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LAPIDARY JOURNAL

OCTOBER 2004

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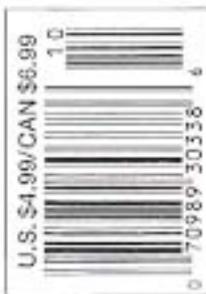
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STEP by STEP

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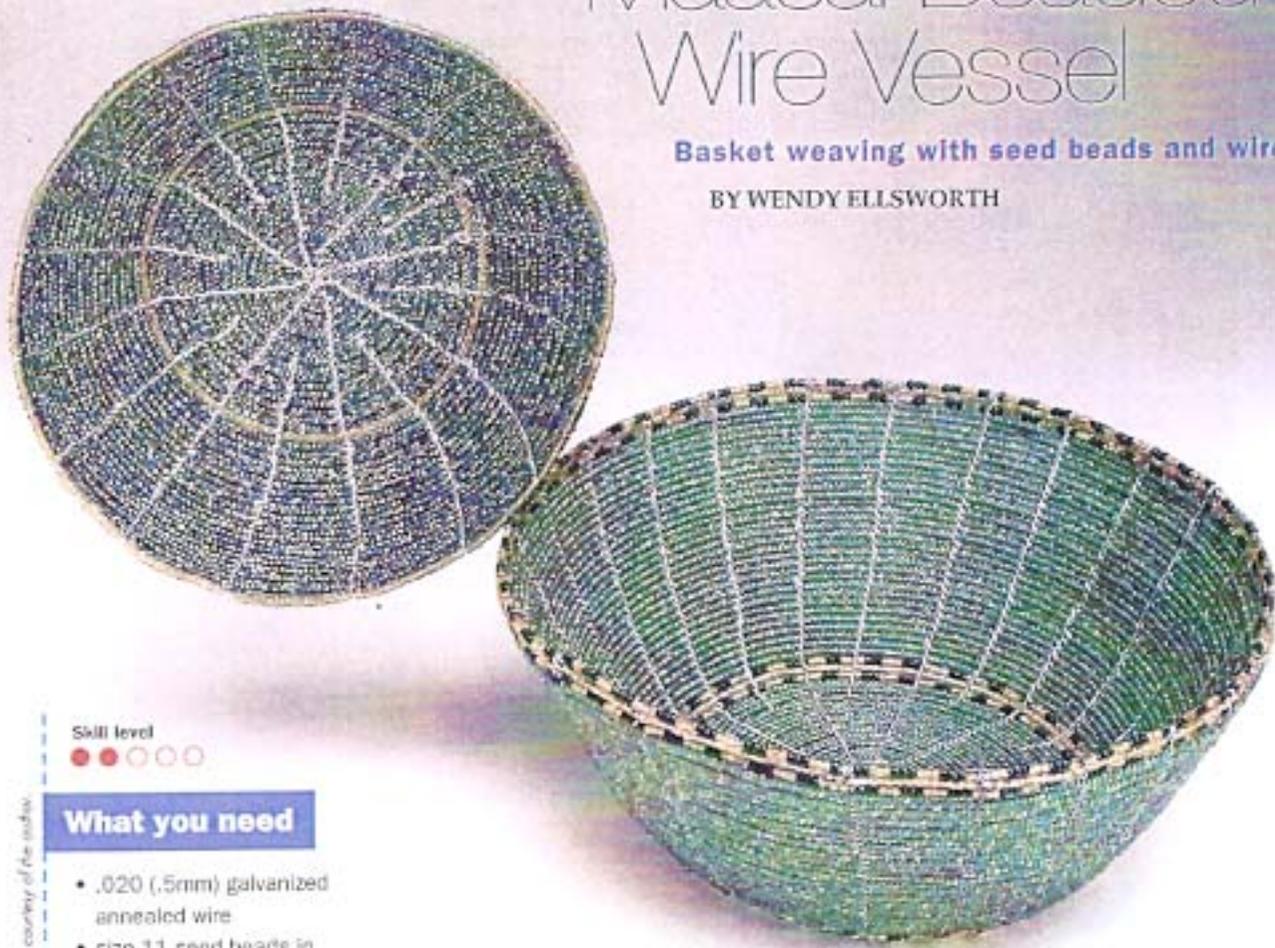
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Maasai Beaded Wire Vessel

Basket weaving with seed beads and wire.

