



Joseph P. W. Vigil Jr.

Objects for Deployment

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[veteransbookproject.com](http://veteransbookproject.com)

My personal history with knot making started with curiosity. When I saw the knot on my grandfather's cane, I wondered how it got there and how he tied it on. Where were the beginning and the end strings? How did he hide them? Then, later on, I learned how he did it. I guess you can say I've always had a knack for knots. When we were kids, my dad would have my sisters bring fishing line to me to untangle; I could always do it easily. Rope, cord, whatever – it was easy for me. Nowadays, I can look at a picture of a knot or pretty much anybody else's work, and within a couple of hours or days, I can figure out how they did it, and copy it. I started when I was around 12 or 14. I'd pick up a string and the next thing you know, it was full of knots.

After high school, I started working feedlots. I met up with an old cowboy, can't remember his name. He was a tail gunner on a plane in WWII. He flew 35 missions. The life expectancy of a tail gunner in WWII was 12 missions. He was playing with a piece of leather, and I was watching him while he was making a knot that kind of looked like my grandfather's. I asked him if he would show me how to tie it. He tied one real quick, and then he tossed it to me and said if I can figure it out, he'd let me do another one. So I kept playing around with it. I finally asked him if I could take it home. He said sure. Overnight, I finally figured it out. The next day, I gave it to him and he told me to take it apart and re-tie it, so I did. I guess he was impressed, so he showed me the next one. After that I was hooked.

I would work feedlots and ranches, helping friends out. During these times and others, I came across other cowboys doing knots, and we swapped knowledge -- a knot for a knot. From there, I went to getting knots from books. Seeing them in pictures, going to state fairs, rodeos, looking at other people's work, taking pictures, trying to figure out how they did it, kept me going from there.

Eventually, I was making my own stuff: ropes, halters, hat bands. Then one day, it just got to be too much, 'cause everyone was wanting this, wanting that. It went from being a hobby to a job, and it wasn't fun anymore. So, I quit doing it.

'Bout 10 years went by. One day, my present wife Grace and I were doing some housework, cleaning or something. We had stopped and rested, and she went in the kitchen to make us some lunch. I sat down to rest, and seeing an old piece of string, I started playing with it, and made a keychain. My wife came back, and asked me where I had gotten it. I told her I'd made it, but she didn't believe me. So, I took it apart and did it again for her, and she liked it. I have been doing it ever since. Now my wife is my biggest critic. I value her opinion a lot. If she don't like it, I don't keep it. (I don't throw much away anymore.)



Now I use the knot work for my own therapy. Especially since I was in Fort Hood and found out that I have the cancer. It helped me deal with the cancer, and it's kind of a release. My own release. Pretty much everything I made back then, I threw away after I made it. I don't remember what I made, or how much I made. I do remember, when I made it, the cancer was on my mind while I would work on it. When I was done with it, I would walk over to the trash can. I guess you could say that when I threw it away, I was throwing away part of that cancer. I went through a LOT of 550 cord. You can buy 550 cord in 100-yard bags, and I'd go to the PX and buy 4 or 5 bags. By the end of the week, I was out, but I would go back and buy more.

My fellow soldiers didn't even know about the variety of stuff I was making because, at the time, I'd just make the stuff they'd ask for in the barracks. Then, when I was by myself, I'd make stuff privately – that was about the cancer.

I keep and sell more items now, but mostly I give it away. Before, I didn't like what I made. I'm still hard on myself about my art, but I'm getting more satisfied with it. It's the only thing I can do now, with my tremors, and everything else I got going wrong with me. I guess I'll keep doing it. Until the doctors tell me I can't do it anymore. Then I'll stop. (Maybe.) When I do it, I find it takes my mind off everything. I get so focused on that knot that I forget the TV, sights, smells, everything. And I love working with leather most of all. I feel the textures of the leather, the smell of the leather. Everything in my hand, it just engulfs me. It takes so much patience to do that my hands literally slow down. I'm meticulous in my work. I'm so technical about it that if it's not where I want it, whether I'm 2 minutes into it or 2 minutes from the end, I'll tear the whole thing apart and do it over. I'd just as soon start all over because I want people to look at something I made and let them know they have something that's mine – something I'm proud of.

I once heard someone say, "You express yourself in your art." Maybe that's why I always feel like I'm never finished or satisfied.

I hope the people can use this book like I used the knots: as a release, to help them forget, like I do. I hope when they're making these projects, like me, they forget everything around them.

I hope also that they realize that no matter what injury they have, whether it's in the head, the heart or an appendage, that given the right tools, and the right opportunity, they can create and do anything. They can still do something, no matter if the doctors tell them what they can and can't do. All they gotta do is have the desire to do it, and maybe this book will give it to them. I know this as a fact.

I'm glad that other people like my art. I'm glad they see a beauty in it. Until a couple of years ago when a cowboy friend of mine actually called it "art," I never really thought of it that way. As long as people keep seeing the beauty in it, I'll keep going.

## SOLDIER'S BRACELET





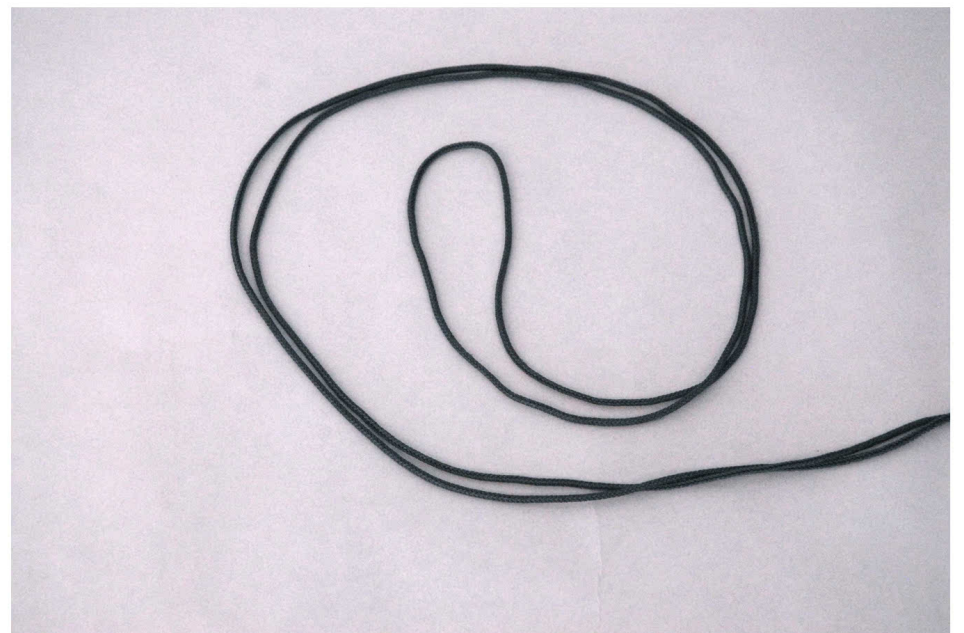
Items needed: 550 Cord - 2 different colors of your choice.  
Length: Minimum 6 Ft. for average sized bracelet.



Cut your 550 cord into a 6 ft. section and fold in half. Burn both ends to keep from unraveling.

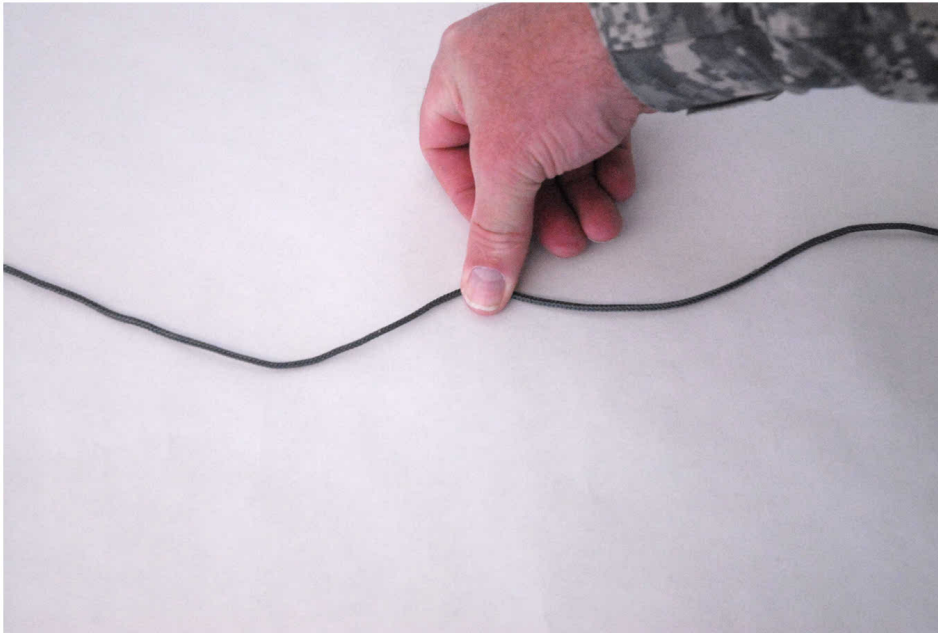


Tools Required in this Book: 3 Ft. Tape Measure, Pocket Knife, Lighter, Small Clamp (if needed), Needle Nose Pliers, Needle (plastic, embroidery size), Leather Awl. All items but the pocket knife may be found at your local hobby store.

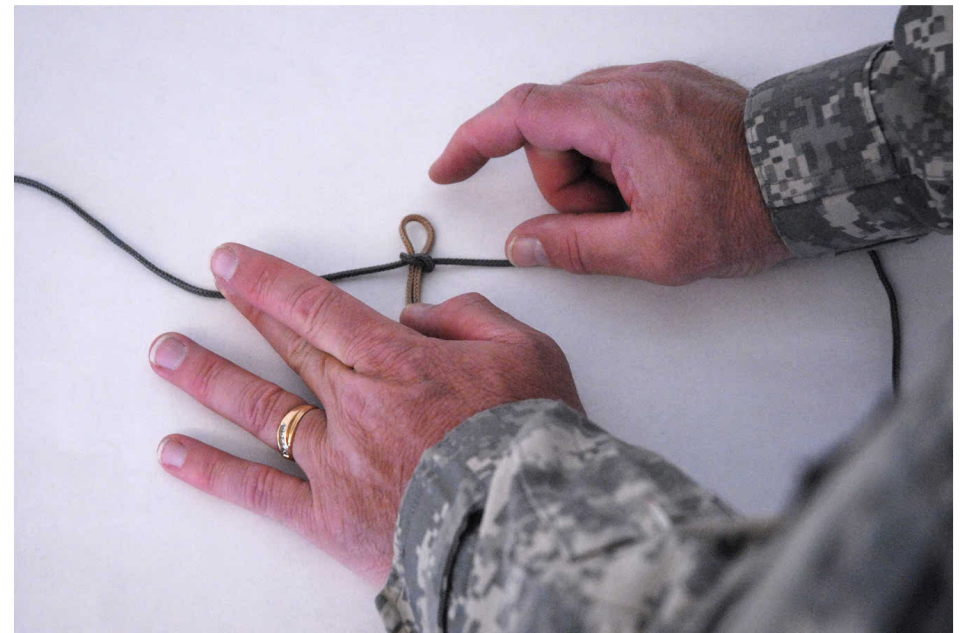


Repeat same steps for second cord.





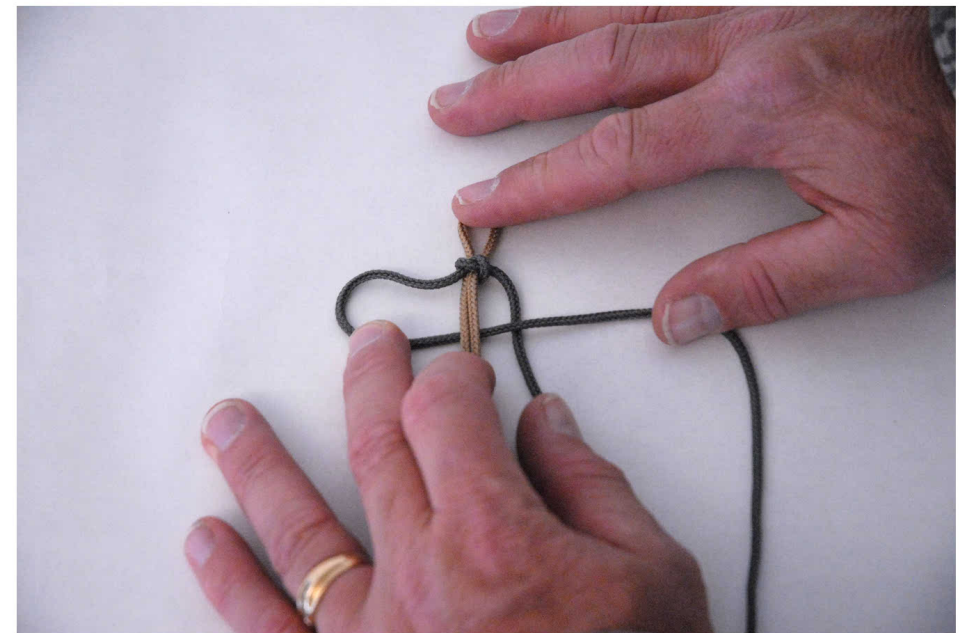
Mark the center of your first cord with your thumb.



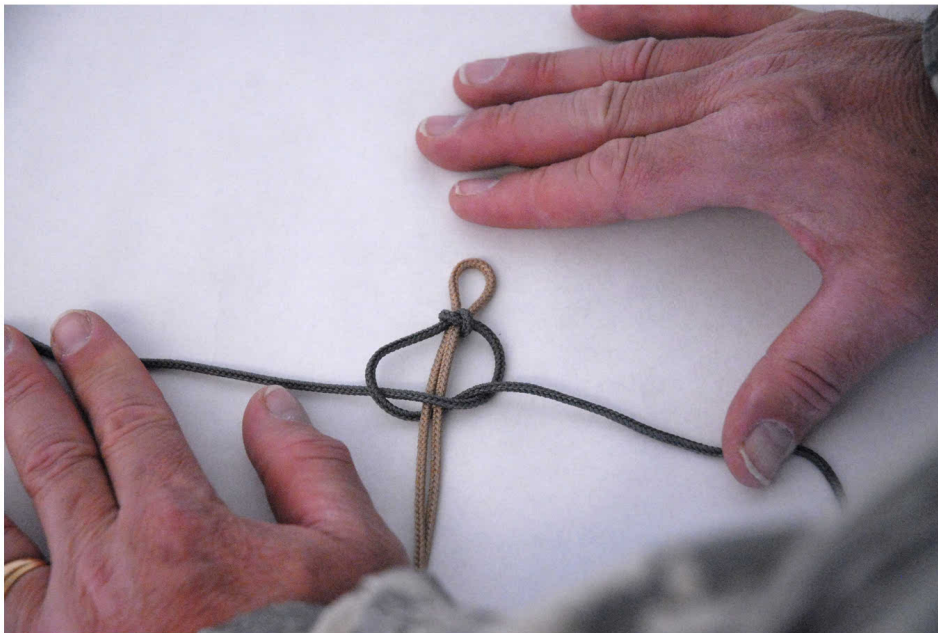
Make sure your loop is a 3/4 inch long.  
Tie a "granny knot" right over left, and bring it in tightly.



