

Weaver, writer, and all-around curious person

# Weave*Zine*

## Portable, Addictive: Ply-Splitting!

by Louise French a... on November 30, 2008



*by Louise French and Barbara J. Walker*

What do camels, cords, and creativity have in common? Ply-split braiding.

It's a fiber art that is versatile, portable, and uses small amounts of yarn.

For centuries, men in northwest India have used ply-split braiding to make decorative girths for their camels.

"Ronnzini's Magical Mystery Tour"  
by Barbara Walker



Photo by Brian McLernon

In ply-split braiding, cords move *through* each other. A special tool, called a gripfid, splits the cords to create an opening through which you pull another cord. Pattern effects are derived from both the color and composition of the cords, and the order in which they are arranged and manipulated.

Virginia Harvey wrote a monograph about ply-splitting in 1976, but the technique remained largely unrecognized by the fiber-arts community until 1998, when Peter Collingwood published *The Techniques of Ply-Split Braiding*. (<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1857251334?ie=UTF8&tag=weav-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1857251334>)

"Sonneblume" necklace  
by Louise French



Now fiber artists use ply-splitting to create exciting necklaces, vessels, rugs and sculptural pieces.

Another great reference on ply-splitting is *Ply-Split Braiding, An Introduction to Designs in Single-Course Twining* by [Julie Hedges](http://www.juliehedges.co.uk) (<http://www.juliehedges.co.uk>). This volume is filled with inspiring full-color photos and instructions for a variety of braids.

## Project Details

This simple bookmark, with its jaunty diagonal stripe patterning, is a great introduction to ply-splitting.



## Materials

- Eight ply-splitting cords, cut to 15 inches in length. These should be four-ply cords, plied in the Z-twist direction. You will need two each of four colors: A, B, C, and D. (In the bookmark shown, UKI 5/2 perle

cotton, A=Purple, B=Pistachio, C= Yale Blue, D=Lipstick Red.) Cords made with two ends of 5/2 perle cotton in each ply make a nice-sized cord for this project.

- Two additional thinner cords for finishing the ends, 15 inches long, two ends of 10/2 perle cotton per ply.
- One holding cord, six inches long.

