

What Is; - Kumihimo

Kumihimo is the Japanese art of braiding.

All different cultures around the world have their own histories of braid and cord making, using different methods and equipment, but Kumihimo refers specifically to the range of Japanese methods.

Japanese braids come in many different varieties, in a wide range of different styles of decorative and practical braids, from flat bands, to cords of different shapes and sizes.

Within Kumihimo, there are several sets of equipment used to create braids, including;

Marudai - Braiding Stool / Round Braiding Stand - makes round, square, hollow, flat and other braids - generally up to 32 tama (bobbins)

Takadai - High Braiding Stand - used often with over 100 tama to create complex, mostly flat braids, often with complex woven patterns and layers

Kakudai - similar to a Marudai, but braids are worked upwards, pulled up over a pulley system.

Karakumidai - a smaller stand used to create flat braids or sashes based on diamond patterns.

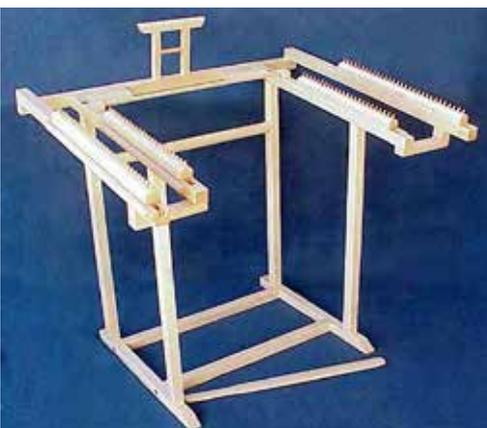
With each of these stands, yarn is wound onto weighted bobbins (tama) and a counterweight is hung from the braid, to balance and tension the braid.

The moves made with the bobbins (and therefore how the threads interlace) are what creates different braid structures or shapes. Braids can be completely flat, round, square, hollow and almost any other shape, just by changing the order and direction bobbins are moved in.

Different colours and textures of yarns used to create decorative effects within these structures.



Marudai



Takadai

Karakumidai

Kakudai

Braids were traditionally used as ties, belts and laces - most notably used to decorate and lace together the panels of Samurai armour, and also still used as a tie or belt around the Obi of a traditional Kimono outfit.

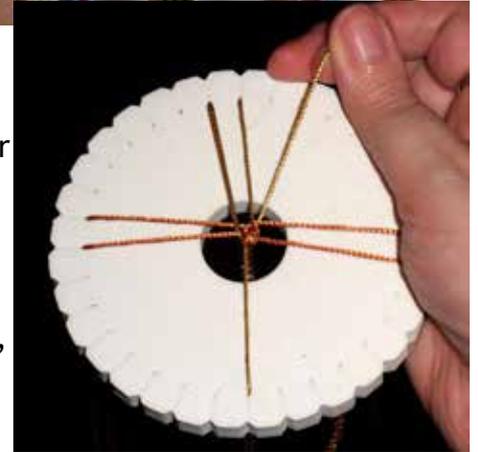
Fibre / Textile Braids

Traditionally braids were made using various fibres, primarily silk - textile braids give a gorgeous variety of colours and textures and are very versatile. Any fibre can be used however, even wire, although some are easier to handle than others - combining thick and thin, smooth and harsh, as well as different colours can give great effects.



Beaded Braids

In recent years beaded versions of these braids have become popular - beads can be threaded onto the warp threads themselves, or onto separate threads to be interwoven and worked alongside the warps. They can be woven in as the braid is made, or stitched on afterwards. Adding beads in, gives even more potential for pattern creating within the braids. You can use beads on any braid structure, but some are better suited to using beads than others.



Braiding on a Disk

Braiding on a solid foam disk, is a modern development, as a portable version of the Marudai, and most braids that can be done on a Marudai can be done on a disk (and vice versa).

When using a disk, the slots in the disk usually give you the tension (if they become loose and no longer grip your thread - cut them deeper with a scalpel), to save having weighted tama. Plastic bobbins can be used if working with long thread. A counterweight can be used to clip onto the braid to change the tension if desired.

All you really need is some thread and the disk however - and you can make your own disc from cardboard.



More Info

Look out for books by any of the following authors; - Jacqui Carey & Catherine Martin (UK), Makiko Tada (Japan), Adrienne Gaskell and Giovanna Imperia (USA), Beth Kemp (Australia)

- **The Braid Society** - www.braidsociety.com - is an international society for people interested in any types of braids (not just Kumihimo) - they have resources available online and organise events.



Suppliers

www.careycompany.co.uk - www.beadsdirect.com -
www.spoiltrottenbeads.co.uk - www.thecrystalphoenix.co.uk -
www.totallybeads.co.uk - www.braidershand.com -
www.braidandbeadstudio.com - www.whatakknit.com -
www.itsalljuststring.com