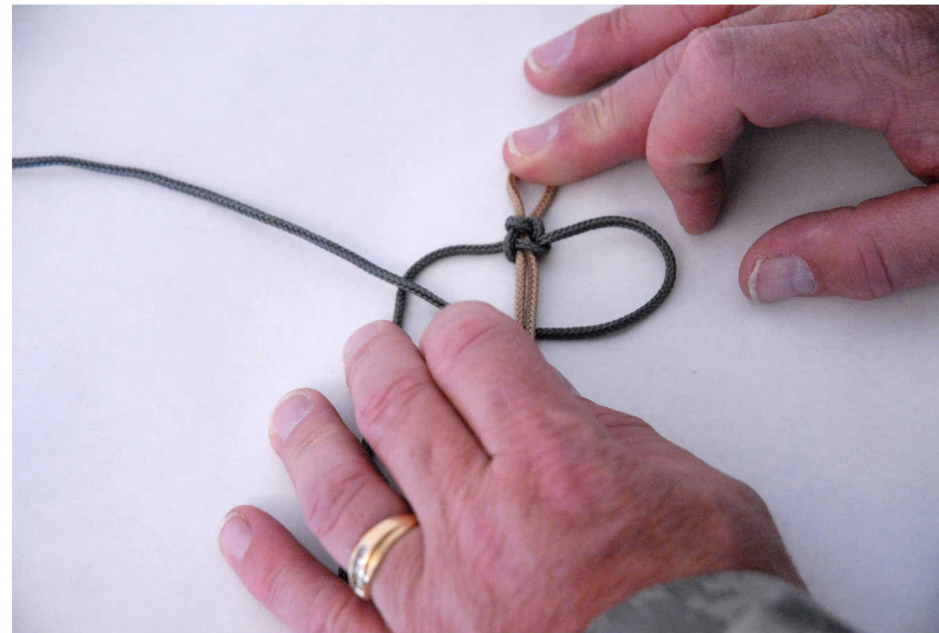
Keeping your second cord folded in half, place the folded end of the second cord on the center point marked by your thumb.



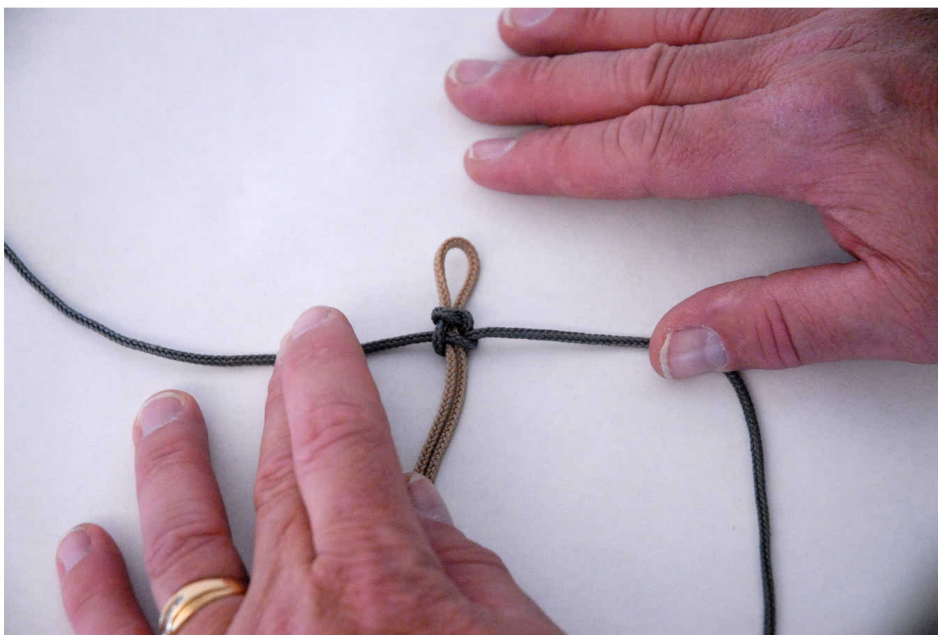
Take the left cord, bringing it behind the brown cord and over the right side, as shown in figure above.



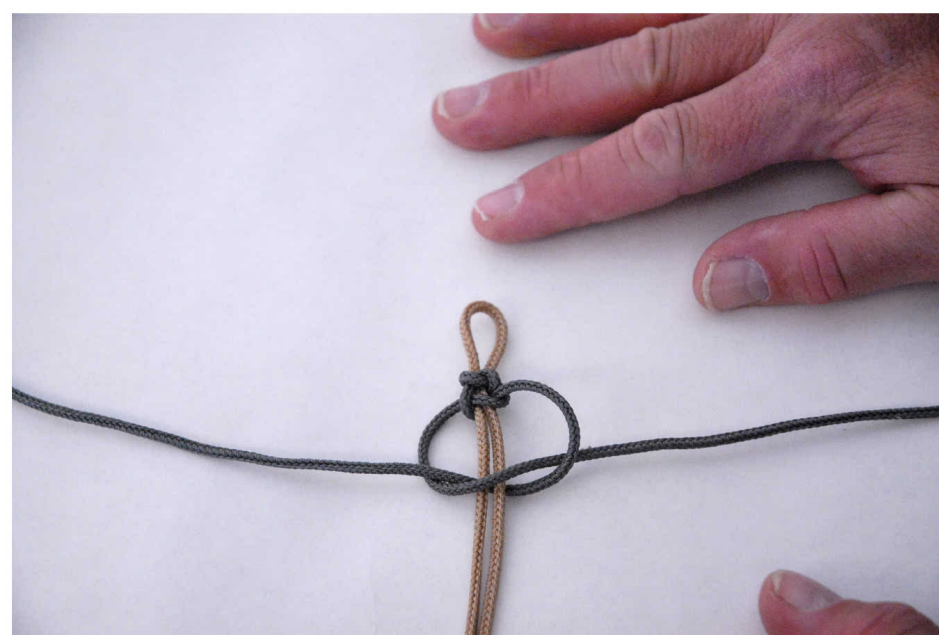
Take the right cord over the brown cord, then under the left cord, and bring it up tightly.



Take the right side behind the brown cord, and over the left side.

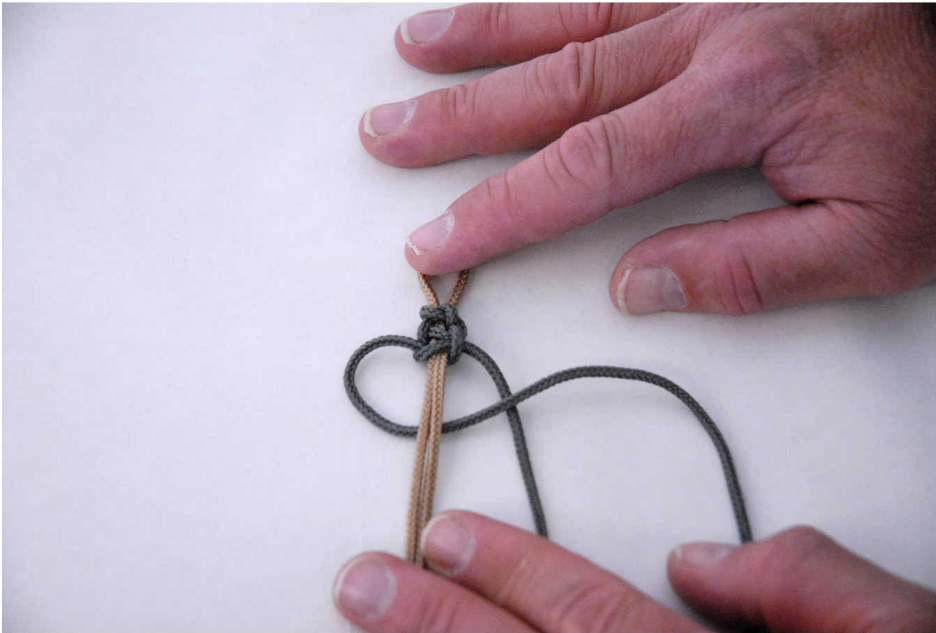


At this point, make sure your loop is a 3/4 inch long, and then tighten your knot securely.

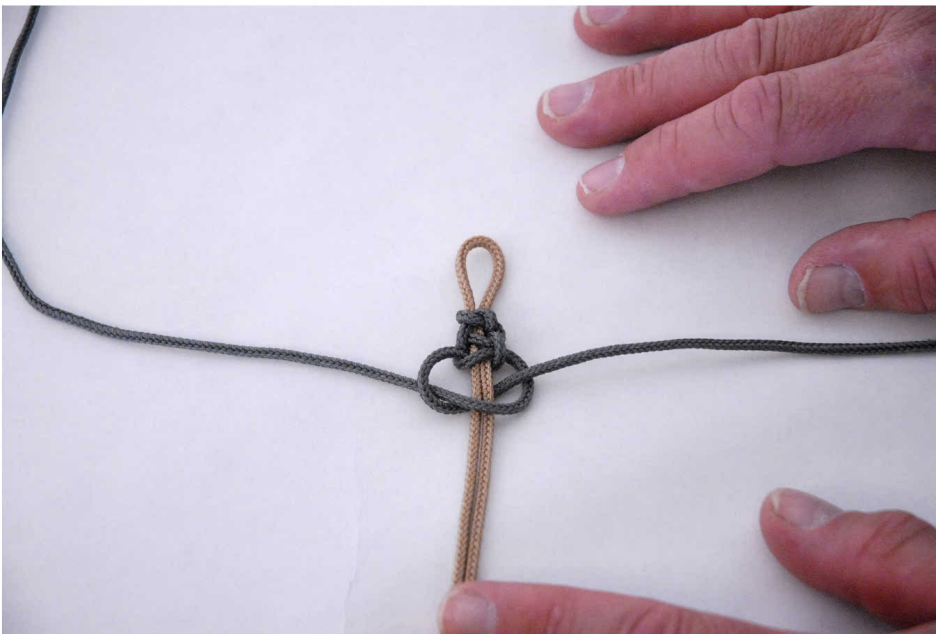
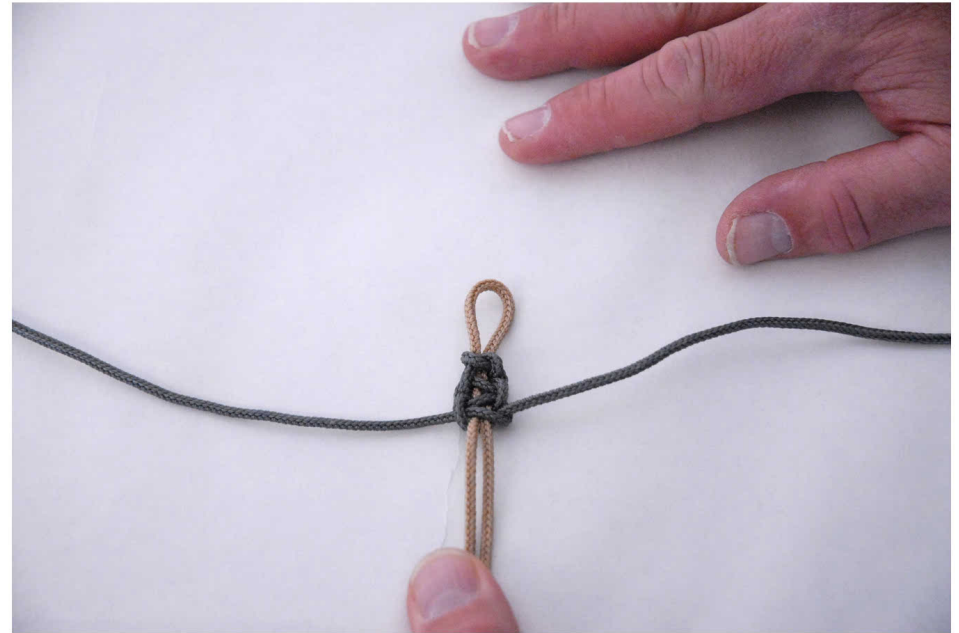


Now, take the left side over the brown cord, then under the right side, bringing it up tightly.





Continue alternating sides: right side behind brown cord and over left side, followed by left side over brown cord and under right side,



bringing it all up tightly.



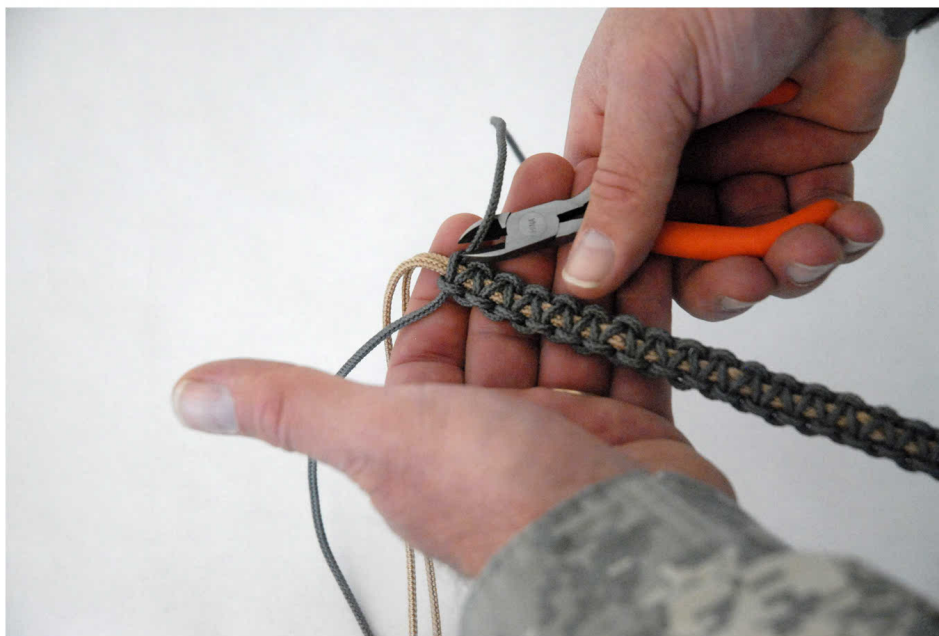
Continue repeating steps.