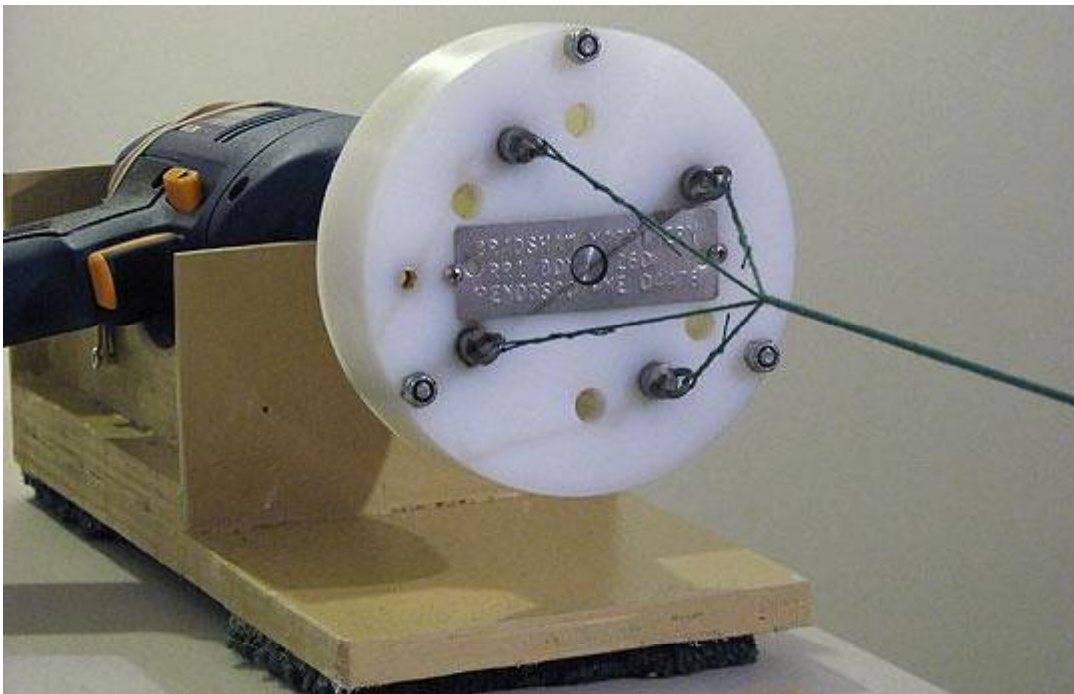
## Equipment

- [Gripfid](http://www.louise french.com/gripfid_shopping_catalog.htm#gripfids)  
([http://www.louise french.com/gripfid\\_shopping\\_catalog.htm#gripfids](http://www.louise french.com/gripfid_shopping_catalog.htm#gripfids))
- Tool for making cords, such as a four-hook [Bradshaw cord maker](http://www.louise french.com/gripfid_shopping_catalog.htm#corkmaker)  
([http://www.louise french.com/gripfid\\_shopping\\_catalog.htm#corkmaker](http://www.louise french.com/gripfid_shopping_catalog.htm#corkmaker)) (preferable) or a drill with a single hook.

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## Creating the Cords

The most efficient tool for making four-ply cords for ply-splitting is a Bradshaw four-hook cord maker. This produces a consistent and well-twisted cord. Making your own cords gives you the freedom to create cords in a nearly infinite color range. For beginners, using two ends of 5/2 perle cotton for each ply makes a nice-sized cord. Wrap the end of each cord with a small piece of packaging tape to form an aglet or anti-fraying tip.

