

Bobbin Lace Workshops – General Info

Basic Pillow Prep

Bobbin lace pillows can be round, square, or rectangular. They can be flat, somewhat domed in the center, or the workspace can be a round roller set in the center of the pillow. Each has its advantages. Round and small square pillows are more easily portable and use less space. While the large square and rectangular pillows provide more workspace for large projects. The roller pillow is especially useful for making long lengths of lace. The dome shape pillow makes the bobbins less likely to roll out of position as gravity helps hold them down.

Padding can be used but most foam pads are soft enough not to need padding. If padding is necessary add 1 to 2 layers of felt under the pillow cover.

The cover should be a non-slippery cotton fabric. Broadcloth or quilting cotton works well. It should be of a solid color that contrasts well with the color of thread you will be using.

Clean Pillow and Lace

Wash Your Hands

Dirt and hand oil can, over time, cause yellowish discoloration of your work. Your pillow can pick up some of this dirt and transfer this to the lace.

Cover Cloth

Keep your pillow covered when not in use.

While working a large piece of lace cover the portion not currently being worked. This helps keep pillow and lace clean and keeps it from being disturbed when not in use.

If you take your pillow to a demo, consider covering part or all of your work with Saran Wrap to allow people to see your work without touching it.

Divider Pins (Big head pins)

- Used to pin down cover cloth.
- Used to keep currently un-worked bobbins out of the way of your work. Pin each un-worked section.
- Used as placeholder pins in the lace pattern.

Pins (Small head pins)

“Silk” pins work well

Pins keep your threads in place while making lace.

Place pins at a slight angle from the body of your work. This keeps them out of your way. Too much of an angle will cause your work to warp as the threads have a tendency to ride up the pins.

Push the pins in about ½ way as you place them.

Always place the pin in the pinhole, not where it looks like the pin should go. Remember that later moves will help define the pattern. It may take a while before the lace looks “right”.

Thread

Bobbin lace can be done with regular sewing thread. But traditionally white lace thread of the size 50/20 is used.

Bobbins

There are many styles and shapes of bobbins available and collecting decorative bobbins is a popular hobby. But the decorative bobbins are not always the most useful for working lace. Be sure to pick bobbins you will be able to work with easily.

There are also many methods for moving the bobbins as you work -- Some people pick up each pair and move them methodically, some toss the bobbins from hand to hand as they work. Some people straighten and tighten their work after each stitch, and some do it at the end of each sequence. ... Each person comes up with the method that works best for them.

Bobbin Keepers (Crocheted strip)

Provides a place to secure the bobbins when the lace is not being worked,

Winding the Bobbins

Tie the thread to the bobbin with a slip knot.

If winding by hand the best method is to roll the bobbin along the thread. If you can afford it a bobbin winder makes things easier.

Wind all your bobbins in the same direction.

Tying Off the Bobbins

Tie off the bobbin with a half hitch. This keeps the thread from unwinding while you work and makes it easier to lengthen the thread as needed. Sometimes an extra twist is needed to help keep it from unwinding.

Pricking

This is the pattern that you follow to make the lace. It indicates where pins are to be placed and any unusual thread movement. Always keep an original copy of the pricking for future use. Photo copy it on to stiff paper or cover stock that will contrast with your thread.

Pin it onto the pillows working space.

Pricking Instructions

These are the directions that explain how to work the pricking or pattern. It lists what stitches you use for each bobbin pair and any unusual thread movements. The lines on the pricking are guides and do not indicate exactly where the thread will lay.

Moving the Bobbins

Everyone has their own style of picking up and moving the bobbins while working lace. You'll encounter several different methods as you read bobbins lace books and watch other doing their Bobbin lace. Keep an open mind and find the method that works best for you.

A Stand, Chair, Comfort

You don't need a special stand or chair but, you will need to be comfortable as you work or you will develop a terrible pain in your back and/or neck.

A good working position is the same position that you use for typing -- pillow top at elbow height when sitting up straight.

Starting the Work

Bobbin Pairs

Bobbins are usually used in pairs. Create a pair by unwinding a foot of thread from two bobbins. Tie those 2 threads together about an inch down from the cut ends of the thread.

To avoid tangling tie the pairs just before you hang them.
Later you'll create your pairs by threading one thread on 2 bobbins and hanging the midpoint of the thread on the starting pin.

Hanging Pairs

Most prickings have a "Set Up List" or "Hanging List". This list will indicate the number of bobbin pairs needed along with the **starting position** of each pair.

Place a pin in each of the pricking's starting positions. The number next to the starting position indicates how many pairs of bobbins to hang on that pin.

As a beginner it will probably be easier to pin through the knot but you should learn to work with the pairs them hung on the pin.

As you hang each pair it might be easier for the beginning bobbin lace maker to separate each pair with a divider pin.

When you have hung all your pairs lengthen or shorten each thread so that the bobbins all hang at the same level.

The pricking will also indicate which pair of bobbins is the **starting pair**. This will be the first pair you work with as you follow the pricking instructions.

Open vs Closed

Bobbin pairs can be hung either Open or Closed position.

- **Open position** is when a pair of threads start out hanging straight down from their starting pin.
- **Closed position** is when a pair of threads starts out crossed or twisted under the starting pin.

Many if not most lace patterns start with the pairs in the open position.

The pricking instructions will indicate if some or all of the pairs should start in the closed position, it will also indicate if the closed pairs should use the Cross or Twist stitch.

As you start each project be sure to check whether the pairs should be open or closed. The lace will unravel if you start it in the wrong position.

As You Work

Bobbin Pair Numbers

The pricking instructions usually list which type of stitch is to be worked on which bobbins for each sequence. The bobbins are always counted from the left side of your pillow, the left pair is #1, the pair to their right is #2, etc. As your work progresses the bobbins will change places but they are still counted from the left edge or side.

Lengthening the Threads

As you work the bobbins will hang higher on the pillow, when they get too high lengthen all the threads to bring them down to the starting position.

Additionally, some bobbins thread will be used more quickly than other, lengthen those threads as needed to keep them at a useful level with the other bobbins.

Removing the Pins

After you get 2 to 3 inches along the lace pattern you can begin to pull pins from the start of the lace. Always leave the most current 2 to 3 inches of the lace pinned at all time.

If you are working on a large project leave enough pins in to support your project, especially where you may have to join portions.

Finishing the Work

Tying Off the Lace

Many braid patterns end with stitches that “tie off” the pattern and prevent it from unraveling after the pins are pulled out.

If your pattern doesn't – Tie each bobbin pair in a square knot under its final pin.

The snipped off ends of the project can be hidden by weaving them into the lace or can be used to provide a decorative element. (i.e. left long and braided, twisted, etc.).

How you finish off your ends will depend on how you plan to use the piece. Remember to leave extra thread at the start of your piece if you want decorative fringe on BOTH ends of the lace.