

The Art of Making:

Tassels



HL Sine Gunnsdottir
Principality of Tir Righ
Kingdom of An Tir
(Written 1995 - 2005)
(Copyright - Janis M. James)

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History: (As far as we know.....)

Tassels appear in many cultures in varied designs, the earliest being methods of finishing the warp ends of woven textiles and rugs. It can therefore be assumed that tassels are at least as ancient as weaving. Decorative embellishments were added when people became aware of pattern and design. Trimmings evolved with cloth and are synonymous with it. Tassels were developed into highly decorated forms by Nomadic tribes and probably introduced into the West at the time of the Crusades. In the West they became status symbols of Royal, Military and Civic Regalia and home interiors as decorations.

Passementerie (*paws men tree*) is the art of braid and trim making including tassels. It is a French word for which there is no equivalent in English. The braid is the earliest and most basic of trimmings with infinite uses made in great variety especially in peasant cultures. Early fabrics were woven on narrow looms and stitched together, braids were often used to hide and strengthen the seams. The simple woven, twisted, knotted and patterned braids eventually evolved into the elaborate fringes of the 18th Century. Tassels are more complex than braids and they are purely for pleasure and made with great skill. Traditionally a five year apprenticeship was required to become a "Passementiere" and the custom tassels of today are still made in the traditional manner.

The Byzantine Empire was established when Emperor Constantine moved the capital of Rome to Constantinople in AD 330. It was decreed that all Christians should be clothed. This was to the advantage of the emerging cloth industry, leading to a demand for trimmings for clothing which overlapped into furnishings. Soon these were exported to the west so that by the Middle Ages bed hangings, pillows and carriages were adorned with tassels.

In AD 540 Emperor Justinian, aided by two Persian Monks, smuggled precious silk worms out of China - initiating sericulture in the west. This fine silk was a precious commodity and used to embellish Royalty and the wealthy. The influence of the Middle East was strong: fine tassels, threads and gilt braids were part of the Muslim culture. The Moors created fine prized trimmings that were adopted with enthusiasm by the Spanish. In this way the wealthy houses of Europe began to

adorn their clothing, draperies, hangings, canopies, chandeliers and pillows with braids, fringes and tassels in the Arab fashion.

Tassels as we know them today may have originated in China. The Emperor's courtiers would have silk pendants attached to their robes to prove they concealed nothing under them. Chinese noble women attached tassels to their tiny shoes to draw attention to their bound feet.

The word "tassel" evolved in the Middle Ages. Cloaks or mantles were fastened with metal ornaments called "tasseaus" from the latin "tassa" meaning clasp. The English author Chaucer wrote "And by hire girdle heng a purs of lether tasselled with greet and peried with latoun". The Bayeaux Tapestry shows fringed bridles and the Greeks used them in a similar way to that in which the Scottish use them today - over a kilt-like garment. In Tudor times, trimming would often be made of gold or wool. It was either exceedingly fine, for clothing, or a bit rough and ready, such as was used for bed drapes. Trimming would follow the fabric, and still does. Elizabethan inventories show trims, fringes and bone lace. Tie backs with tassels or pairs of tassels used to hold back curtains were often of silk over a wooden core. Choices are always inspired by the fabric's character and weight; you wouldn't, for example, hang a heavy trimming on a very fine silk. It wouldn't work and it would look wrong.



Anatomy of a Tassel: (This section thanks to Rissa Peace Root of www.prettyimpressivestuff.com)

Cord or Rope:

This can be any form of cording, hand made or purchased, as thick or as thin as you desire. Its sole purpose is as something from which the tassel can hang. The simplest method for making your own cord is to secure one end, loop the other around a pencil, knitting needle or chopstick and hand twist it. The Spinster® is an inexpensive little tool that is perfect for winding the cords. I have done my cording many ways in the past, but I recently purchased this neat little tool and am very pleased with its ease of use. You could also modify a hand drill or a cordless screwdriver by filling a cup holder or other small hook into the chuck. A cord does NOT have to fit through the head of the tassel, it can be attached with thread or wire.

Head, Mold, or Finial:

If you are making a soft tassel, the head will be the wrapped end of your fiber skirt. If you are using a mold, they can be made of wood, ceramic, polymer clay, beads, or any type of hardware. Many molds are hand painted, but often they are covered with gimp or fiber. Crocheted or tatted netting or needle lace can also be used to cover the head of a soft tassel or a wooden form.

Neck, Collar or Ruff:

On a soft tassel, the neck will be repeated tight wraps of fiber. This neck can be left plain or later embellished. On a tassel with a mold, the ruff is designed to cover the joint between the head and the skirt. Most ruffs are decorative, often a piece of nice trim or cord, but a plain one can be used and later embellished with embroidery or ribbon.