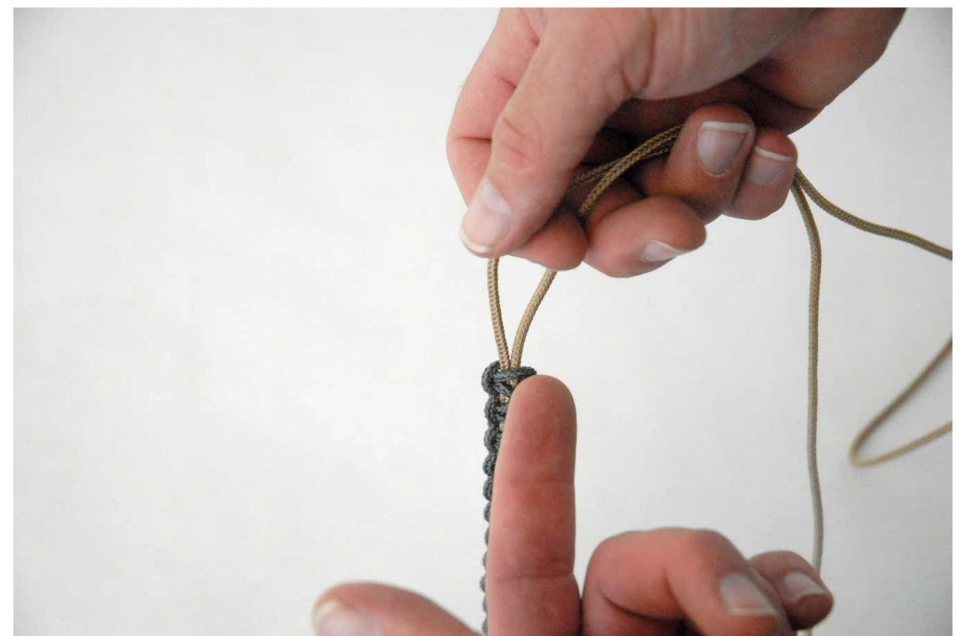
Continue until desired length is reached. To measure, wrap around wrist. Braided ends of gray cord should touch.



Burn the ends and press down while hot to prevent untying. Repeat for other side.

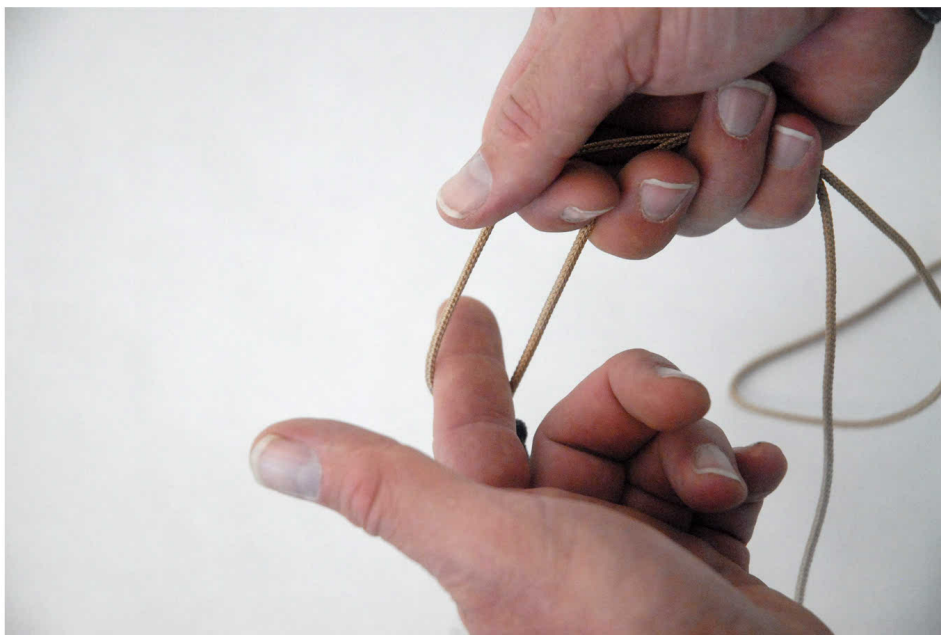


Cut cord right up against the last braid.

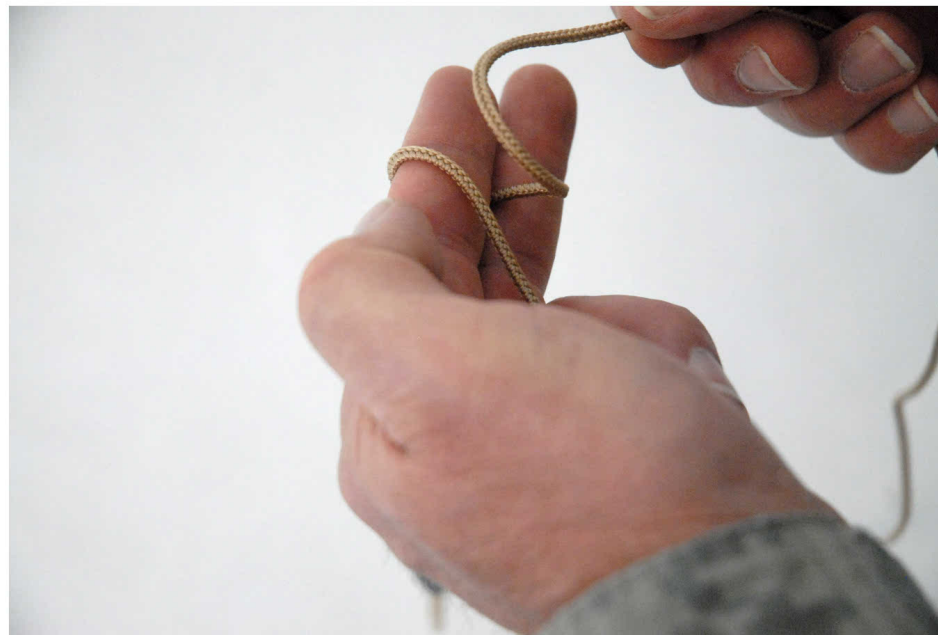


Place your pointing finger between the two brown cords.





With pointing finger resting between the brown cords,



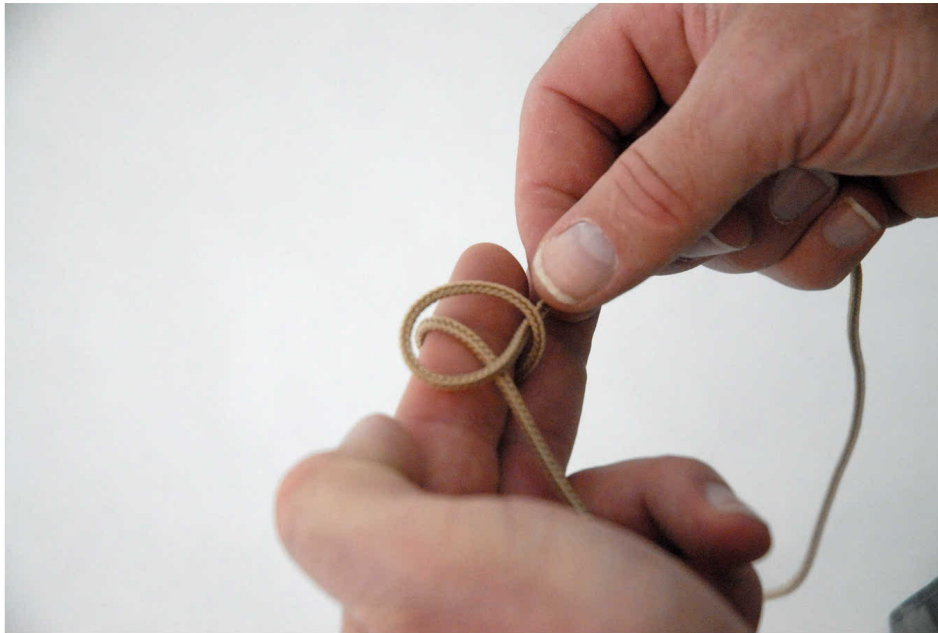
Place bottom cord between pointing finger and thumb of right hand, and roll to the right.



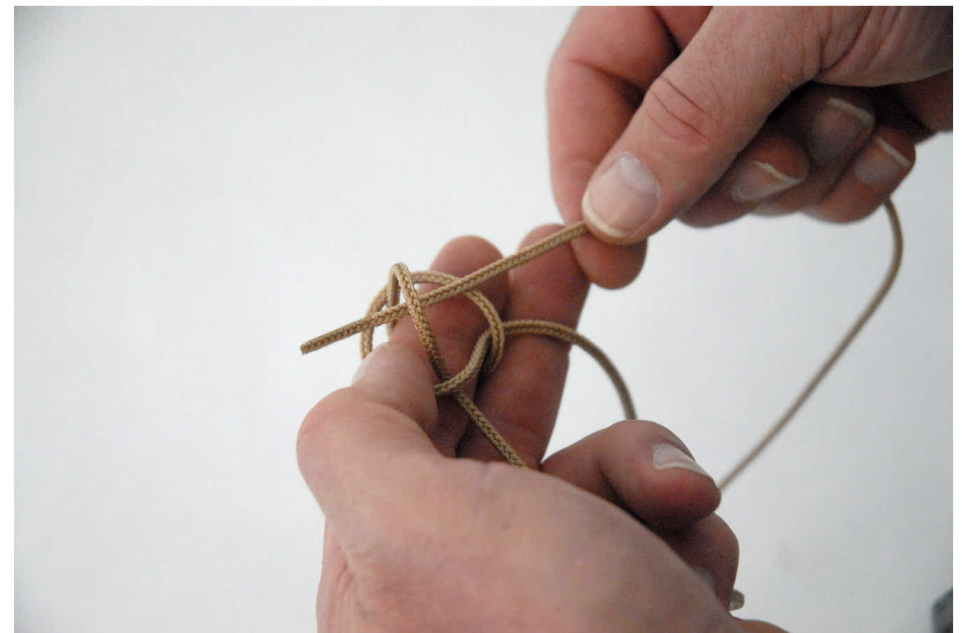
Lay the top cord over the finger and to the left side of the other (with left palm facing you.)



Continue to roll to the right until a loop is formed, as in figure above.



Place the created loop over and centered on the top cord.



Take the end of the top cord. Thread under bottom cord and over loop, then through the top cord,



Pull approximately 1 - 1.5 inches of cord through the created loop.

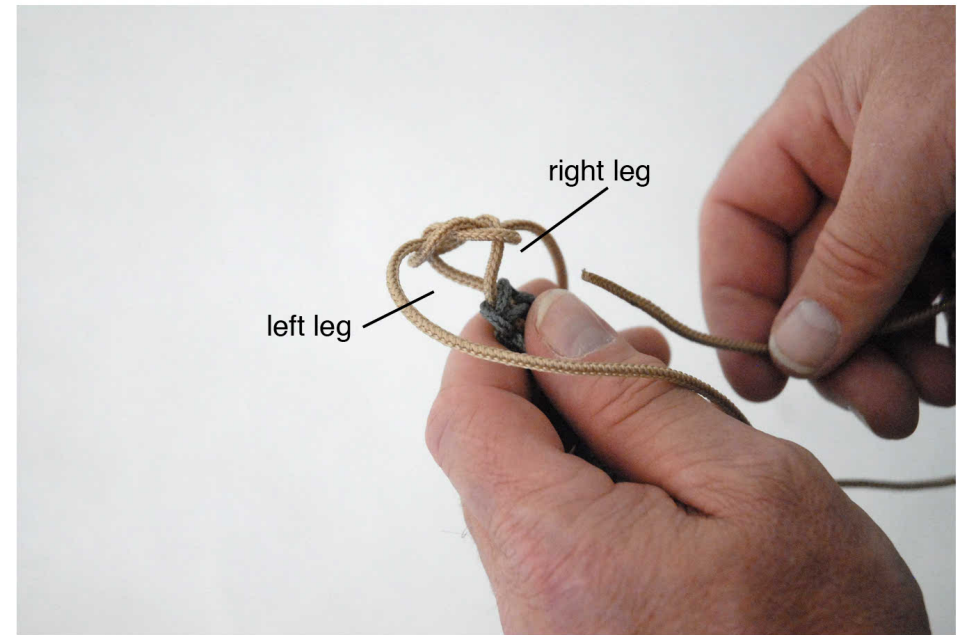


forming a figure 8.





Tighten and adjust as shown in figure above.



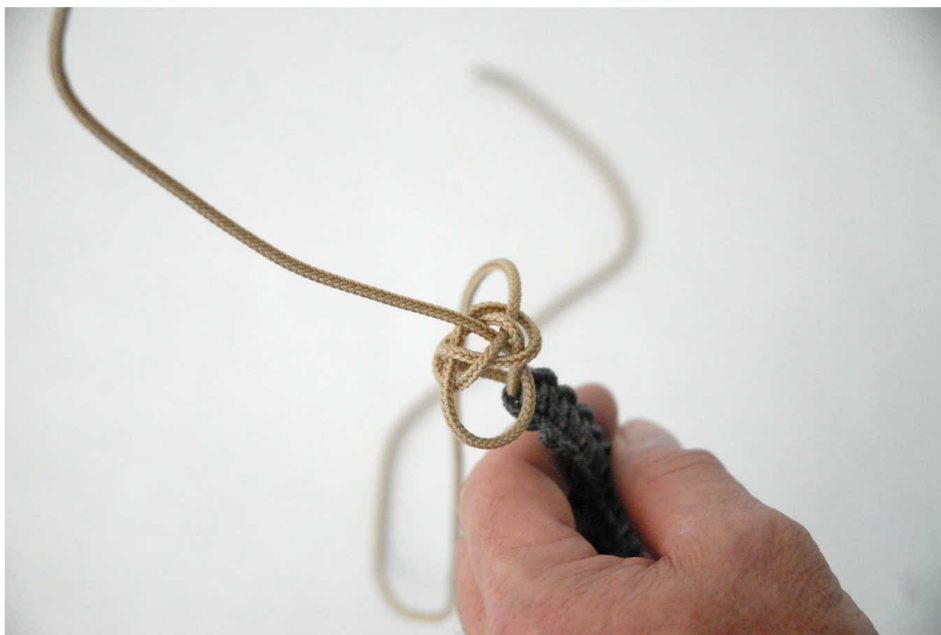
Take the left cord and bring down and around the right leg.



