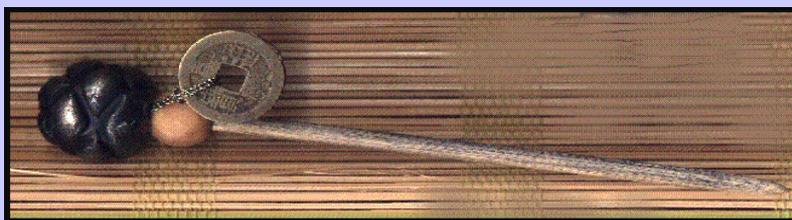


HAIRSTICKS

by Kathleen McLaughlin



Hairsticks are decorative items, whether you use them in your hair, place them in a potted plant or display them in a small vase on your dressing table. Because most of you know basic techniques for making beads and baubles, the intent of this article is to inspire you to attach any bead or flying object to a hairstick. Throughout this article the generic term "bead" will be used to refer to anything you are attaching to the end of the stick, but please don't limit your options to just beads!

Materials:

You have a number of options to choose as the basis for your hairstick. I have used all of the following:

- short knitting needles (especially those with points at both ends)
- chopsticks
- plastic hairsticks
- manufactured wooden hairsticks
- metal hairsticks (sometimes bent in a U shape)

The least expensive are chopsticks. Check out your local dollar store for bags of chopsticks, which usually contain 100 pairs for \$2.00. Refer to directions below for turning them into hair sticks.

I buy knitting needles at thrift stores for around \$.10 a pair. If you buy long needles, you can cut off the non-pointed end to shorten them.

I have found plastic and metal hair sticks at the dollar store and, if there's anything attached to the end, I simply remove it and have an unadorned stick ready for polymer clay embellishment.

The most expensive option, since they are usually made out of good wood, is plain wooden hairsticks. They are lovely and well worth the investment for personal use but may not be an option if you are selling your hair sticks.

Preparation:

Chopsticks need to be prepared before use. Decide on the length of your finished stick, taking into account the length of the object you are placing at the end, and cut off the stick. For purposes of discussion, "top" will refer to the end where you place your object, "bottom" will refer to the pointed end that goes into your hair.

With a sharp knife, trim the bottom of the stick to a soft point. Use sandpaper to smooth the entire stick, paying particular attention to the bottom. Most chopsticks are made out of bamboo and the grain runs lengthwise along the stick. Making a soft point rather than a sharp point at the bottom helps to keep the fiber from pulling up.

After sanding, coat the entire stick with shoe polish (colored or neutral), paste or wax, then buff. This helps to seal the fiber and prevent tearing. If you want your stick to be colored, dip it in any type of fabric dye, which the bamboo fiber picks up very easily, and then wax and buff.

Other options include painting or varnishing the sticks. I prefer a more natural-looking stick, so I use polishes and silk or fabric dyes.

The size of the bead hole dictates what size you will need the top of your stick to be. If you have beads you've already made, sand the stick down so the top is the same size as the bead hole.

If you haven't made the beads yet, you can cure them on the stick. Just remember to pop the beads off and glue them back on, so they are permanently attached to the hair stick.

The only sticks that can't go in the oven are the plastic ones. When using plastic, baby powder the stick and either build your bead on the stick or test your bead for size, then remove the bead and cure it.

After curing the bead, glue it back onto the stick. This is the method I use most often for all sticks, except the

metal U-shaped sticks where I have incorporated the metal into the beads.

After curing and polishing the bead, embellish the hairstick by adding Chinese coins dangling from a chain or ribbon, feathers, or anything else you can imagine.

Some other embellishment ideas to consider:

- Hand-formed polymer clay flower with leaves
- A small butterfly
- Crystal beads, trims or ribbon