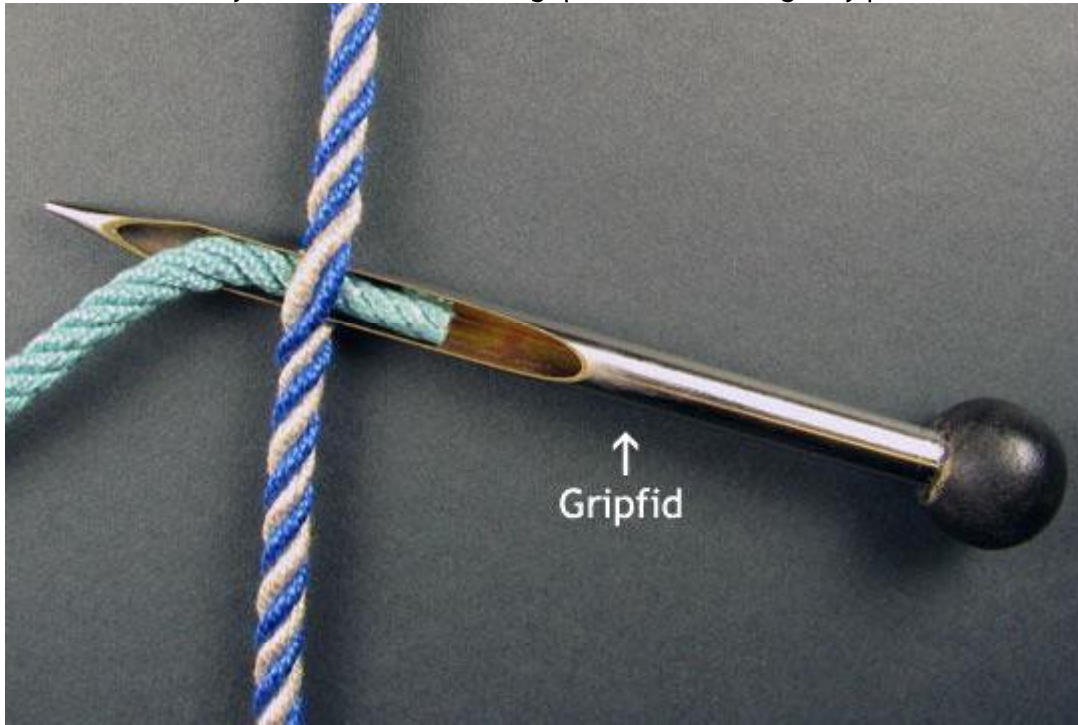


**Note:** If you don't have access to a Bradshaw cord maker, you can create ply-splitting cords using a standard electric drill. Tighten a sturdy hook into the chuck of the drill. Attach two *very long* strands of 5/2 perle cotton (or whatever base yarn you're using) to the hook and tie the other end of the strands to a stationary point. Use the drill to twist a long ply. Then, under tension, fold the long ply in half, and then in half again. Attach the ends to the drill's hook and the stationary point as before, and reverse the drill to create a counter-twist.

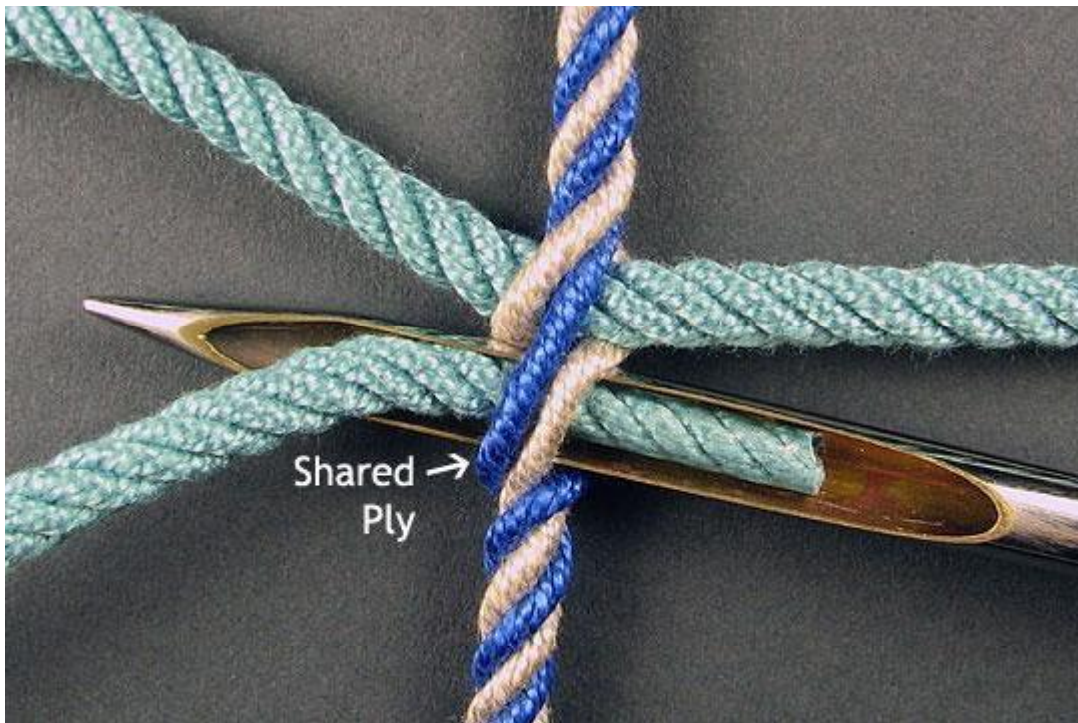


## Ply-Splitting Basics

Insert the point of the gripfid into the cord so that two plies are on top of the gripfid and two plies are underneath it. Lay another cord into the gripfid channel and gently pull the cord through the split opening.



In successive splits, one new ply and the adjacent, previously split, ply are picked up. In other words, each split will have a shared ply.



## Making the Bookmark

*Step 1:* Position the cords in color order: A, A, B, B, C, C, D, D. Split all eight cords. Lay the holding cord into the gripfid channel and pull it through all cords. Tape the ends of the holding cord to the edge of a table to maintain tension while splitting.