Place in left hand, as shown.



Then, up through the center of the figure 8.



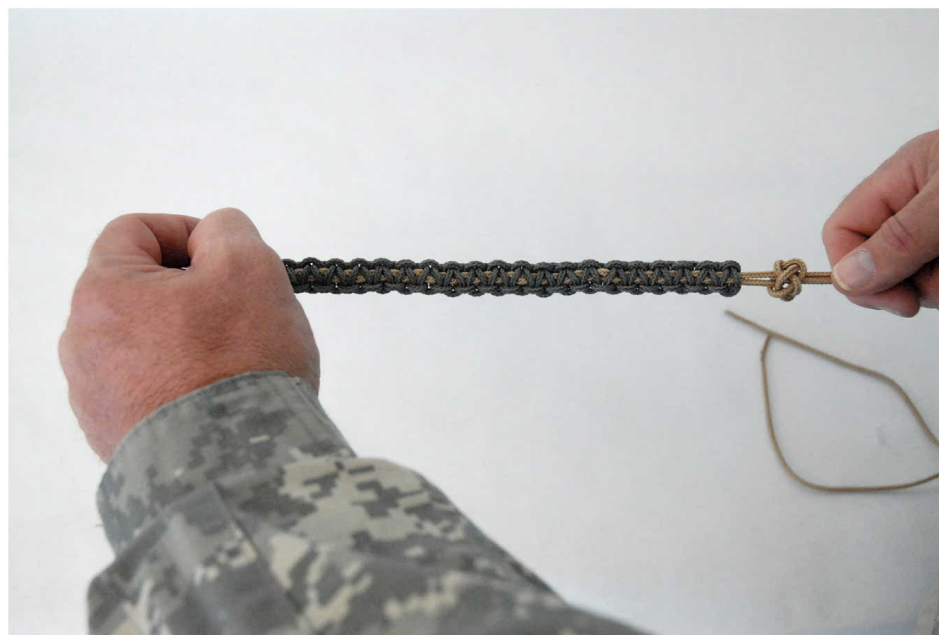
Bring up snug but DO NOT TIGHTEN!!!



Pull both strings at the same time, and draw up snug once again.



Repeat steps for other side.



Place finger through loop at one end, strings in hand at the other head, and pull tightly. This tightens the Turk's Head knot securely.





Using your needle nose pliers, tighten the Turks Head further, if you choose.



Finished Soldiers Bracelet.



Cut excess cord. Burn to prevent unraveling.



MONKEY'S FIST WITH A  
SNAKE BRAID HANDLE  
KEYCHAIN



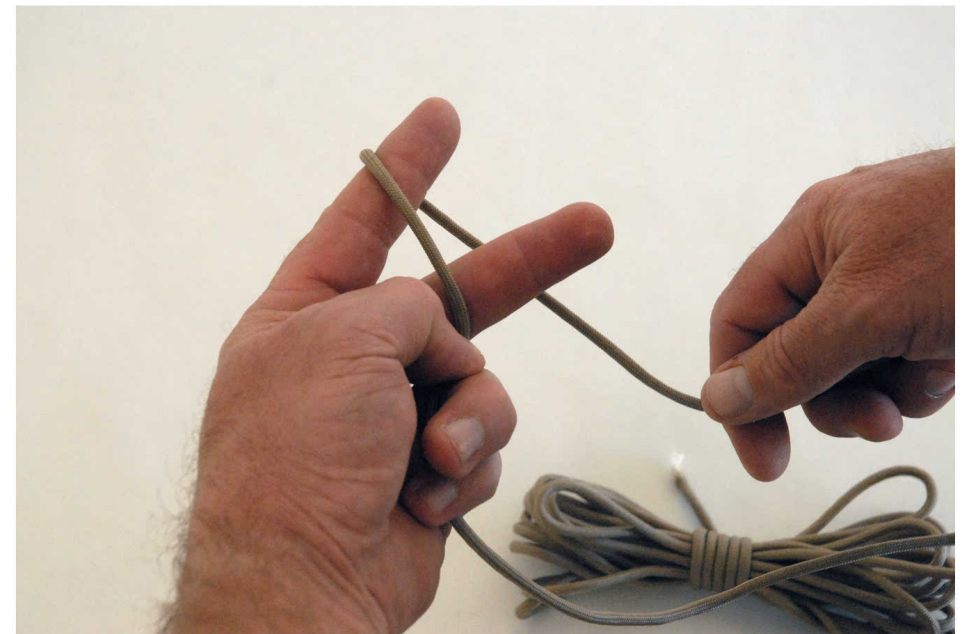
Tools Required for Monkey Fist Keychain: Plastic Embroidery Needle, Bic Lighter, Needle Nose Pliers.



Place left hand with first 2 fingers in a "V" formation.

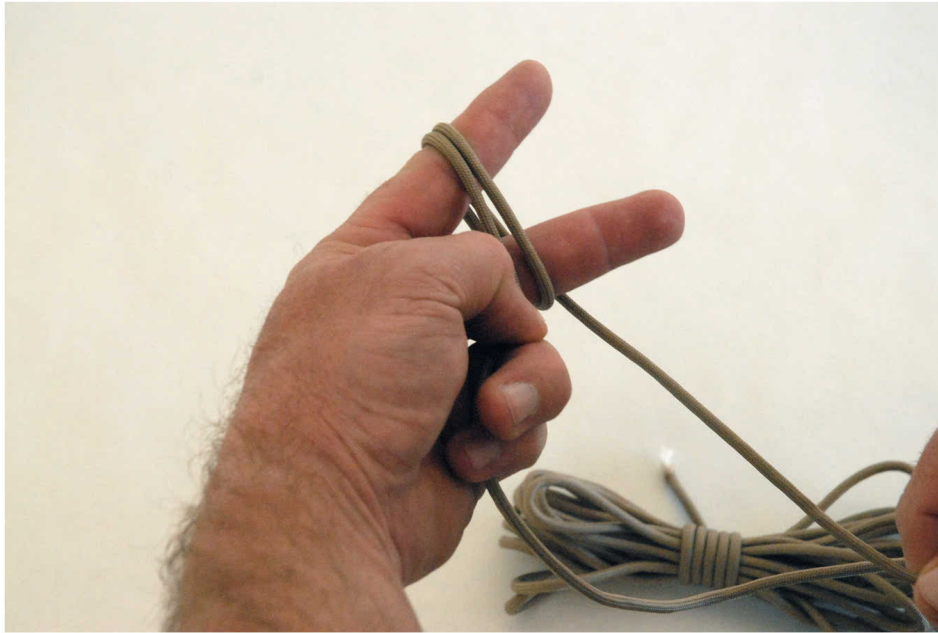


Items Required: 550 Cord, color of your choice, 1/2-3/4 inch sized Marble, 1/2-3/4 inch Key Ring.

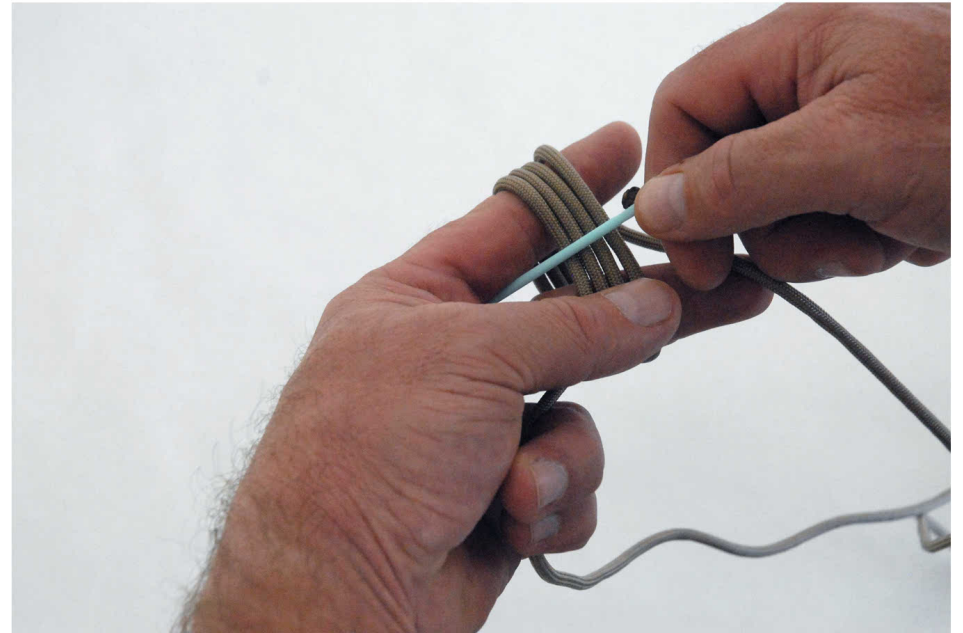


Lay 550 cord over the top of your pointing finger, front to back.

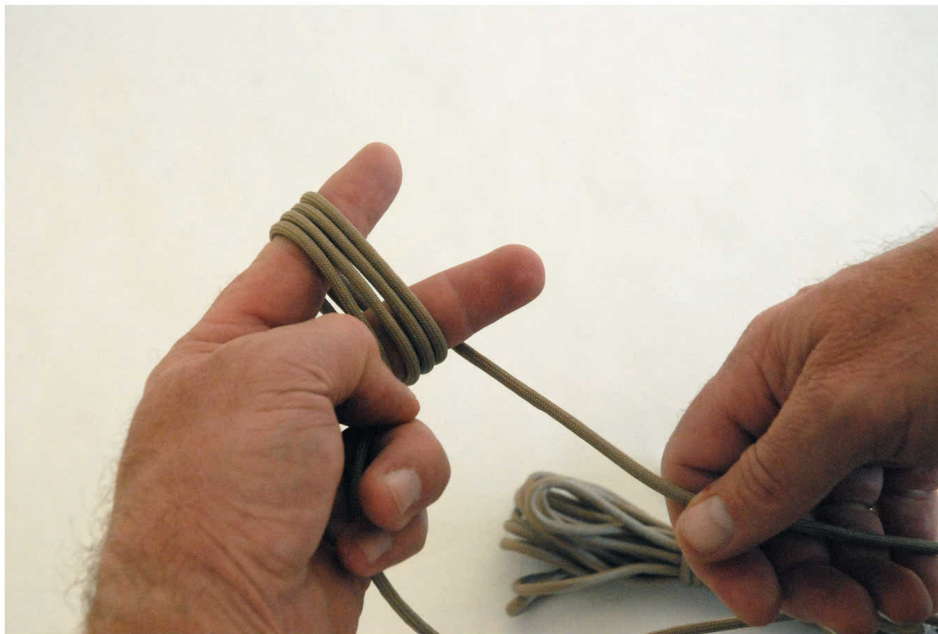




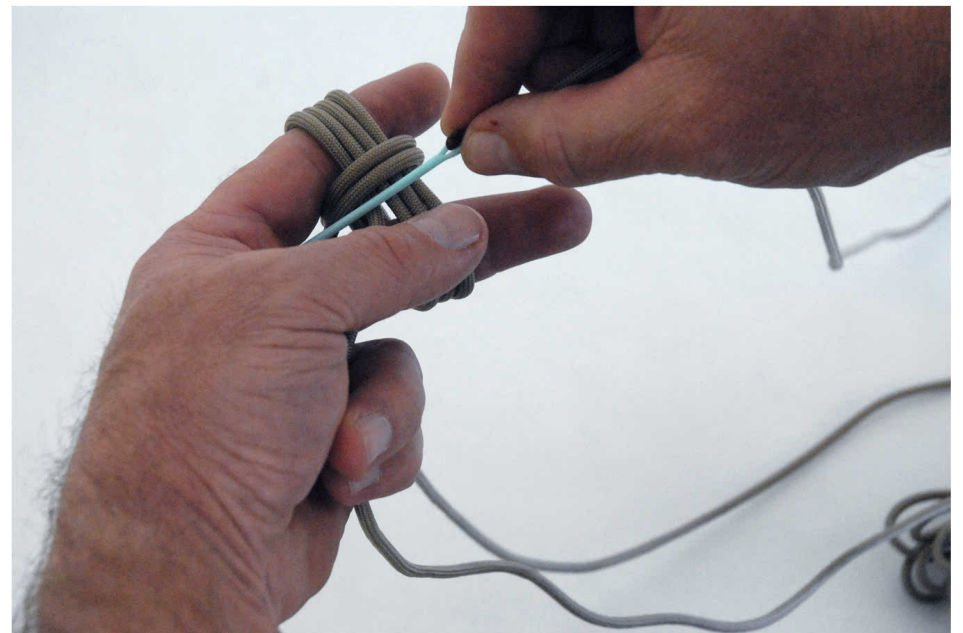
Keeping fingers in position, evenly wrap cord around fingers



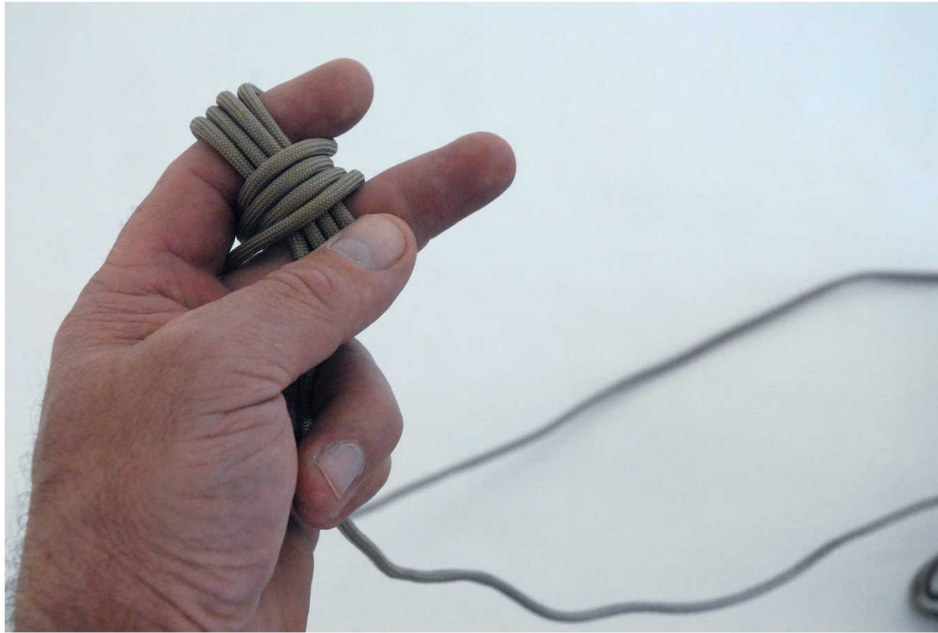
Run needle (cord) between fingers as shown in figure.



