

How to make a wire lace snowflakes

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Bobbin lace made with wire is a bit different than making lace using thread. The most important difference is that wire has memory and is difficult to 'un-lace' if you make a mistake. Once bent, wire is hard to straighten and it's impossible if the wire is sharply bent and creased. Work carefully and with a gentle hand.

The simplest way to try wire lace is to make a plaited or braided lace (2 pair bobbins per braid). Simple cross-twist-cross (CTC –tension), gently tighten wire, followed by cross-twist-tighten (CT-tension) will soon produce an interesting metal braid. You can add double or single thread picots or pre-thread seed beads on to the wire and pin them in place of a picot. When braids cross use a simple windmill crossing (treat each pair as a single bobbin and cross-twist-cross). Stop at least one stitch before the crossing. My preferred 6 pair crossing is the modified windmill – carefully move the top two pairs of bobbins aside. Use the remaining four to start a windmill crossing, cross-twist and BEFORE the last cross, gently lay the top two pairs down across the center of the windmill crossing. Complete last cross and gently tighten wires.

Appearances will vary depending on wire size (gauge), metal type, coatings or surface finish of wire and the number of strands used for the plait. A good place to start is with 30 or 32 gauge copper (magnet) wire, worked single or double-ply. A sturdy snowflake can be made using very soft wire up to 26 gauge or thicker. Note that wire should be 'dead soft' or 'bend and stay' wire. Use caution with wire meant for wire wrapping, which is usually hard or half-hard. A quick test is to bend the tip of the wire 90 degrees (square corner angle) with your fingers. Was it easy to do? Does the wire stay where you bent it or does it spring back? Easily bent and 'stays bent' are the features good for wire bobbin lace.

Hints for wire bobbin lace:

- 1: Keep wire straight – no kinks (if kink develops, unwind wire back in the opposite direction, DO NOT pull to straighten)
- 2 Pull wire taut STRAIGHT in line with the pattern, don't wrap it around your fingers to pull. Do not bend wire. (Opinions vary about tugging directly on the wire or on the bobbin – try it out yourself)
- 3: Minimize wire movement, swaying or flexing, all of which can lead to metal fatigue and breakage. Secure bobbins when not in use, pin tightly to the pillow so they can NOT move at all when you carry your pillow.
4. Use stiff board for the pricking, it will help keep pins stable. (Use manilla folders or cereal boxes)
5. Use wood tool such as a skewer to move wire around to 'tidy up' your braid or picots. DO NOT use metal which can scratch the finish.

6. Do you need special bobbins for wire? There are many commercial options with top or side hooks. Newest option is the double headed bobbins with rubber o-rings (see Lenka's lace). You can add hooks to regular bobbins – top or side or use 'hookies', bobbins with really large hooks for metallic threads. Key feature should be that the wire is never bent at a sharp angle as it goes across the top of the bobbin. (Short samples can be made without bobbins at all).

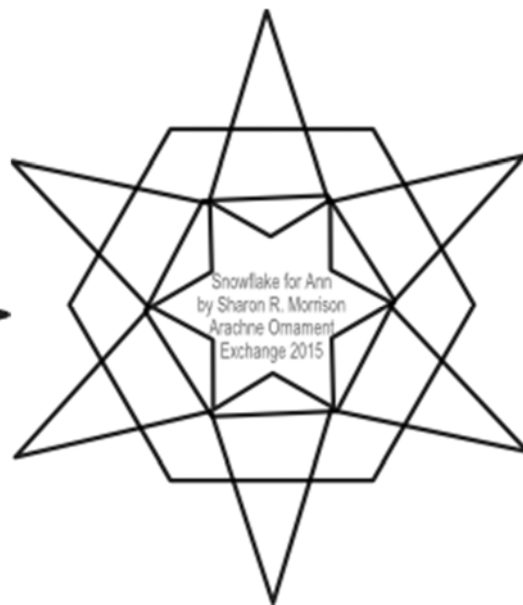
7: Finishing is VERY important. Wire ends are sharp & pointy, so they must be hidden in a bead or filed/smoothed or bent back on themselves to prevent inadvertent pokes/stabs. You can also weave individual wires back into a braid and then bend or file the tip of the wire. Another option is to apply a small drop of jewelry glue on the end of the wire. Flatten wire braids with a wooden or plastic surface or tool (this will work harden the wire, making the snowflake stiffer).

Here are two snowflake patterns to try out. Scale them as you wish, best range is 2.5 to 3.5 inches. I used doubled strands of matte stainless binding wire (approx. 35 ga.) with two strands of 34 ga. Jeweler's bronze wire for the star snowflake with six pair crossings.

Simplified snowflake with loops (omitted outer hexagon) was done with single strands of 28 ga. Bronze wire and black 4mm crystals.

I hate trying to do sewings with wire, but I like the look of the loops. My solution was to use a bead in the center of the braid, placed where the loop will cross back over itself. The bead helps secure the braid at the intersection. At the crossing, remove the pins supporting the loop and lay the center two wires underneath the bead. The outer two wires should cross over the top and around each side of the bead. Be careful not to kink wires. When things look good, gently snug the wire around the bead and repin to support the loop. Continue the twist-cross-tension of your braid.





30 ga = 0.01 in = 0.25 mm
32ga = 0.008 in = 0.2 mm
34ga = 0.0063 in = 0.16 mm
36 ga = .005 in = 0.13 mm
38 ga = 0.004 in = 0.1mm

