

## Creating a Beaded Doll Head

By C. Pennington

### Supply list:

Doll

Scissors

Fabric in a color that matches or complements the beads of the hair

Seed beads, size 11 for very fine strands, up to size 6 depending on how thick you want the locks to look and how much you like to bead!

Beading thread

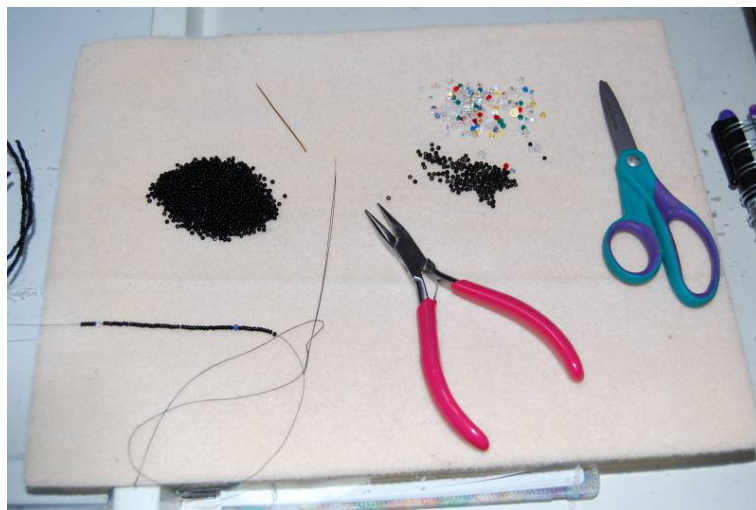
Beading glue

Plastic / fabric glue

Beading needles, have extras because you may well break some

Sharp sewing needle

Recently I came up with the idea to make a doll with beaded hair instead of the usual silken hair most fashion dolls have. My hope was that this would be faster and simpler than doing a full “reroot” where you take out the original hair the doll came with and attach new hair at the root of the doll head. Reroots take strong hands and at least 10 hours of work when you are good at doing them. I hate doing reroots! Beading the hair turned out beautifully, but took about 27 hours and whole lot more work! I think it was worth the effort and everyone who has seen the finished product agrees, but it certainly isn't the short cut I was looking for!



So you want to make a beaded doll head? Great! Here are a few questions to think about before you start:

- Is this doll male, female, somewhere on the spectrum, human, other?
- Is there a theme for your doll?
- What color hair do you want?
- Who is this doll for?

**Technique:**

To start with you need to cut off all the existing hair from your doll. This will leave you with a reasonably smooth surface and very little hair on the surface of the head.



Next take the fabric you have chosen and cut it into strips about a ½ inch wide and at the most 3 inches long. Take the strips and glue these to the dolls skull in one complete layer so that you cover the plastic of her head completely. Set the doll aside to dry.

Once the first layer of fabric has dried, add a second layer of fabric to the skull. This time you want to add your glue to the \*edges\* of the strips only, leaving unglued sections in the middle of the strips. The goal here is to create padding that you can sew into as you are creating your beaded hair strands. You want the strips to stick well enough to hold, but not so solidly that you can't get the needle through later. Set the doll aside to dry.



When the glue has dried check the head over to see if you need any other strips of fabric to sew into anywhere. If you do, repeat the above step until you are satisfied that you have enough padding to work with. You need to find a balance between padding the head and making the doll look like he/she is wearing a turban before you even start beading!

Now that you have your padding in place, its time to start beading! But first, a few questions about the hair itself:

- How long do you want the hair to be?
- Will it be one length all across the doll's head or will it have a style, and if so what kind?
- Will the hair be all one color, a random mix of colors, or have patches of color?
- If you have patches of alternating color, where will the different colors be?

Back to Technique:

Beginning at the base of the doll's skull near one ear, securely attach a length of beading thread approximately 24" long. The length of this thread can vary, what is important is that you have more than enough thread to go double the length of the "hair" strand you wish to make. The longer your starting thread, the more strands you will be able to do before you have to reload your needle with thread. But don't over do it! Too much thread and it will tangle and knot up fit to drive you mad, trust me!

The main technique I use in stringing the beads for hair is fairly straight forward. Fill your needle with beads, whatever color you are using, push them on to the thread, repeat until you have the desired length. Insert your needle back through the second to last bead in your strand, leaving the last bead off your needle. This lone bead will serve as your anchor bead to lock and hold all the other beads in place. Push your needle back up through all the other beads in the strand until you com out the last bead at the top of the strand. Tighten up the thread so that the strand is snug to the doll's skull. Tie the strand off and add a small drop of beading glue for security on the knot.

If you have enough thread to do an additional strand then insert your needle through the padding on the skull and bring it up and through at your established distance along the row you are working on.

This is the point at which you may want to switch needles. I found that, particularly using size 11 seed beads which don't fit over most sharp, yet strong, sewing needles, I needed to use a thin beading needle to bead the strands. Then because the padding is so thick, I needed to change to a very sharp sewing needle to get through the layers of fabric when setting my next strand point.

Working outward from the ear, attach hair strands in one line along the dolls skull every 1/4 to 3/8 inch. How close together you put the strands is up to you. The closer together you make them the denser the hair will be, the heavier the doll will on top, and the longer

all of this will take. This is my on going problem. I like really thick hair on people and dolls, so I invariably start out too thick and then back peddle as I figure out just how many strands I have already done and have left to do. In truth, the bottom third of the head does not need to be closely beaded as the upper layers will fall in and cover any gaps that appear.



Repeat and repeat and repeat until you are up to the crown of the doll's head.



At the crown of the head you get to make a choice. Here you can continue to add free floating strands or you can do as I did and fill in the crown with beads sewn directly onto the top of the doll head in what is sometimes called the “Lazy Stitch”. Sewing directly on to the skull allows you to give the doll the look of a part and finish off your hair style however you want.



Your final step is decoration. Here you can either leave the hair down for your client to play with or add additional items, beads, ribbons and gems to accents what you have created. With the doll pictured here I used light weight wire and twisted it around and through the beads to give her a crown of stars.



Don't forget to take a lot of breaks while you work to shake your hands out and rest your eyes!

Another thing to keep in mind is keeping track of your time for when you need to charge for you work. Normally I just note when I start working on a section of one of my dolls and then note when I end. With the beaded hair that didn't work. I kept losing track of time, forgetting to record my time and not knowing how to work in my breaks. I finally worked out a system where by I timed how long it took to do one strand, checked the timing to confirm the length and then locked that in as the per strand time. Then at the end of the process I counted up all the strands on her head and multiplied that number by the time it took to do one strand to get my finally total time to do her whole head.

Have a Beading good time! ☺

Kate