Stop at 4 wraps.



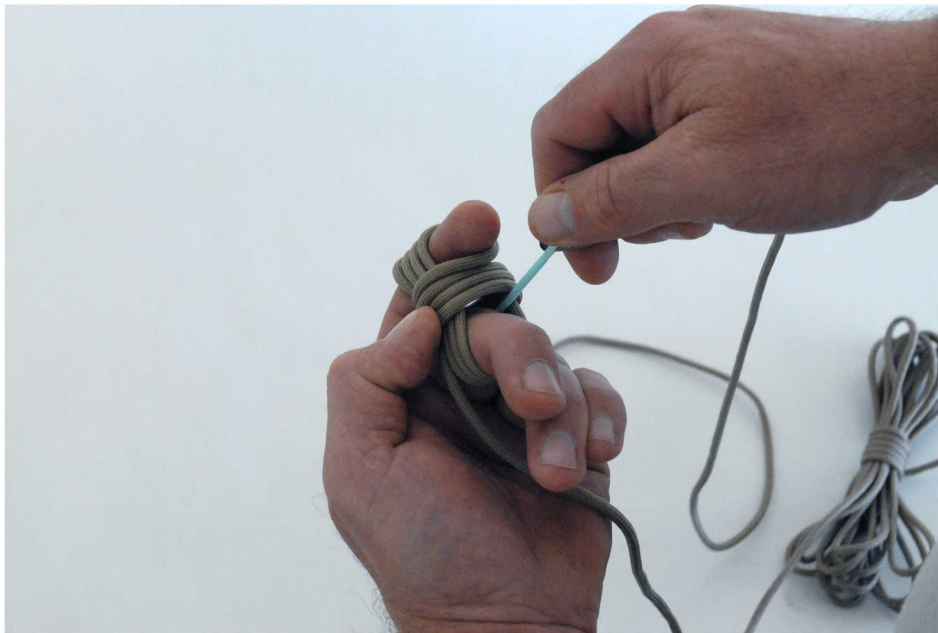
Continue wrapping as shown.



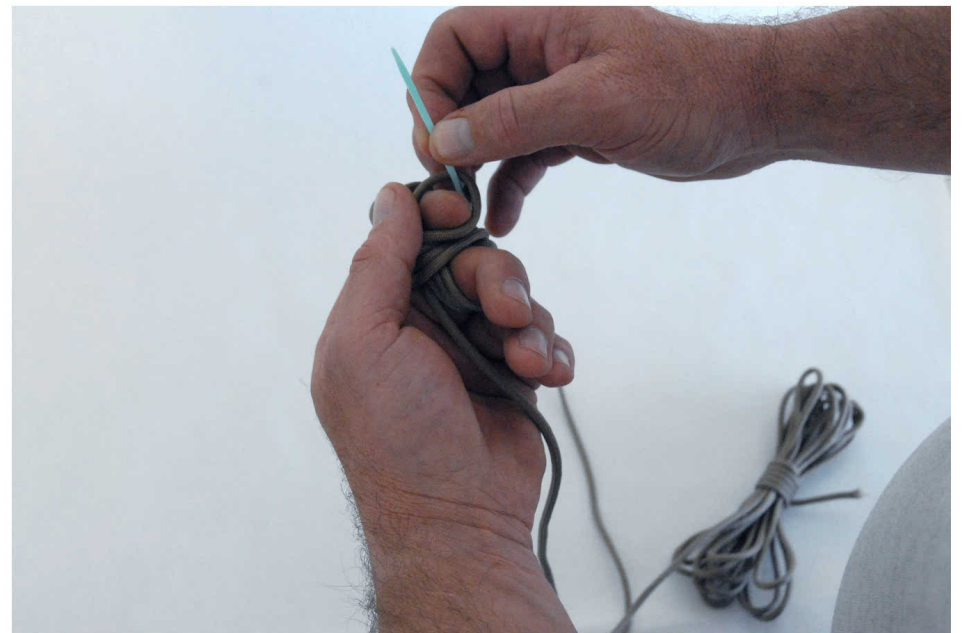
Complete 4 wraps as before.



Bring needle through top of last 4 wraps,

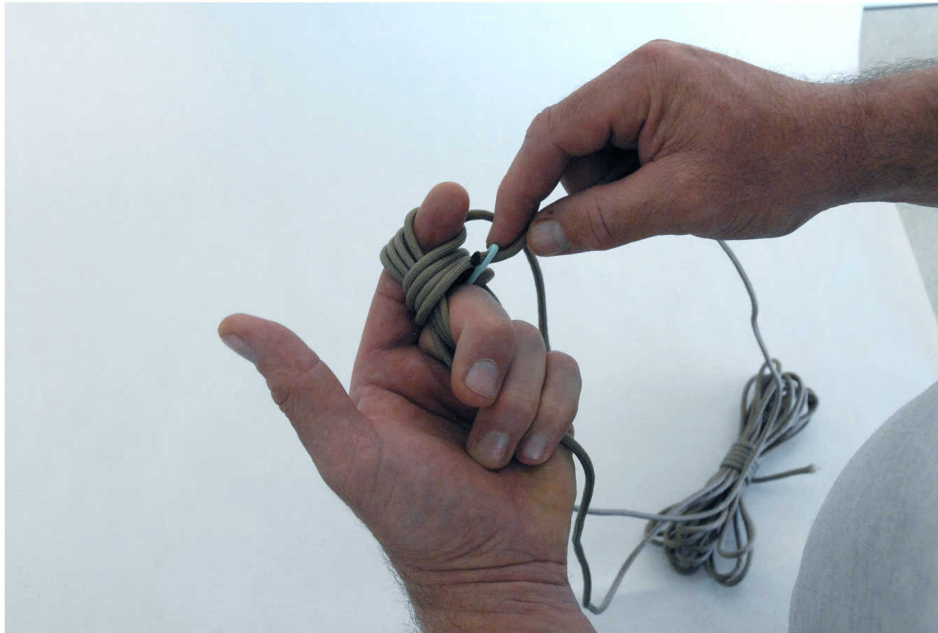


Take your needle (cord) and place it through the bottom front of the last 4 wraps, as shown.



and pull through.

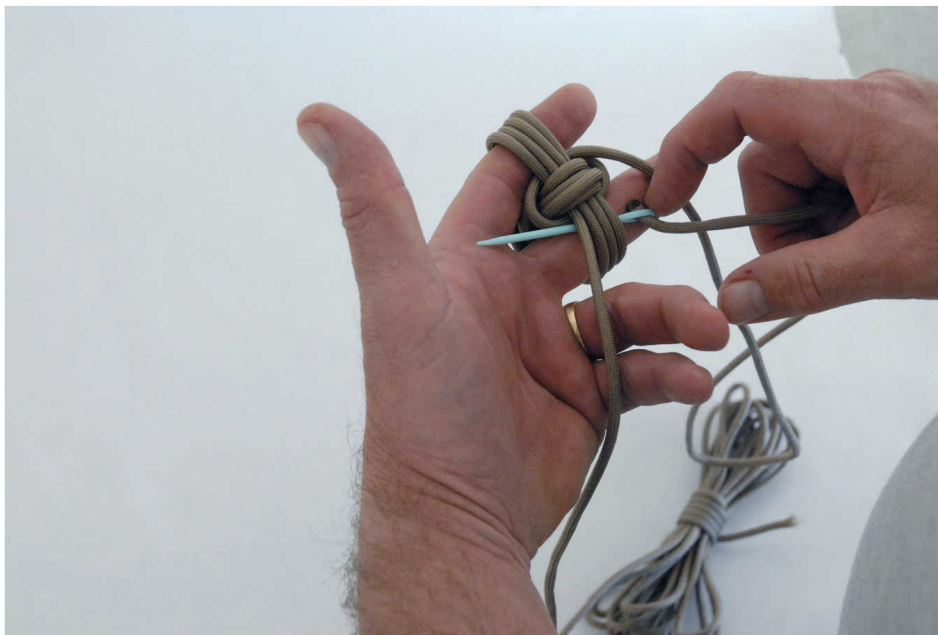




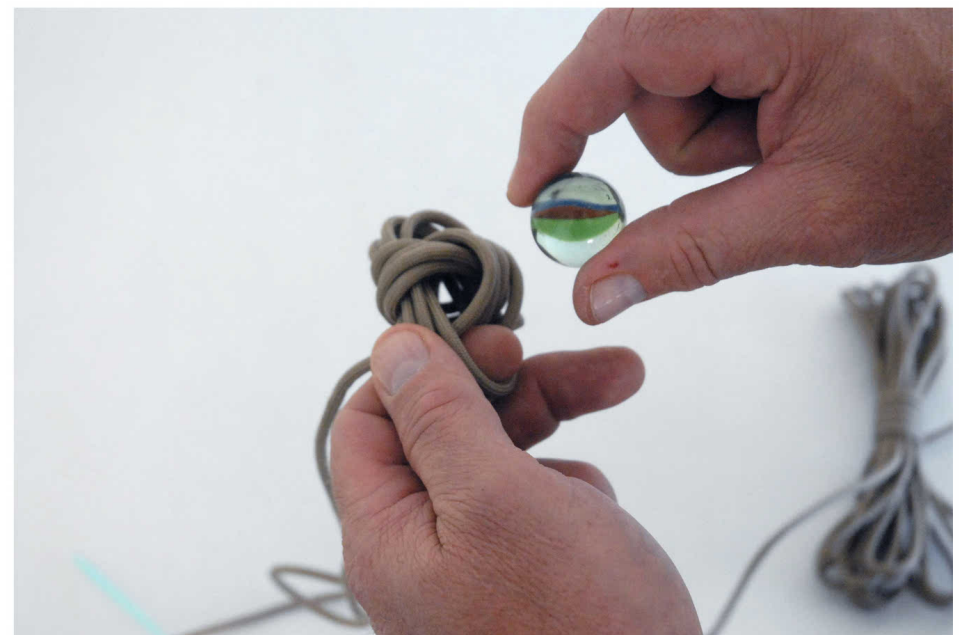
Thread needle (cord) through bottom.



Remove knot from hand.

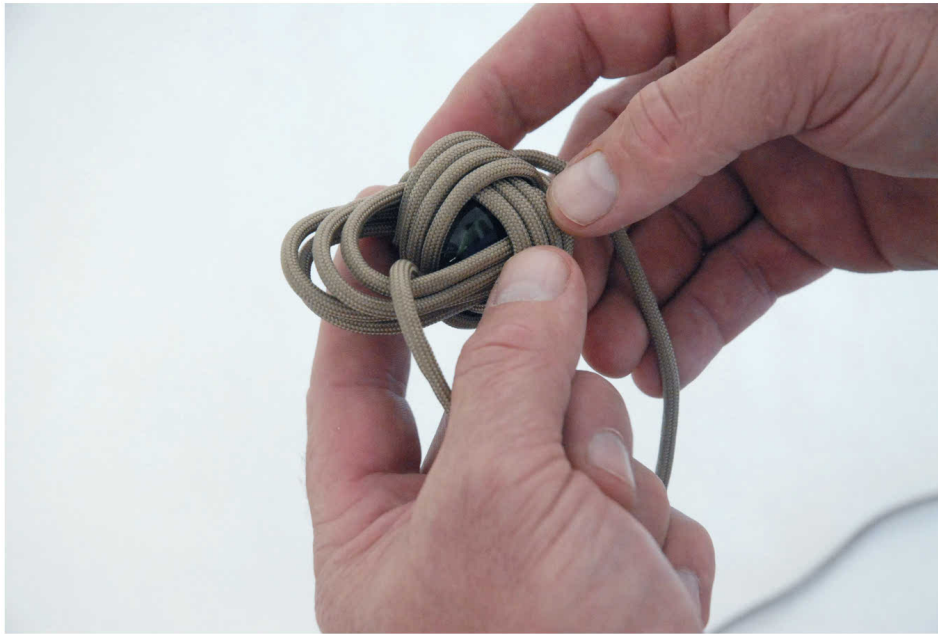


Wrap 4 times.



Work a large opening in the knot as shown in figure, and place your marble inside of it.

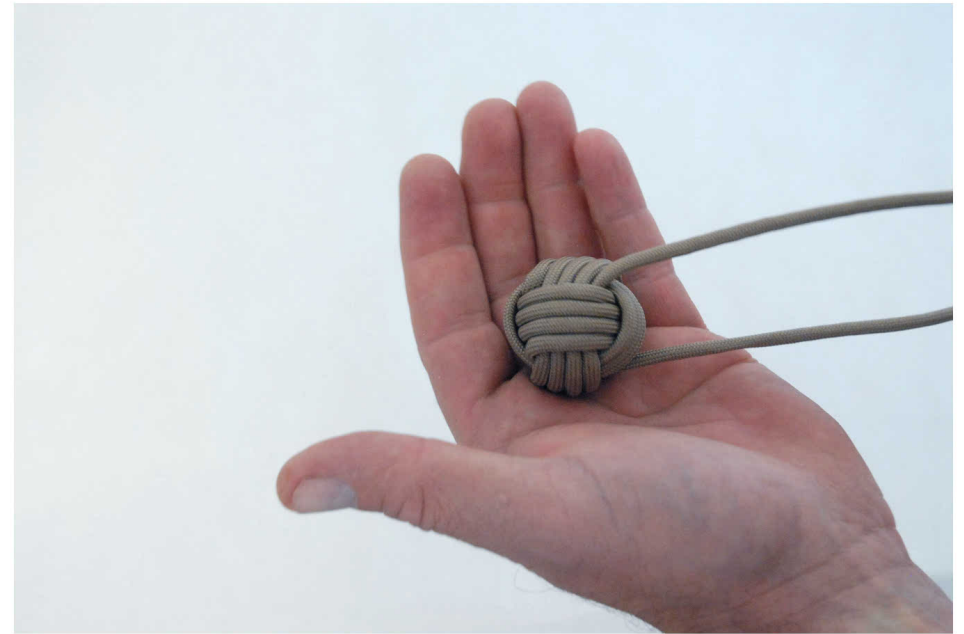




Once marble is inside of knot, work your cords evenly around the marble.



