

All About Cube Beads

There is quite a lot to know about these relatively new products. Many retailers are just beginning to get the full line of cube beads and to realize their potential for beadwork designs.

After the publication of my first book, I heard from many readers who wanted to make my designs, but couldn't find a local vendor who carried the beads. Most of the questions I had from readers were about size and availability.

To purchase any kind of cube, the fastest way is to go on line and search, for example, for "buy 3mm cube beads." I include the word "buy" at the beginning because this eliminates any news or articles about 3mm cubes beads and takes me straight to the vendors. You will find any on-line dealer who sells these, and there are quite a few. But I also want to encourage everyone to visit their local stores and ask them to carry cube beads. This is the best way to ensure that they will be available in the future.

There are two primary manufacturers of cube seed beads. They are Toho and Miyuki, both Japanese companies. Toho refers to their beads as cubes, and Miyuki refers to their beads as squares. In this book, I use the word cube to refer to either of these beads. I use beads from both sources.

You can distinguish these two manufacturers' beads by looking at them. Toho beads have a square hole and slightly rounded corners along the linear edges; Miyuki beads have a round hole with sharper edges and corners.

The Miyuki line includes square beads in sizes called 1.8 mm, 3 mm, and 4 mm, sometimes also called 3.5 or 3.8. The Toho line includes cube beads in sizes called 1.5 mm, 2 mm, 3 mm, and 4 mm. These are all in the "seed bead" category and can be found in the seed bead section of catalogues and on-line stores.

Buying Cube Seed Beads

Unfortunately, buying cubes is kind of like buying a 2-by-4 from the lumber store, which doesn't actually measure two inches by four inches. The millimeter measurement is just a standard used to assure that you buy the same product every time. This is true with both cube manufacturers.

In working with these beads, I follow my practical experience. There is very little difference between the Miyuki 1.8m square and the Toho 1.5mm cube. I use them interchangeably. So far, there is no bead made by Miyuki that is the same size as the Toho 2 mm cube.

You will also find a bit of variability in the sizes of all the cubes because the manufacturing process creates differences. For example, beads that are tumbled decrease slightly in size and beads that are coated increase slightly in size. And then there are some size variations that I find unexplainable.

You may find vendors that say they sell 3.5 mm cubes. This is probably a 4 mm, but vendors can label their beads by any name or color they choose. You would be wise to check carefully, ask questions wherever possible, or buy a sample before committing to a big purchase. I asked one vendor if they sold 2mm cubes and they tried to sell me 1.8mm cubes, but these are actually the same size as the 1.5 mm cubes.

Other Kinds of Cubes

Other kinds of cubes are available. I've used some of them in my designs. One of the cubes I've used is a glass cube with beveled edges made by a few of the manufacturers of crystal beads. The smallest I've been able to find is 4 mm, but these may work wherever you need a 4 mm size and can be combined with the cube seed beads. They are also usually also available in 6 mm and 8 mm.

Another type of square bead is metal. Some vendors carry a hollow metal bead, usually sterling silver. These have rounded corners and usually come in sizes 2 mm, 3 mm, and 4 mm. In actuality, these beads are smaller than their name indicates, so I would suggest buying a few to see how they work before committing to an expensive purchase in the wrong size. I use the 2 mm sterling cubes in combination with the Toho 1.5 mm cubes, and they work just great.

You can sometimes find gem or mineral beads in square shapes. These can be used if they fit, but be sure the holes are large enough to accommodate the number of passes with the thread.

A new type of cube that I just discovered is called a "square cut delica." I found them with the delicas on a web site and ordered some. They are almost indistinguishable from the 1.5 or 1.8 mm cubes. Delicas are made by Miyuki and so are the 1.8 mm cube beads, so I don't know why they are two different names. I do notice that the square cut delicas I bought seemed more regular in shape with less distortion at the cut end. Try them and see what you think.

Working with Cube Beads

If you are a long-time beader, you may find working with the new cube beads strange. They can create a piece that's uncommonly rigid. The flat sides will lock together and the corners will just get in the way! But if you are a beginner, you may find that the flat sides and large holes make learning quite a bit easier. You can hold them in place better, they don't roll around, and the holes are big enough to see and to pass through easily.

There are advantages and disadvantages to working with cubes. The trick is to use them when they are an advantage and avoid them when they are a disadvantage. The purpose of my books has been to show some great designs that can be made with cube beads and to show how the various stitches work up using cubes.

My books give you a large selection of designs to begin working with cubes. I hope you'll take advantage of this opportunity and make something lovely with cubes!