BY WENDY ELLSWORTH



Skill level



What you need

- .020 (.5mm) galvanized annealed wire
- size 11 seed beads in colors of personal choice
- Needle nose pliers
- Wire cutters

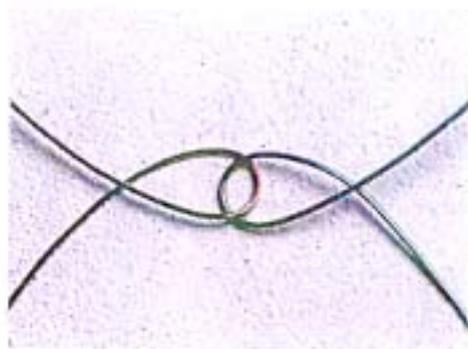
The Maasai make a variety of objects using wire and seed beads. In writing up this project, I realized that the technique they use to make their vessels differs from traditional French wire work. The Maasai coil the spoke wires around the weaving wire, whereas the French coil the weaving wire around the spoke wires. The Maasai technique gives a very different finished result. I have a profound respect for how well they manage to make these lovely vessels without pliers or wire cutters, usually sitting on the ground in front of their little houses, doing the work on their laps with a bag of beads beside them. Many thanks to Leah Kirage, Chairlady of the Dupoto Women's Beading Cooperative in Isinya, Kenya, who sent me her samples and hand-drawn illustrations to help me write these instructions.

Preparation

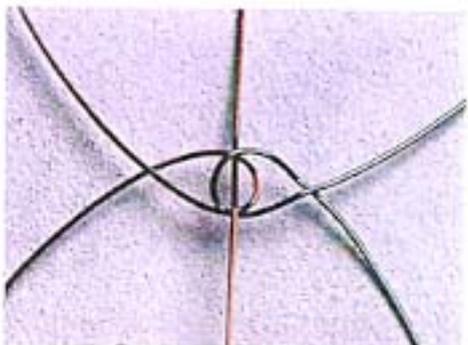
For your spoke wires you'll need to cut three 24" lengths of .020 galvanized wire. For the weaving wire you will need a very long length of the wire, perhaps 10-14' long

Weaving the center knot

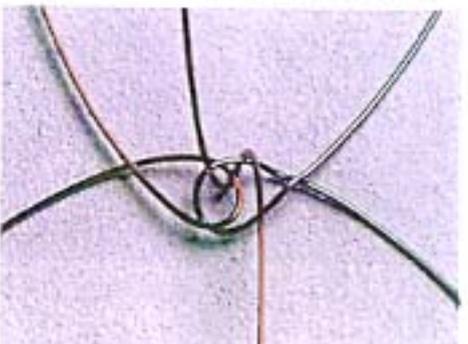
- 1 Bend two of the spoke wires into a "U" shape and interlock them as shown.



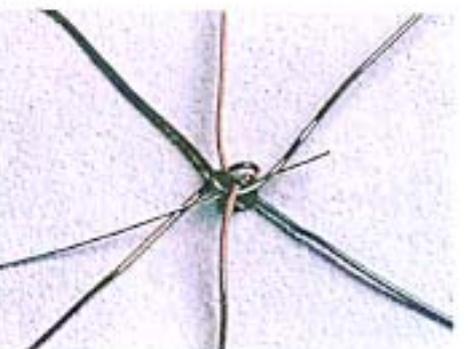
- 2 Insert a third spoke wire into the junction of the first two wires.



- 3 Bend a loop in the third spoke wire as shown.



- 4 Insert one end of the weaver wire into the junction of the spoke wires.



- 5 Bend the tip of weaver wire back over onto itself to secure, and tighten the center loops of the spoke wires.

- 6 Arrange the spoke wires so that there is an equal distance between them around the center knot.

- 7 Add a large number of seed beads onto the weaver wire and bend the end of the wire to prevent beads from slipping off.

- 8 Row 1: Put one seed bead between every spoke wire. To do this, bring one bead at a time down to the base of the weaver wire, pass the weaver underneath the next spoke wire in a clockwise (or a counter-clockwise direction) & coil the spoke wire around the weaver wire, pulling to tighten each coil.



- 9 Rows 2-9: Continue to add seed beads between each spoke, increasing the number of beads on each row and coiling the spoke wires around the weaver wire each time. When you've done 9 rows you'll need to add additional spoke wires.

- 10 Cut six new spoke wires, approx. 12" in length.

- 11 Bend one end of each spoke wire into a hook shape.

- 12 Pass the hook end over the midpoint of the previous row and bend the tip of the wire up to secure. Repeat this step until all six new spokes have been added.

