

Loop Braiding Tutorial

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for the Braids and Bands on-line discussion group of the Braid Society

Part 2: Spiral Braids — Introduction, and 4-loop instructions



Spiral braids of 4, 6, and 8 loops—silk and cotton knitting yarn, embroidery floss, gold rayon floss

Spiral loop braids are compact, round braids, made in a very different manner than square loop braids. They are known from the 15th C English loop braiding manuscripts, and were probably done elsewhere in the world as well. The classic version is an 8-loop braid—called the “lace bend round of VIII bowes” in the old manuscripts. A version with 16 loops was also described, to be made by two braiders working together on the same braid.



8-loop spiral braids—silk twist buttonhole thread, and cotton knitting yarn

The basic braiding move for all the Spiral braids is the same as the one in the Two-Loop Braid. *[shown in detail in Part 1]* In the Spiral Braids this move occurs between other pairs of fingers—never between the two index fingers.

4-loop Spiral Braid

In the 4-loop Spiral Braid, these
two pairs of fingers exchange loops:

**Right index with Left middle
Right middle with Left index**

The loop exchanges *criss-cross* each other—this is basic to all the Spiral braids.

Right and left-handed braiders exchange the same loops. However they will pull them in opposite directions:

Left loop through right for righties; right loop through left for lefties.
[See part 1 for a detailed photo-sequence of this move.]

The new element with 4 loops is that now the middle fingers are involved, as well as the index fingers.

BRAIDING PROCEDURE FOR THE 4-LOOP SPIRAL BRAID

1. Right index finger and Left middle finger exchange loops*.

-----TIGHTEN LOOPS (pull loops apart *widely*) -----

2. Right middle finger and Left index finger exchange loops*.

-----TIGHTEN LOOPS (pull loops apart *widely*) -----

REPEAT STEPS 1 and 2

*Exchange loops by passing one through the other, as in the 2-Loop Braid.
Left loop through right for right-handers; Right loop through left for left-handers



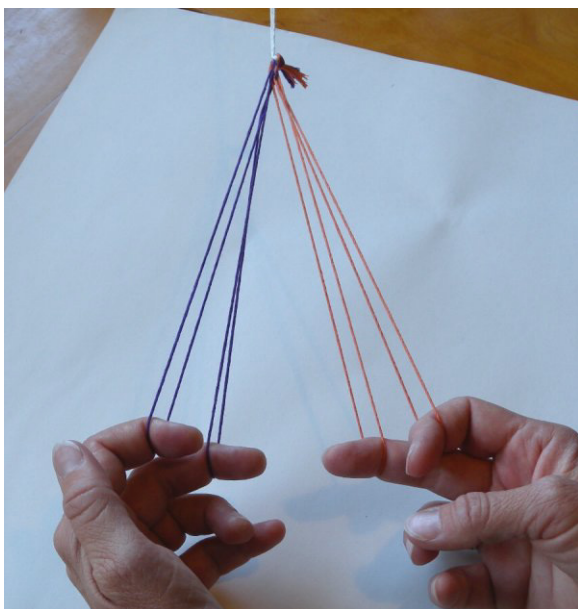
Cut 2 lengths of a dark color, and 2 lengths of a light color. (16 -24" or 40-60cm)
Fold all in half together, and tie the ends in an overhand knot.

Fasten a header-cord to the loop-bundle
(as shown in part 1).



Attach it to a firm point at a comfortable height for braiding

This should be between the level of waist and shoulders. Standing or sitting are both fine—use an upright chair to sit in, as you will need to lean forward when spreading loops apart to tighten.



Index fingers and middle fingers hold one loop each.