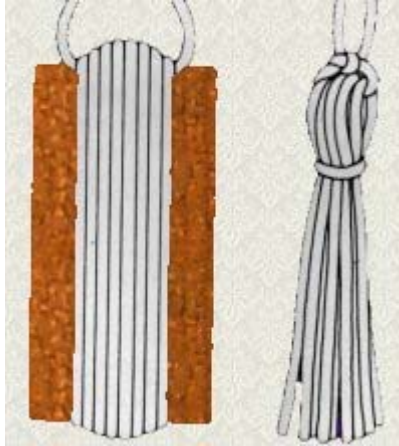
Skirt:

The two common types of tassel skirts are cut and bullion. A cut skirt is like the one seen above in the simple chenille tassels. It is as simple as this, if the ends of the fringe are cut, it is a cut skirt! If the ends are wrapped or twisted, it is a bullion skirt. In a bullion skirt, the threads are wrapped and allowed to twist back onto themselves, creating a *bullion* looped effect. Often highly decorative tassels will have will be

a combination of both, with the inner skirt being cut and the other one being bullion.

-----Thank you Rissa - your tassel "anatomy" words are perfect-----

How to Make Tassels



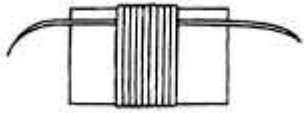
You will need a cardboard rectangle in the same length as the tassel you wish to make.

Wind the yarn/thread round and round the cardboard; each complete turn represents two strands of the finished tassel.

Break or cut the yarn/thread when the tassel is the desired thickness. With a darning needle thread the end of the yarn/thread through all the loops at the one end of the cardboard and fasten tightly with a knot and fasten off.

Remove the cardboard, wind the yarn/thread round all the loops, just below the knot and fasten off.

Cut through loops at the other end of the tassel and trim.



Crystal Beaded Tassel



Decorate a sewing basket, a lamp chain, a ceiling fan pull, or an armoire key with this sparkling crystal tassel. This Crystal Beaded Tassel is 4 1/2" long. 16 strands of fancy fringe dangle below the custom made tassel top. This example is created with an assortment of Accent Beads, Bugle Beads, and Seed Beads. Select your own assortment of beads. Use a mixture of cords and beads for your own unique look. These tassels look particularly good on pavilions or banners.

Beaded Tassel



Supplies needed:

6 inches of grosgrain ribbon

6 inches X the width of the ribbon of Iron-on interfacing

sewing thread to match ribbon

assorted seed beads, bugle beads, crystals and accent beads in your choices of colours

beading supplies – beading needle, scissors, beading thread

6 inches of narrow satin faced ribbon for hanger

Note:

The amount of beads needed will depend on how large and full you want your tassel. I recommend that you make a small tassel first to learn the technique.

Instructions:



Begin by ironing the interfacing to the grosgrain ribbon

Attach beading thread to the lower left corner of the ribbon and attach your first fringe. End this fringe with a large accent bead or crystal.

Add additional fringes about a seed bead width apart on the ribbon, keeping these fringes shorter than the first fringe so the accent bead will show when the tassel is complete. Anchor each fringe with a small knot on the ribbon to stop the fringes from completely unraveling if one fringe is caught on something. You may add as many fringes as you like, but keep the final length of the ribbon between 4 and 6 inches.

Whipstitch seed beads closely together to the top edge of the ribbon.

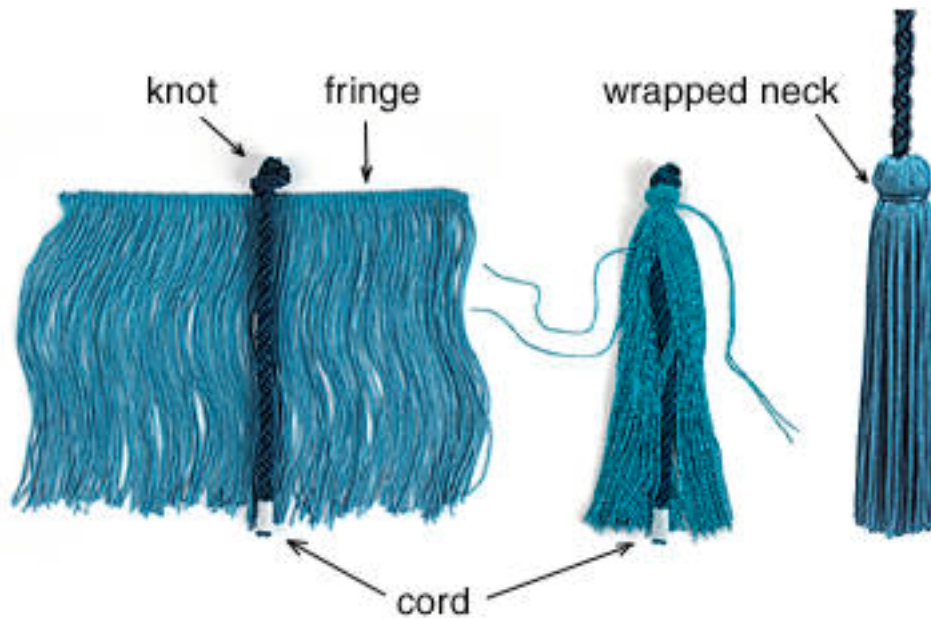
Fold the satin ribbon over and sew the two edges to the inside of the grosgrain ribbon where shown on the diagram with an X. This will be the hanger.

