



Selecting the Right Needle

We are often asked about the right needles to use for Native craft projects, from beading to sewing. Needles are tools, and we all tend to prefer different tools that work for us best. With needles you need to start by learning about sizes, lengths, and stiffness that work best for the common projects.

Beading: These needles are the longer, thin needles especially made for bead stringing projects or weaving beads on a loom. Beading styles include loom, wrapping, peyote, brick stitch, and earrings. They are long, so best used for these purposes. They also bend easily and sometimes break at the eye. Be sure to have spares around! When they become too bent they are hard to use. It is best to start with another one.

Beading needles are available in size 10, 12, 13, and 15. Size numbers are like nails and wires, the larger the number the smaller the diameter of the needle. Size numbers used by the English manufacturers relate to the bead sizes used in Czech beads. Size 10 needles work well with size 10 seed beads, 12 needles with size 11 and 12 beads, and so forth. The seed beads made in China and Japan have larger center holes so the size 10 beading needle will work with those beads. The needle needs to work with the size thread as well. Size D bonded Nylon thread will thread in a Size 10 needle, but gets tougher to thread in a size 12 needle. Size B Nylon thread works well in size 12 needles.

Standard beading needles are about 2 inches long, and there is an extra long size 12 available that is 3 inches long.

Sharps: These needles are thin, short needles, about 2 1/4 inch long. They are best used for all types of applique beading including lazy stitch, peyote, rosettes, and wrapping. They are stiffer than the beading needle but they too sometimes bend and break, so spares should be kept on hand.

Like the beading needles they are numbered according to the size of bead they can be used for. For example: a size 10 needle can be used for all size 10 or larger beads. The size 11 for size 11 beads and so forth. Remember, the larger the bead number, the smaller the bead size.

Sharps can be used for sewing into soft leather buckskin. Some crafters use the size 12 for doing earring designs. Again, you need to match the size thread for these as well, the thicker thread for the larger needles, and the thinner thread for the smaller needles.

Glovers: Glovers needles are stout needles made for sewing into and through leather. The front point is sharpened on the sides so that it cuts the leather as it goes through. Like beading needles, the larger the size number the smaller the needle. The sizes include 1, 3, 6, 8, and 10. The largest, size 1, has an eye large enough to thread regular flat simulated sinew thread. Usually sizes 1 and 3 are used to sew heavy leather and sizes 6 and 8 for more delicate sewing on soft buckskin. Up to size 6, a heavy Size F nylon thread can be used as well as cotton polyester threads and one or two split simulated sinew.

A size 10 Glovers needle, a type made for sewing on leather, is available to applique size 10 seed beads onto leather. It also can be used on any size large hole seed bead like the Chinese or Japanese made seed beads. Size 10 is 1 1/4 inch long and size 1 is 1 7/8 inch long.

Big Eye Needle: They come in 2 1/2 inches and 5 inch lengths. These are very good for bead stringing projects. The way you thread them is to open up the center of the needle and just pass your thread through. The needle is small enough to pass through the holes once when using size 11 seed beads, including the Delica beads. Excellent for doing jewelry stringing. Some crafters use it for doing loom work. It just can not be used when you have to sew into fabric or leather or pass through the bead several times.