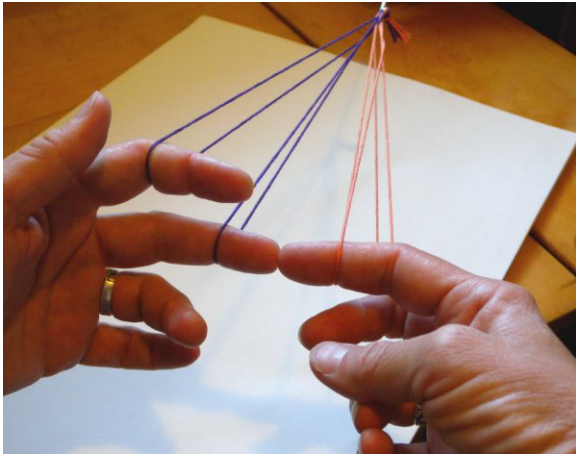
Start with both dark loops on one hand; both light loops on the other. Colors will have switched hands after each braiding cycle.



Don't worry if the strands are twisted/ tangled at the top of the loop bundle. This will not show after a few cycles of braiding.

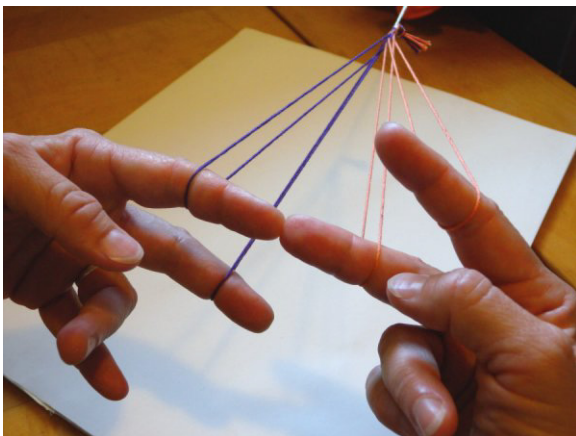
Before you start braiding, it's a good idea to practice the sequence of these braiding moves by tapping together the fingers that will exchange loops.

Include the tightening move—spread your arms wide apart between each tap of the “loop-exchanging” fingers. This might seem silly, but it can really help make the moves seem more natural once you start braiding.



1st tap right index and left middle fingers.

(Then separate hands as if to tighten loops.)



2nd tap right middle and left index.

(again spread arms apart as if to tighten loops.)

Tap this sequence a couple of times before starting the braid, spreading arms apart between each tap.

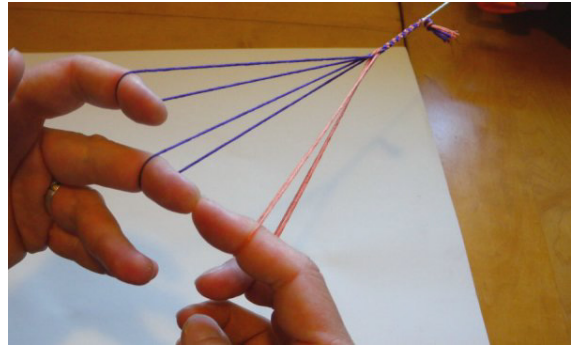
The middle finger and index finger will alternate in being the “loop-pullers.”

They will both do the 2-loop braid move—lay their loop onto a finger of the other hand, then pull that other finger's loop through, leaving their original loop behind.

Start braiding after you're used to the alternating sequence of moves.

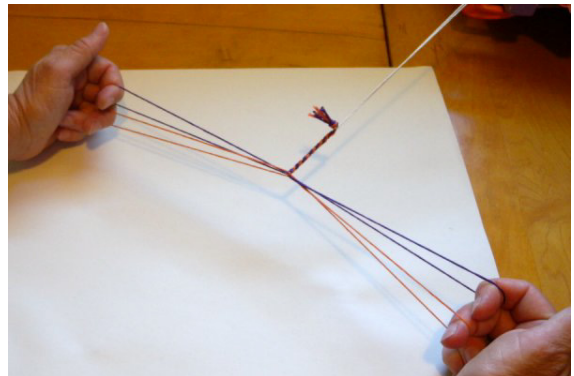
One hand has the dark loops, the other has the light loops.

1st step: Right index and Left middle exchange loops.