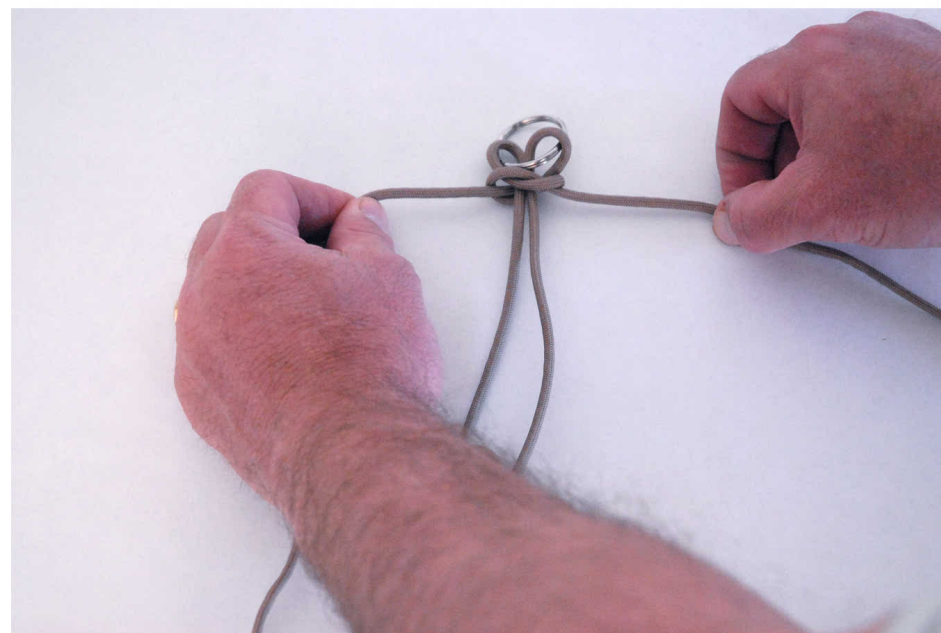
Begin tightening your knot around the marble from either end, being careful not to tighten too much at first. Start slowly on your first pass, and then come back and tighten again for an even tight.



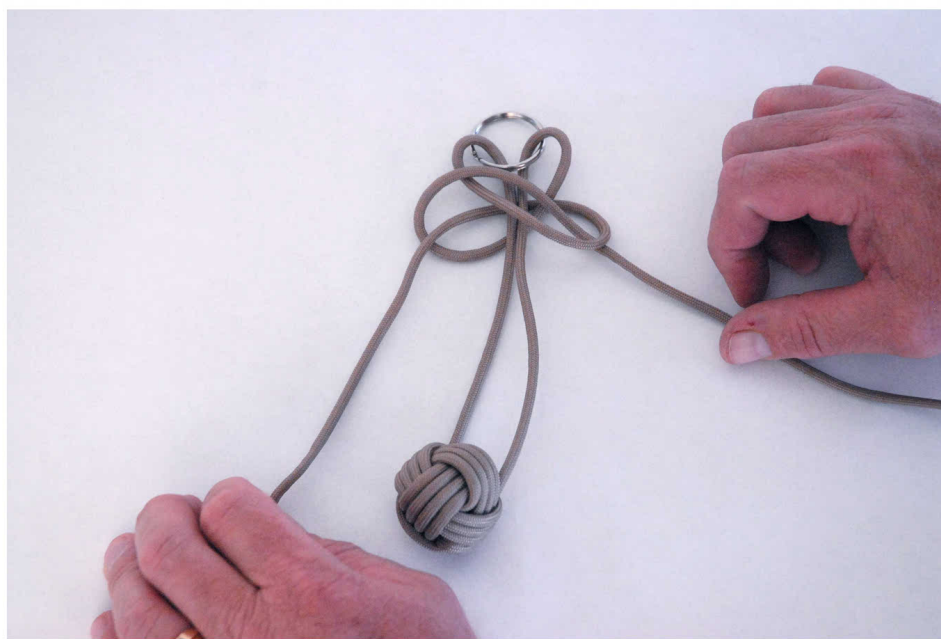
This is what your completed Monkey's Fist should look like. Neato.



The Snake Braid: Pull cord through keyring until approx. 5 inches of cord remains between Monkey's Fist and keyring.



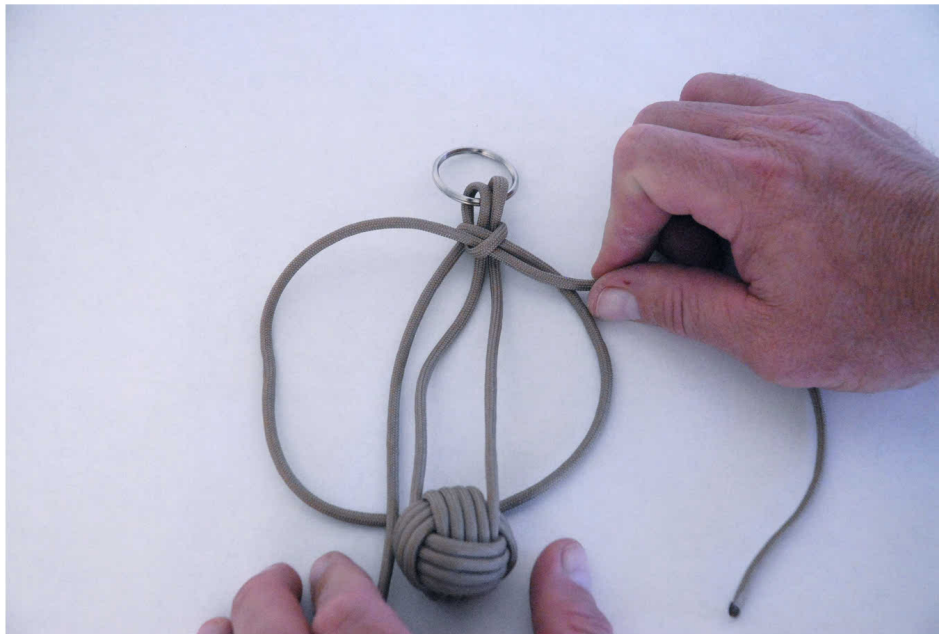
Slowly pull your left and right cords until snug.



Take right cord behind middle 2 and left cord, and bring around and in front of all 3. Now, take left cord in front of middle 2, over right cord, behind all 3, and through loop of right cord.



Adjust the length you want from your knot to your keyring, and then finish tightening your knot.



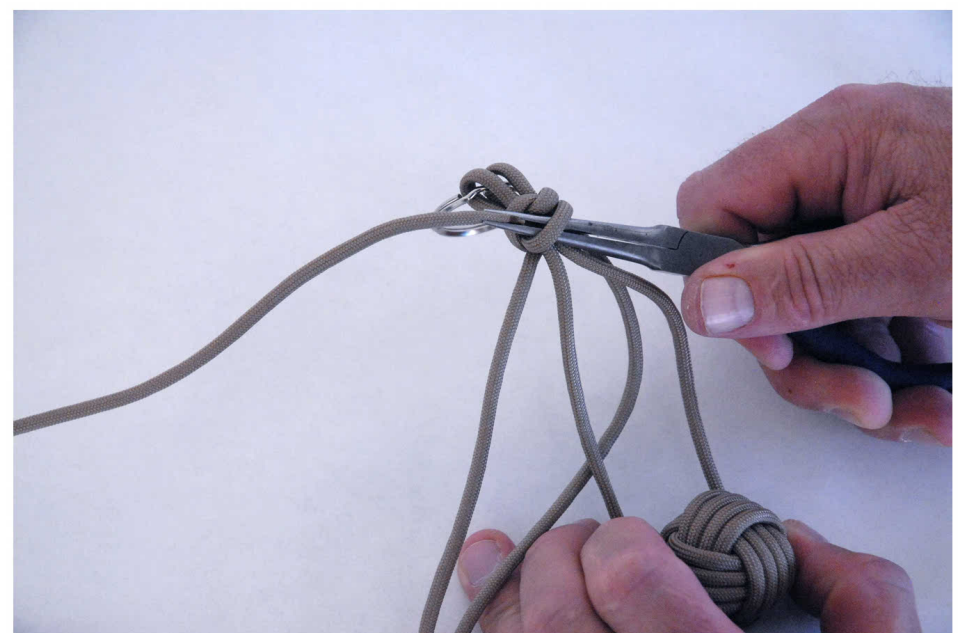
Turn the entire thing over, loosen the knot, take the right cord behind all 3, and run through the loose knot.



Turn entire project over again. Loosen knot and repeat steps.



Slowly bring up tight using both left and right cords.

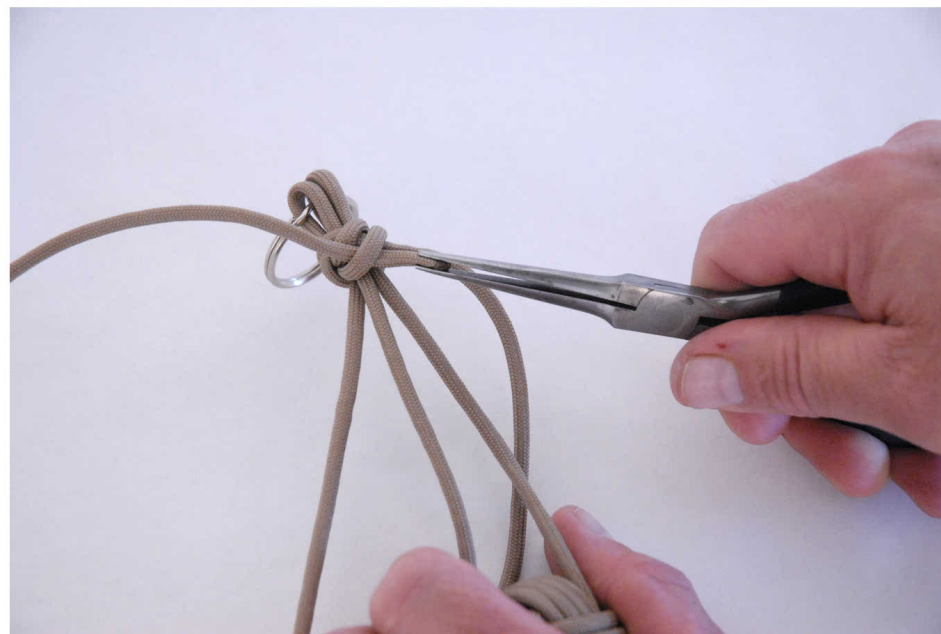


At this point, you can use your needle nosed pliers to make it easier to pull the cord through the knot.

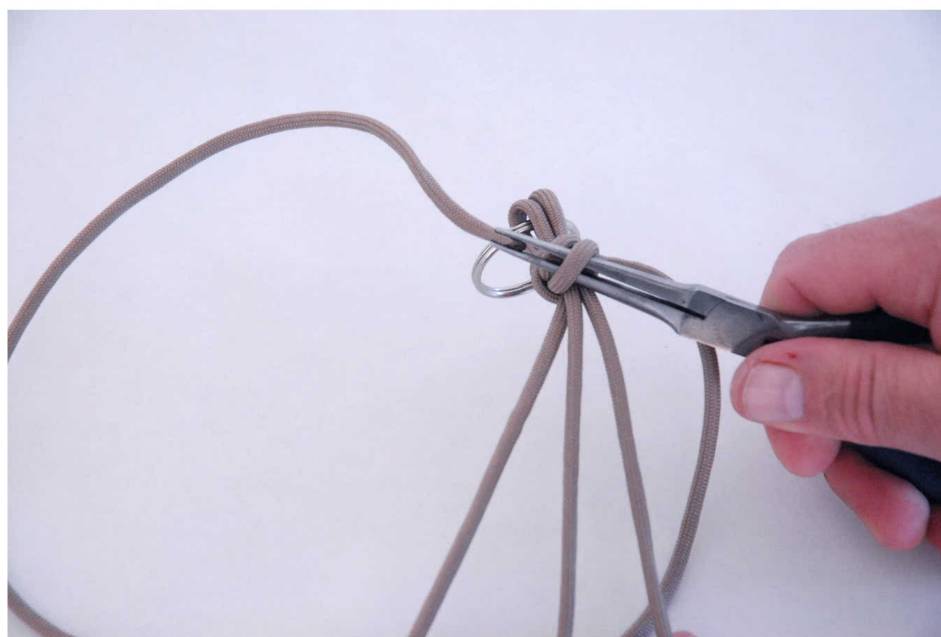




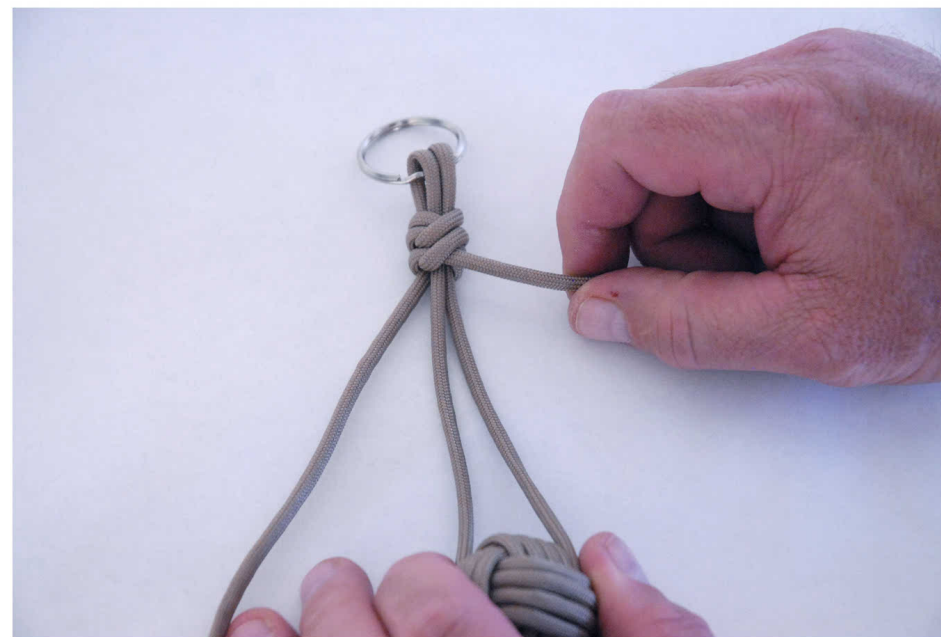
Pull through with pliers.