*Step 2:* Using a quarter twist split, as shown in the photo above, split cords one through seven, keeping all on the gripfid. Pull cord eight through the previous seven cords.



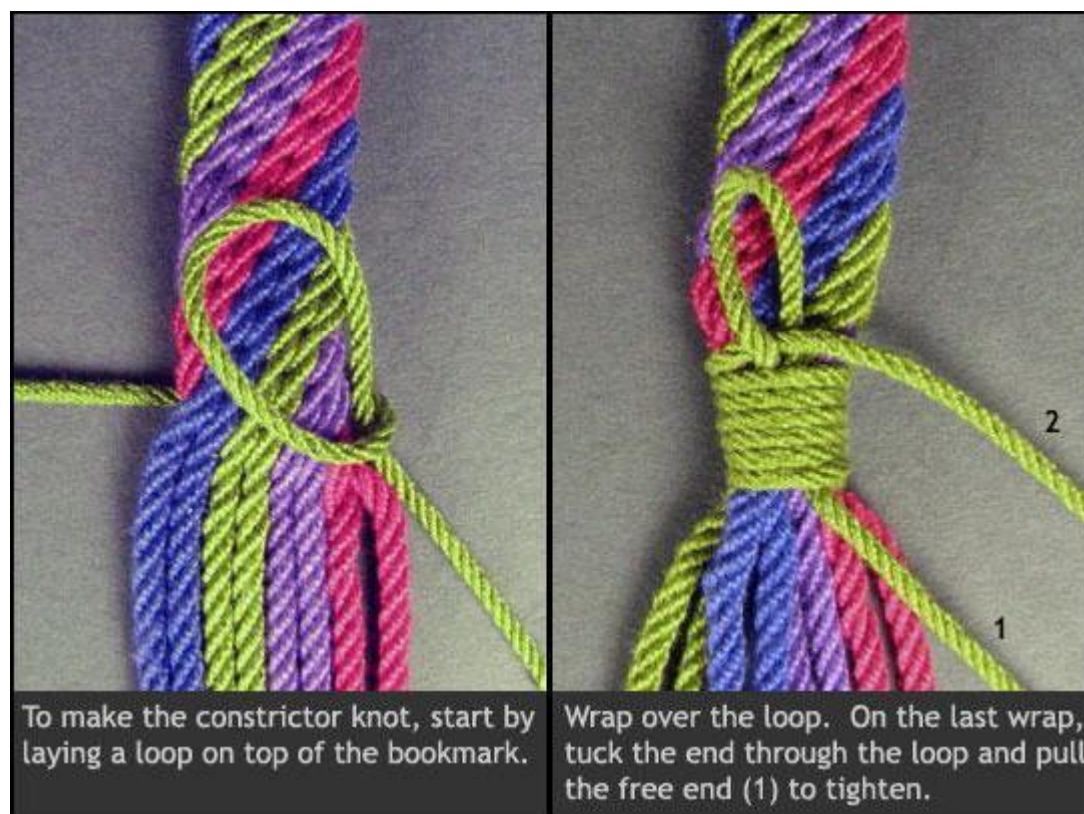


Repeat Step 2. Remember that the cord pulled through in the previous split is now the first cord split in next row.

Continue splitting in this manner for six inches or the desired length, leaving four inches unsplit for constrictor knot and fringe.

## Finishing the Ends

Use a constrictor knot to secure the cords at the end of the bookmark.



Cut the cord ends (1) and (2) even with the top and bottom wraps.

Remove the white holding cord you inserted at the beginning of the bookmark and tie another constriction knot.

Unply and comb out the fringe on the top and bottom, and your bookmark is done.

Welcome to the fascinating world of ply-splitting!

## Further Resources

- For more information online about ply-splitting, see the [compilation of articles on the WeaversHand website](http://www.weavershand.com/#P). (<http://www.weavershand.com/#P>)

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cooks. Louise has studios in St. Paul, Minnesota and on the Yellow River in Wisconsin. Barbara's studio overlooks the Willamette Valley in Salem, Oregon.