Roll the ribbon tightly, beginning at the X, and sew the edge to keep it together. You may either keep the top edge level or let it spiral slightly for a domed effect.

Add another layer or layers of fringe to the lower edge of the ribbon if you like. Keep these layers shorter than the first layer of fringes. This is where you really where you get to play. Try looping some fringes or adding extra crystal beads.

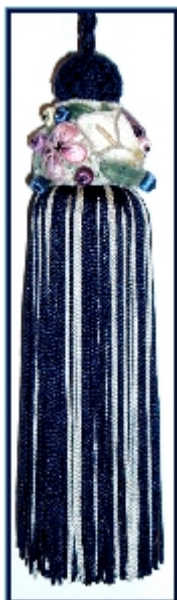
After you have added all the fringe you like, couch seed beads to the outside of the ribbon roll to cover.





Tassels from purchased fringe and cord

1. Tie knot in cord.
2. Wrap fringe tightly around base of knot. Sew, glue, or tie fringe securely in place.
3. Turn fringe upside down over knot to cover it.
4. Tie or wrap neck with thread and bury thread ends.
5. Embellish if desired.



Taken from the DMC Tassel Making Handout-

Only DMC makes tassel-making this fun and easy to do. Use DMC Embroidery Floss skeins to create instant tassels to accent your clothing, home furnishings - everything you own.

Materials:

2 Skeins of DMC Floss

Scissors

Instructions:

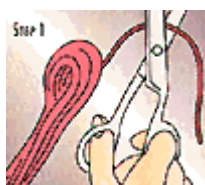
Step 1: Remove bands from a skein of DMC floss. Take 1 loose end of the floss and cut off a 6 1/2 inch length to use as a hanging cord.

Step 2: Fold skein of floss in half, placing hanging cord with a loose knot to hold in place.

Step 3: Using a length of floss in the same, a complementary, or contrasting color, hold the tail in place with your thumb and begin tightly wrapping the skein approximately 1/2 inch down from the center fold. As you wrap, the tail will be fixed in place. You may make the wrapping as wide or as narrow as you like. To finish wrapping, tuck the end tail of the length of floss under the wrapped section, using the tip of your scissors or a blunt point needle.

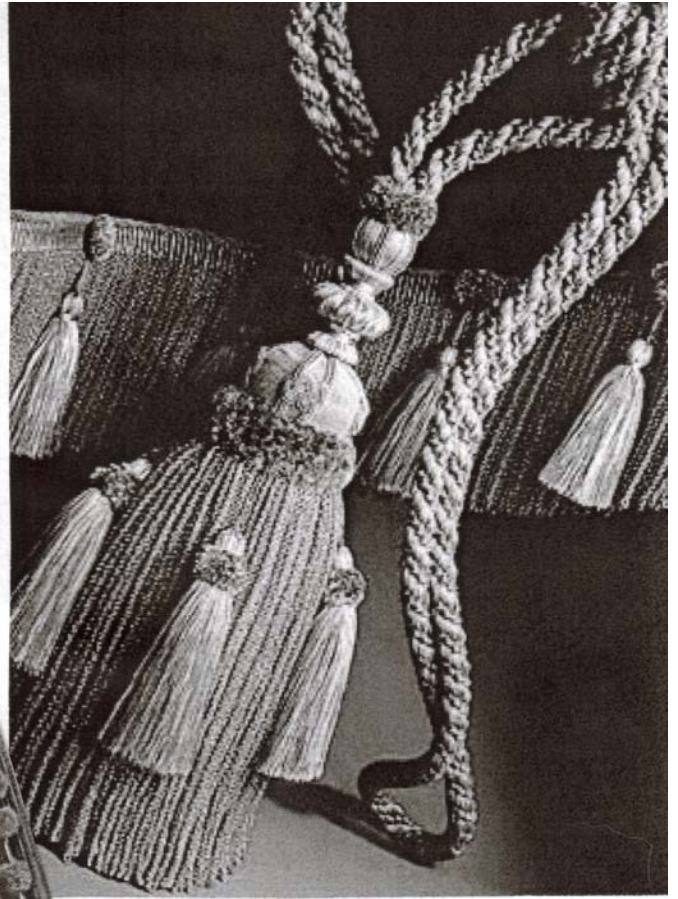
Step 4: Cut the bottom loops of the floss skein. If necessary, trim the edge to make it more even by holding the tassel upside down tightly at the bottom between your index finger and thumb, and gently snipping. Untie the hanging cord, without removing from tassel, and use to attach to clothing, shoes, pillows, etc.

To make thicker tassels, use two or more skeins of floss, using the instructions given. For a more elegant look, use DMC Metallic Thread to wrap your tassels, or to create braided hanging cords. (DMC Rayon Thread makes luxurious tassels)



Examples for Fun & Inspiration:







Bibliography:

Janis M. James - Many, many years of designing, creating and teaching tassel making for Ithra sessions and modern world classes. You will note from my photographic examples that I love tassels and encourage anyone to try this delightful embellishment technique.

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