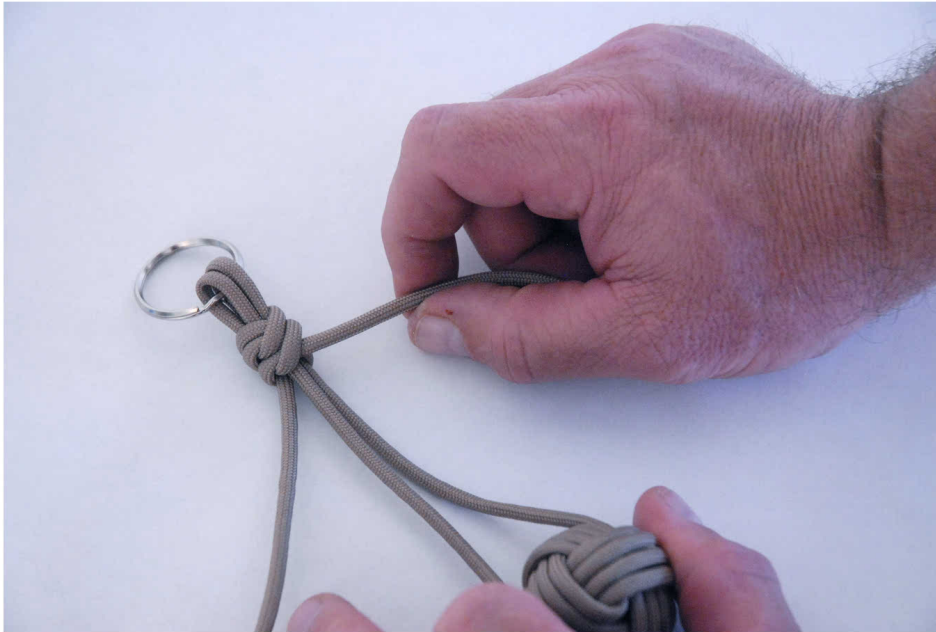
Pull through.



Turn knot over and repeat steps.



Continue steps. Remember to each time turn project over for each step, and to tighten with both cords until desired length of Snake Braid is achieved.



Continue braiding.



Using your sharp knife, cut cord approx. 1/8 of an inch from last braid.



Finished braid.



Using your Bic lighter, melt the end of the cord and then while hot, press down on melted cord with your lighter. This will prevent unraveling. Repeat for other side.



Your completed Monkeys Fist Snake Braided Keychain!

DOG LEASH

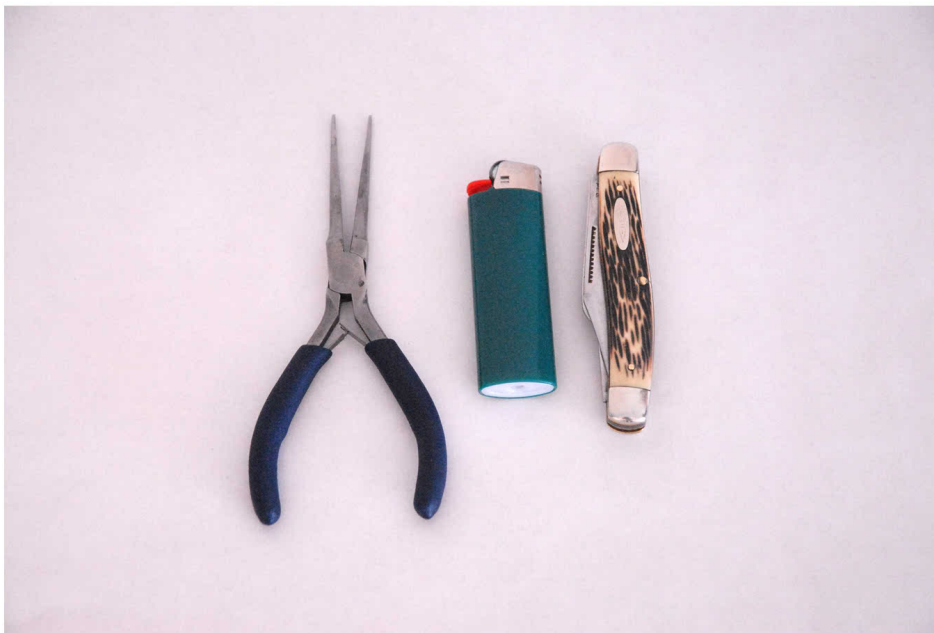




Items needed for Dog Leash: 2 colors 550 Cord (approx. 12 feet each), Clasp



Run both cords through clasp to halfway point.



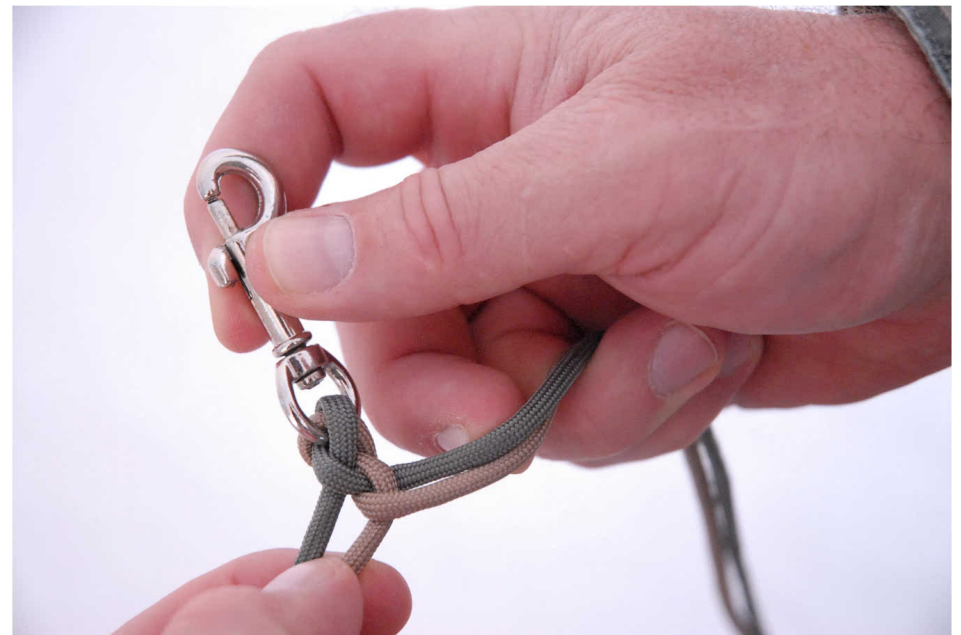
Tools required: Needle-nose Pliers, Bic Lighter, Pocket Knife



Cross cords as shown, right over left (gray on top.)



Bring rear gray cord forward and around front gray cord, and to the right as shown in figure.



Bring second brown cord behind and over first brown cord as shown.



Bring left brown cord around back and over the gray front cord.



Bring left grey cord behind and over front brown cord.





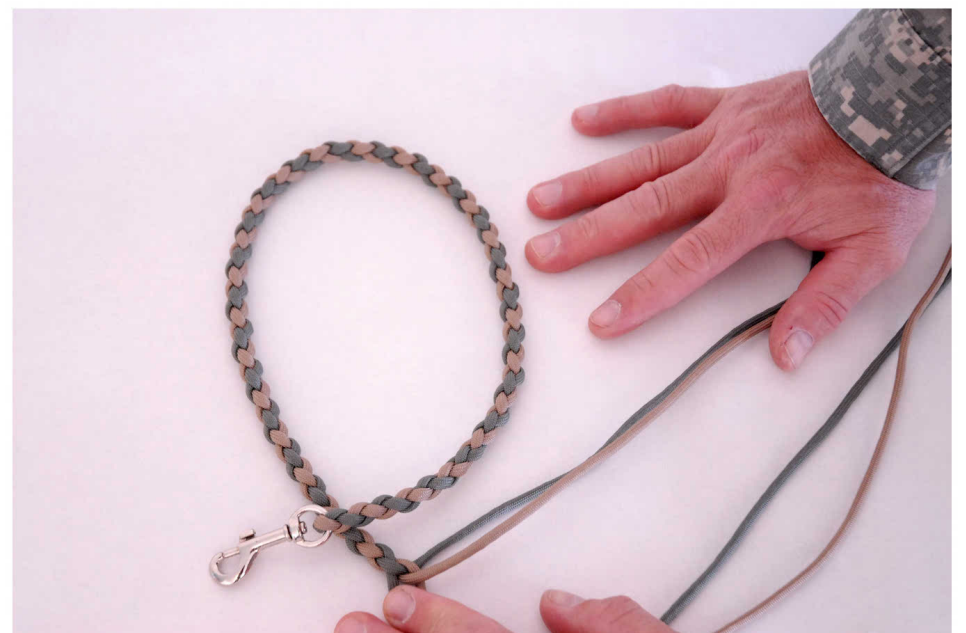
Bring second gray cord behind and over first gray cord.



Bring second brown cord behind and over first brown cord.



Bring first brown cord behind and over front gray cord.

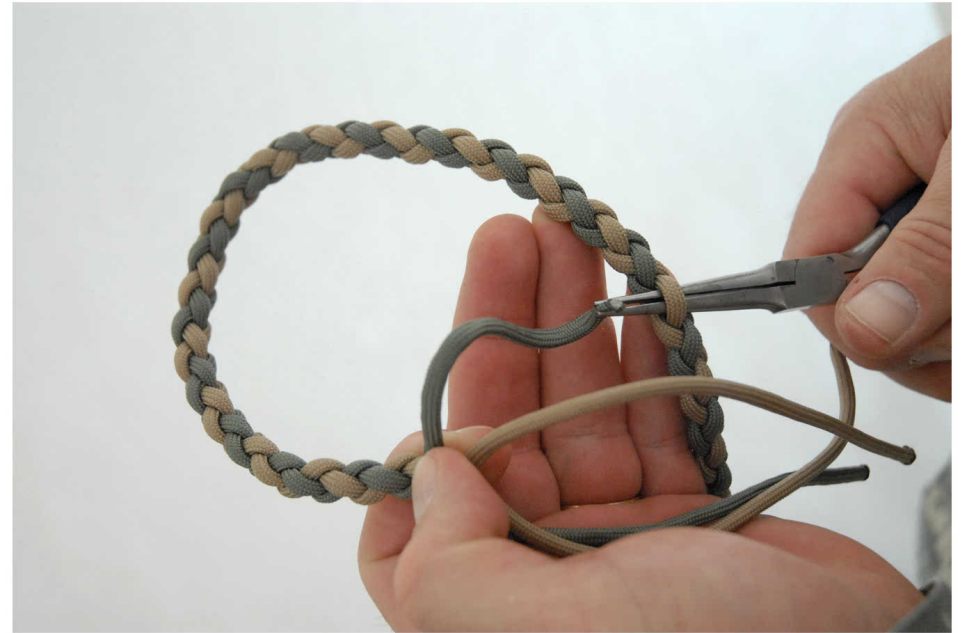


Continue four strand round braid until desired length is reached.





Your finished braid will have 3-4 inches of unbraided cord, which will be used for the handle.



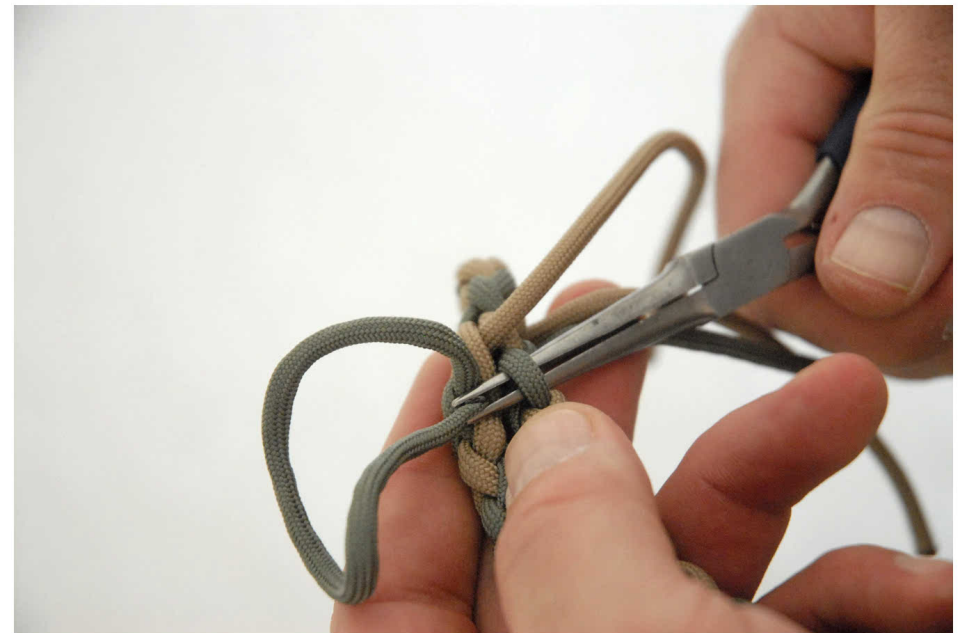
Fold approximately 4 inches of your braid over. Place your needle nose through the brown cord as shown, and grasp the gray cord.



Pull the gray cord through until the end of your braid is snug up against your brown cord as shown.



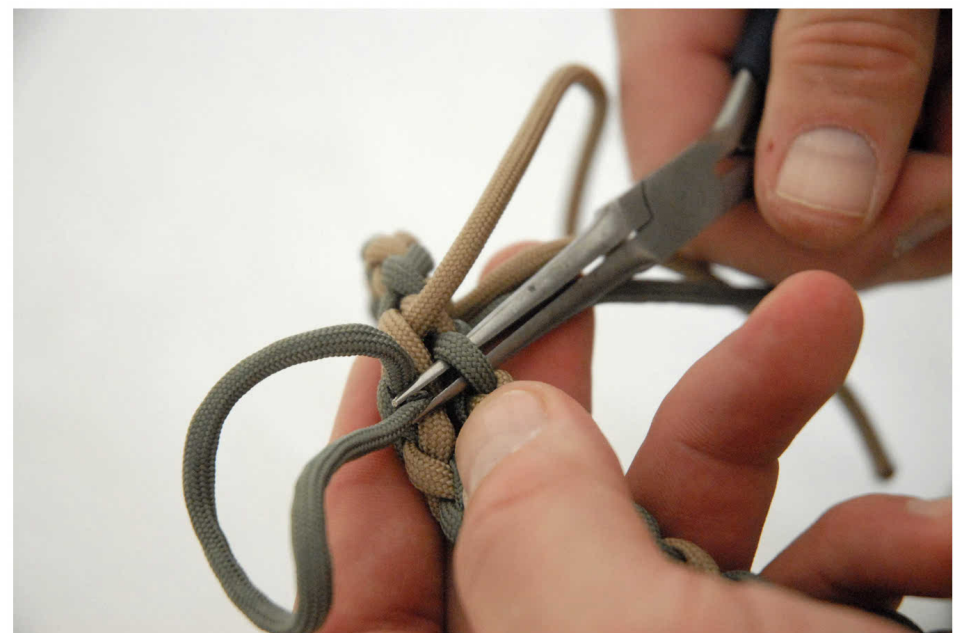
Repeat steps for brown cord.