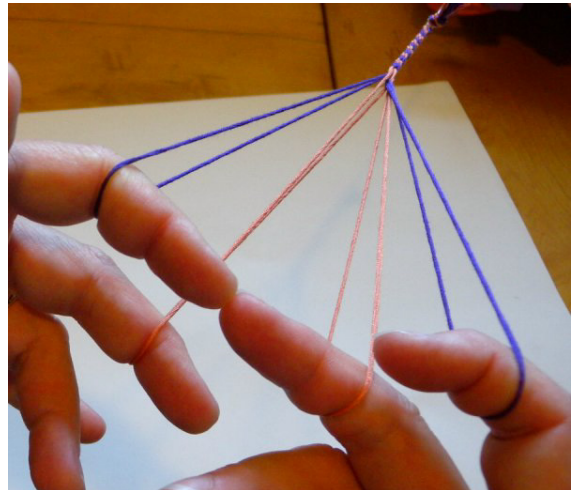
Tighten in a wide arc, and rock/ repeat to beat the fell. Don't jerk the loops—keep a smooth, even tension.

(The loop colors are starting to switch sides.)



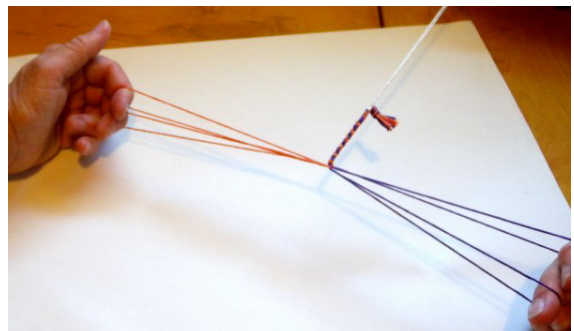
2nd step: Right middle and Left index exchange loops.

Now dark and light loops have switched hands.

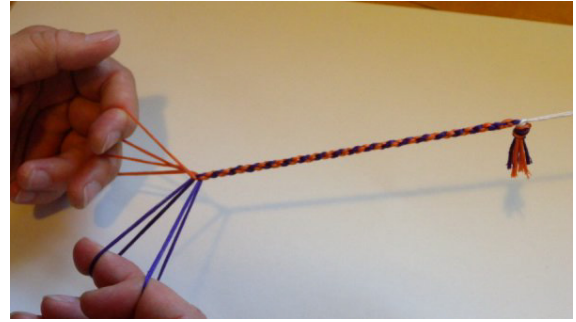


Tighten widely, and rock/ repeat

Keep repeat steps 1 and 2, tightening after each exchange of loops.



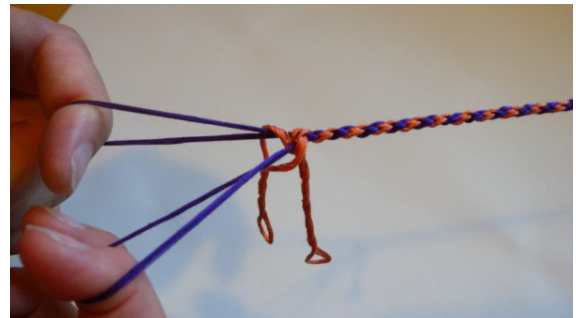
When you are nearing the end of the braid, decide *how* you want to end it.



You can finish by dropping the loops and tying the ends into an overhand knot.

Another option is to finish with a couple of 2-loop braids as shown below.
(Start these sooner than I did here! These loop-ends are too short)

Drop 2 of the 4 loops, and make a 2-loop braid with the other two loops.



When you finish the first mini-braid, drop those loops, and pick up the two loops you left behind. You may have to tug on them if they are baggy or a bit stuck in the first 2-loop mini-braid.

