

Your First Beading Stash

Jean Campbell

Like stocking a pantry in your kitchen, shopping for your first beading stash is all about the staples. These core elements are the tools and supplies you'll always want on hand when you sit down to bead, and you'll continue to replenish them as your love for beading grows.

I didn't have much guidance when I started beading twenty-five years ago, so spent a lot of time and money on poor quality tools and beads. In the end, a lot of the jewelry I made tarnished, was uncomfortable, or broke. I realize now that if I'd spent my money more wisely, I might still be wearing some of those first creations.

If you're just starting a stash, take advantage of my bead buy blunders and follow this shopping list to get started stringing. It will definitely save you time and, at under \$250, probably some money, too.

Flush cutters: \$25

Used for cutting wire, this tool cuts wire with the flat side of its jaws toward the cut, so you end up with a flat (or flush) cut. I paid \$5 for my first cutters and they only lasted through a couple of projects. Invest in a pair of mid-price cutters—they'll last longer until you decide you're ready for a really good pair.

Chain-nose pliers: \$20

Chain-nose pliers have smooth, flat jaws that taper to a point, and are made especially for jewelry-making since they don't have serrated jaws. (Don't use the pair that was in your Dad's tool box!) These babies are invaluable for a beader, no matter what technique ends up becoming the favorite, so buy a sturdy, comfortable pair.

Round-nose pliers: \$20

These pliers have round, tapered jaws without any serrated edges, ideal to form perfect loops. A good, mid-price pair will do wonders for anyone's wirework. Make sure the tips meet together.

Crimping pliers: \$15

Crimping pliers are the only professional way for securing crimp beads to a wire. Their jaws have two notches: one collapses the crimp tube, the other shapes it. These have an added benefit—they work well to shape the coils of wrapped loops. Crimping pliers come in standard and "micro" crimp sizes.

Scissors \$10

A pair of 4" scissors is essential for snipping beading thread. For nylon beading threads, buy very sharp, pointed-end embroidery scissors. For FireLine, use the children's size Fiskars brand. You'll get a cleaner cut and won't ruin your embroidery scissors.

Beading mat: under \$10

These little squares of Velux fabric are lifesavers at the beading table. Placing your beads on them ensure that the beads don't roll, and make picking up beads with your needle easier than a hard work surface.

Beading wire: \$16

A 30' spool of .018 or .019 flexible nylon-coated 49-strand beading wire drapes like silk and doesn't kink, even though it's made of steel. A spool holds enough wire to string 15 necklaces or 36 bracelets, so is well worth the price.

Assortment of findings: \$30

If you want to make good, quality jewelry, use high-quality (never plated!) findings made of sterling silver, gold, brass, or copper. I suggest this starter list: 2" head pins, 6mm open jump rings, 2x2mm crimp tubes, ear wires, and a couple of really beautiful toggle clasps.

Your first bead stash: \$100

This is a no-brainer: buy beads that you love and want to wear. Steer clear of those second-hand plastic beads that won't last, and only purchase high-quality glass, pearl, stone, and precious metal beads. You don't need to go overboard—a strand or two of each, enough for a necklace or bracelets. My shopping list would include 4 and 6mm bicone and round Swarovski crystals, interestingly-shaped freshwater pearls, semiprecious stones in unique shapes, seamless round sterling silver beads, several Thai or Bali silver beads and spacers, and a few tubes of neutral (or to match your strands) seed beads. Keep refreshing this core group as your stash grows, and you'll find you're up for any beading challenge.



JEAN CAMPBELL writes and beads in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Check out her Wednesday blogs at www.beadindaily.com and visit her website, www.jeancampbellink.com.