

Basic Fingerloop Braiding

Class Notes by Anpliça Fiore

A Brief History:

Fingerloop braiding has been documented as early as the late 12th Century. There are 24 actual extant pieces I've read about in my research that are dated from the 12th-15th Centuries. These pieces were all silk and they were all from London (2). The resulting cords were used as edgings for hairnets, clothes fasteners & as purse strings (1).



A couple of women in a 13th c. German fresco who may or may not be fingerloop braiders (4).



One braider and helper pictured in 1465 CE, from the Spanish altar piece "Historia de la Virgen Maria," attributed to Nicolas de Zahortiga (3).

The domestic chore of creating these cords has been also documented in art of the period. As seen in this art, this art was not limited to London or even England, but has been identified across Europe, and was possibly as far reaching as Japan (3).

You're probably thinking this is all fine and good, but how do you do it? Stay tuned, because that's coming up next!

How to Braid a Basic Cord:

- ❧ To start, you need to make the loops your finger will braid. (I usually make them long enough to be able to attach to my big toe. This is the longest braid I have had luck with keeping an even tension throughout.)
- ❧ Make 5 of these loops, and tie them together on the cut end of your string/yarn.
- ❧ Attach this bundle of string to a somewhat stationary item (big toe, tent pole, chair, etc.).
- ❧ Put one loop on the pinky & ring finger of both hands, and the 5th on either middle finger. It doesn't matter which hand.
- ❧ With the middle finger of the hand that does not have the extra loop, grab the opposite hand's pinky loop.

- ✘ Walk the loops down on the 2-loop hand's fingers. The loop on your ring finger goes on the pinky & the middle finger loop goes down to your ring finger.
- ✘ Repeat with the opposite hand.
- ✘ Once you get good at this, you can grab the bottom loop of the opposite hand with your pointer fingers, then walk the loops back down to your pinkies.

After mastering this basic braid, there are tons of variations to try. This includes twisting the loops as you pick them up with your other hand or even going through other loops to pick up the bottom one. The variations are endless.

For period patterns, check out www.fingerloop.org. Mistresses Rhiannon & Azza have done a wonderful job with transcribing almost 30 period patterns.

Some things to keep in mind:

1. Keep as even a tension while you braid as you can. Otherwise you will really see the difference in your final cord. It is really easy to have ultra-tight braids at the end and loose ones at the beginning.
2. Once you start a cord, it is really hard to stop before your length is done. Try to have a time when you will have minimal interruptions and you won't need your hands for other things!
3. Materials can range from silk floss to yarn to regular embroidery floss. I've also heard of people using leather. Be creative!
4. The images above have it right with needing a second set of hands sometimes! Having a friend around to help with tension by making sure each loop is snug before going onto the next one is nice. I usually use the foot my braid is not attached to for this same purpose!
5. Extant pieces are mostly all one color, but feel free to use as many as you'd like.

SCA Uses:

I've used cording I've made in this manner for a variety of purposes. The great thing about them is that since they already have a good sized loop on one end, they can be strung together to make longer cord very easily. Some purposes are:

- ✘ Corset Ties
- ✘ Tacky Garb Belt
- ✘ Decoration on Fighters Favor
- ✘ Sock Garters
- ✘ Sword Lanyards

Resources:

1. Fingerloop Braiding - <http://www.stringpage.com/braid/fl/fingerloop.html> - Part of *Phiala's String Page* by Sarah Goslee.
2. Fingerloop Braiding - <http://www.bumply.com/Medieval/braiding01.html> - by Andy Goddard.
3. Fingerloop Braids - <http://fingerloop.org/> - by Mistress Rhiannon y Bwa (Lois Swales) & Mistress Azza al-Shirazi (Zoe Kuhn Williams). Also available in print in the *Complete Anachronist* #108.
4. L-M Braiding Research & Information Center - <http://www.lmbric.org/> - "A newsletter for all who are interested in the loop-manipulation braiding technique" Edited by Masako Kinoshita.