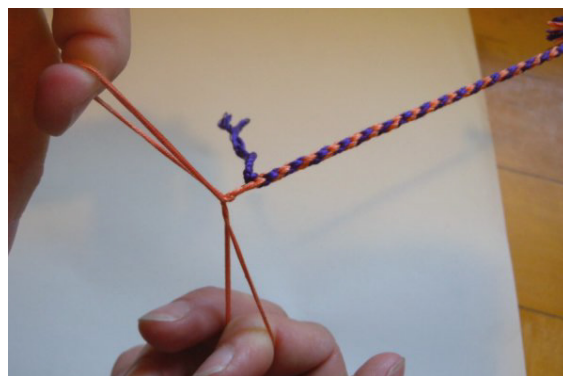


Straighten them out (they will probably be twisted), and braid them.



I could have chosen to join the 2-loop braids back together into one spiral braid near the bottom, forming a loop in my braid.

(If I had started the mini-braids with longer loop-ends!)



Instead, I just braided them all the way down, and tied them both together—another way to form a loop. A loop is often a handy thing to have at one or both ends of a braid—for attaching to a key ring, belt loop, using as a bracelet closure, etc.



Notes:

Spiral braids need firmer tightening than square loop braids.

I hesitate to say that, though, because most newcomers to loop braiding tighten much too hard! If you get sore fingers with loop braiding, it means you are tightening with too much force.

The key to good tensioning with loop braiding is to spread the loops apart widely, rather than to pull extra hard. Loop-exchange braids like these Spiral braids do require some firmness, though. Pull in a smooth arc all the way to the sides—til the loops form a straight line from one hand to the other. Don't jerk the loops to tighten. Instead 'rock' the tightening move—repeat it once or twice with even tension, before bringing your hands back to start position. This is the equivalent of 'beating the fell' in weaving.

If you have back, shoulder, or neck problems, don't use extra-long loops, and be sure to take breaks and stretch (good advice for anyone). Attach the header cord at a height between shoulders and waist.

I haven't yet taught this braid to children, but I think it would be a good one for 10-year-olds and up.

Other patterns:

Other patterns than the spiral can be made using this same braiding procedure, depending on how you set up your colors at the start of the braid.

Lengthwise stripes are formed on opposite sides of the braid when a ***pair of fingers that exchange loops*** hold loops of the same color.



If **Right index and Left middle** both hold orange loops, the braid will have 2 orange stripes, down opposite sides of the braid.

If the *other* two fingers that exchange loops (**Right middle and Left index**), both hold purple loops, the braid will have 2 purple and 2 orange lengthwise stripes.



In the lower sample, one pair of loop-exchanging fingers held purple loops.

The other pair of loop-exchanging fingers held one green and one orange loop, so there are green and orange 'polka dots' on two sides of the braid, bordered by the purple stripes.

The braiding method imparts a slight twist to the braid. This is camouflaged by the Spiral surface pattern. But when you make the lengthwise stripes pattern, you will see a long, gradual twist in the braid, imparted by the half-turn in one direction that the loops get each time they come through another loop.

In the 2-loop braid, that half-turn was necessary, or no braid would form. In the Spiral braids, the half-turn is optional. If you don't want the braid to twist, pull the transferring loops through the "passive" loops *without* turning them. There are various ways to accomplish this.

In all of them, your active “pulling finger” will grab onto the transferring loop from *within* that loop—in other words, it will go through that loop first, before hooking it. The finger would *not* go over the loop to be pulled, and hook down onto it from above (the way you learned for the 2-loop braid). Nor would it go *under* the loop and hook *up* onto it from below—that is just another way to turn it.

I usually turn the loops, myself, since I tend to like that slight twist in the striped pattern—I think it shows off the stripe:



The eyelet/ loop at the top of this braid is made with two little stretches of two-loop braids, like the loop I showed at the end of the braid in my photo-sequence.

In Part 3, I'll show a method for starting braids with an eyelet/loop, and with no loose ends at the top of the braid. I'll be demoing it with the 6-loop Spiral braid, using little 3-loop braids for the eyelet. You can make a 4-loop braid the same way, using 2-loop mini-braids to form the eyelet, as in the photo above.

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<http://loopbraider.wordpress.com/>