that are applied to beads are another area where continuous innovation and attempts to out do the competition come into play.

Seed Bead Finishes	
Finish	Description
Alabaster	A dense translucent milky white or tinted finish
Aurora Borealis or AB	An iridescent rainbow effect finish applied to the surface of the seed beads
Ceylon	A pearl lustre surface finish or inside colouring of opalescent beads
Dyed	A seed bead that has been surface dyed to a secondary colour
Galvanised	A coloured surface coating or plating with a metal appearance
Black Lined	A black coating applied to the inside wall of a transparent or coloured seed bead adding depth of colour
Brass Lined	A brass like coating which reflects a brass light when applied to the inside wall of a transparent or coloured seed bead
Bronze Lined	A bronze like coating which reflects a brown light when applied to the inside wall of a transparent or coloured seed bead
Copper Lined	A copper like coating which reflects a reddish light when applied to the inside wall of a transparent or coloured seed bead
Silver Lined	A silver like coating which reflects light when applied to the inside wall of a transparent or coloured seed beads
Frost	Matte frosted beads typically in bronze, gold or rainbow finishes
Iris	An amazing iridescent coating when applied to dark opaque seed beads
Lustre	A transparent bead with a subtle pearl, silver, or gold surface finish producing a soft reflected light
Marbled	A recent Toho seed beads innovation taking an opaque bead and giving it a marbled surface coating. They are also available as gilded marble with a further surface coating of uneven gilding over the marbled surface
Matte	The seed beads are etched at a microscopic level producing a matte finish that does not reflect light
Metallic	A shiny metal surface coating or plating over an opaque or transparent base giving the appearance of metal, typically bronze or gunmetal
Opal	A translucent seed bead lined with silver or gold
Opaque	Seed beads that are solid in colour
Pearl	An opaque seed bead given a pearlised surface coating
Rainbow	An iridescent coating on the outside of either an opaque or transparent bead
Satin	Seed beads made from translucent low lustre glass
Stripe	Seed beads made with two or more glass colours
Translucent	Glass seed beads that allow diffused light to pass through them
Transparent	Glass seed beads that are see through even when coloured. With lighter colours these beads look almost clear

As with any applied coatings and finishes there is the possibility of fading through long exposure to sun light, or wear through day to day use. However this is now far more likely with cheap seed beads from India and China than with the four main seed bead manufacturers. They have all added a final firing stage into their process to ensure their coatings and finishes are as durable as they can be. As has been the case throughout history the formulas and processes used in glass production remain a closely guarded secret.

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