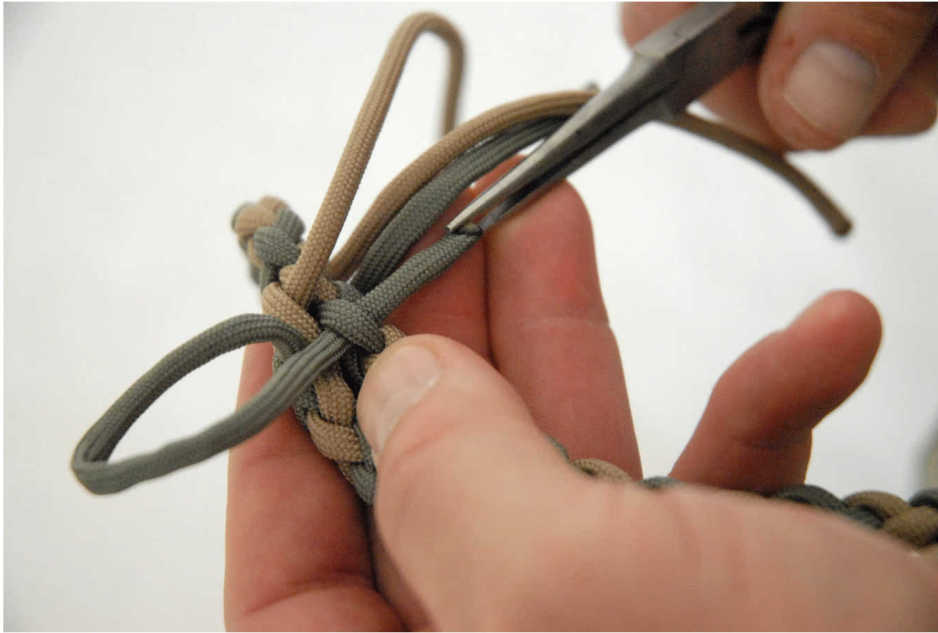
Turn your project completely over and repeat steps for other gray cord.



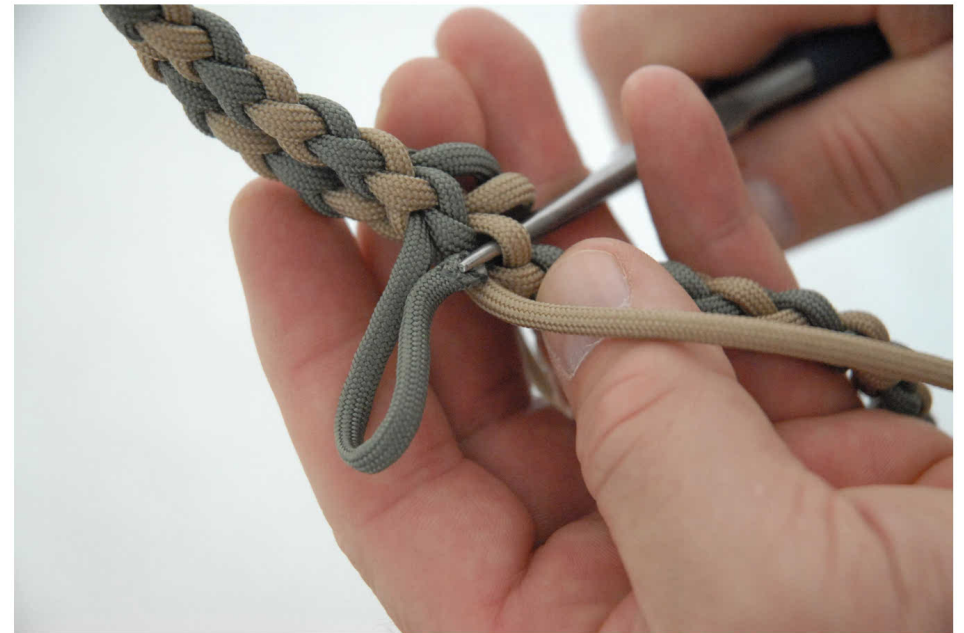
Pull through and snug up to the braid.



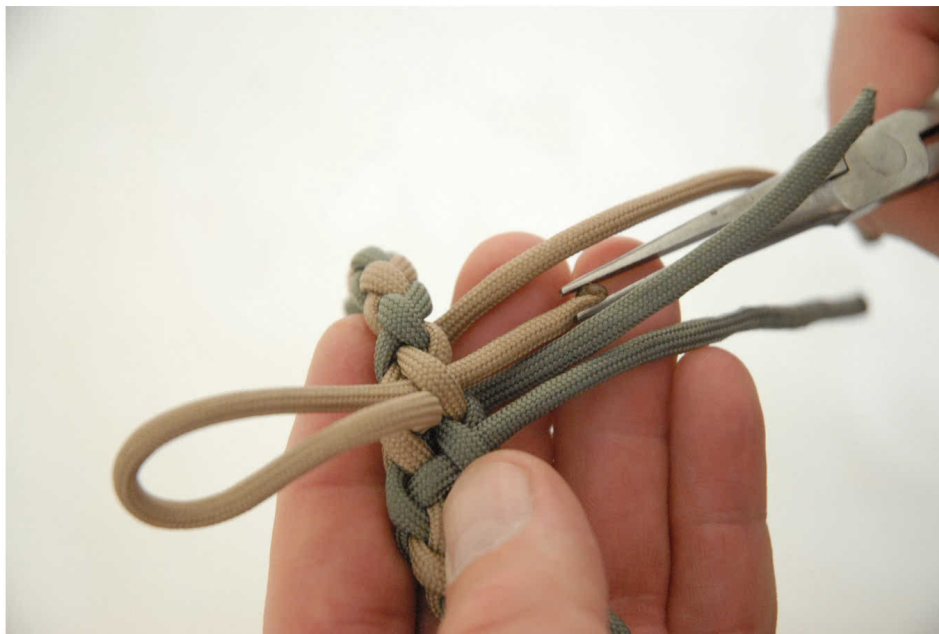
Pull through and make tight.



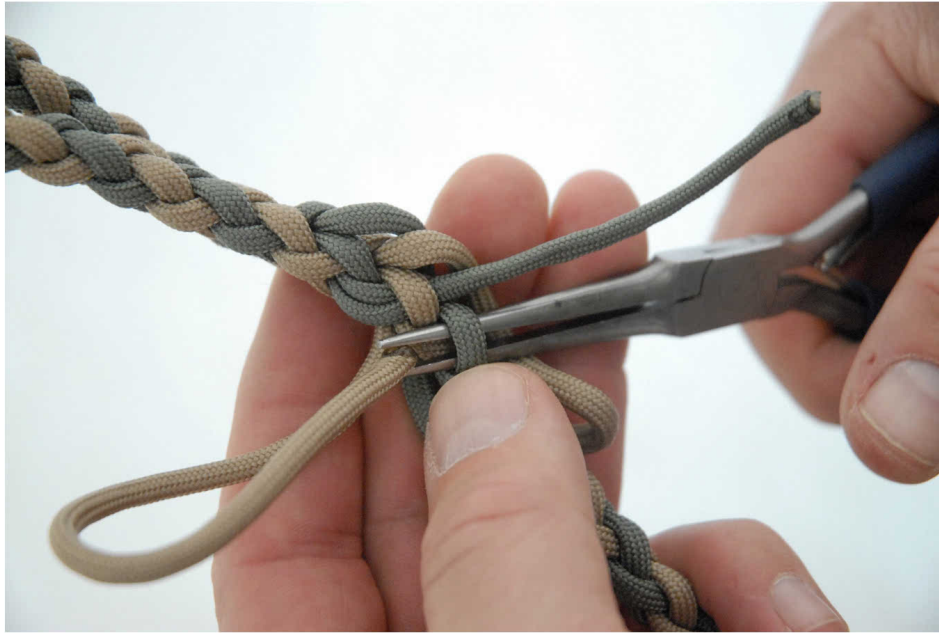
Repeat steps and pull through tight.



Repeat steps and pull tight. Continue working your way down the braid.







You need at least 2 inches of back braid completed.



Cut 1/8 inches from your braid. Burn and press with your Bic lighter.



Completed Back-Braided Handle.



Your completed Dog Leash.

## MY CREATIONS

## BLACKJACK

I made this for my wife. It has a golf ball inside the Monkey's Fist. She keeps it in her office as a paperweight.





### COFFEE COASTER

I made this out of bootlace that I got out of the PX (Post Exchange). Shortly after I was finished, I took it apart because I didn't like it.





## CELTIC CROSS

I did this while in Fort Hood. I was waiting for my plane ride home to have my surgery to have the cancer removed. It just came to me one night while I was sleeping. The next day, I woke up, drew it, and made it. It still hangs in our living room.





## HEART SHAPE FRAME

I made the heart shape frame for my wife. She put a picture of our grandson in it. The rest of the knots that hang below it are my own design.





### TURK'S HEAD KNOT

I was in Fort Hood, still waiting for my plane ride home. I had some spare time, so I tied this on a broom handle. When I took it off the handle, it stayed in this formation, so I took a picture of it.



## LEATHER HAT BAND

I made this leather hat band with horsehair tassels a few years ago. It's one of the first ones I made. Most people see it and request to have one made. It's my biggest moneymaker.





## NYLON HAMMOCK

Our dogs decided to tear up our old hammock. We almost threw out the frame, but I told my wife, let's keep it, maybe one day I'll give it a try. So, a few months ago, I did. It takes 300 feet of cord to make a hammock.





## FLASHLIGHT

I bought my wife a flashlight. I thought I'd be a little "decorative" for her. This is what I came up with. She really likes it... she don't like to loan it out to nobody.

















## KEYCHAINS

Various keychains I kept or gave away, made from 550 cord, shoelaces, etc.

## KNIFE HANDLES

I covered my hunting knife handles with 550 cord. I interweaved the one on the far right with a small camouflage cord. I thought it looked pretty good.

## M-4 FORWARD GRIPS

The one on the right is mine. The other one belongs to a friend of mine. I made them at Fort Hood before I knew I had cancer. After I found out, I took the forward grip off of my rifle and gave it to my son. He put it on his and took it to Iraq. I also gave him the rosary I made, and had it blessed by the chaplain. He also wore that the whole time he was there. He now has both of them at his home, all three safe and sound.

## ROSARY

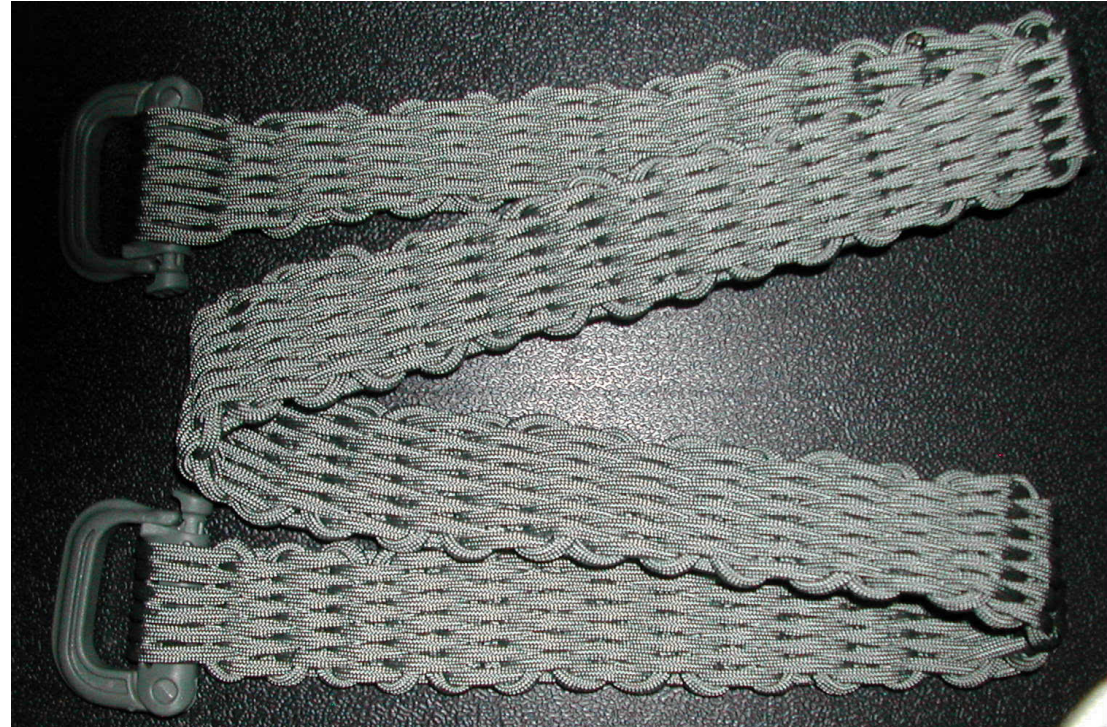
I made this for my wife's work. They were having a charity benefit. I donated it. I'm told they auctioned it off, and it didn't do too bad. This is my second biggest moneymaker.





## SHOULDER STRAP

I made this for a friend of mine. Seems he bought a bag at the PX. When he brought the bag back to the barracks, he didn't have a sling, so he asked me to make him one. This is what I came up with. Damn, it was comfortable, too; I should have kept it.





The sketch is of my grandmother (my mom's mom.) The two colors were her favorite. The quilt pattern is called "The New Mexico Star." Since my grandmother's passing, my mom makes sure she puts those two colors in every quilt she makes. Any woman that can have 15 kids and have a heart of gold has got to be an angel.





## WALKING STICK

I made this for a friend at work. She was going to have hip surgery and didn't think a cane would work, so she asked me if I would make a walking stick for her. I came up with this. I'm most proud of this, out of all the work I've done. I put a lot of time and detail into it. My wife did the staining and varnishing of the stick.





## COLOPHON

A PROJECT BY  
Monica Haller

BOOK BY  
Joseph P. W. Vigil Jr.

PHOTOS  
Monica Haller  
Grace Vigil  
Joseph P. W. Vigil Jr.

TEXT  
Joseph P. W. Vigil Jr.  
Faith Purvey

COPY EDITING  
Faith Purvey  
Lisa Kundrat

TEMPLATE DESIGN  
Matthew Rezac  
Monica Haller

SOFTWARE DESIGN  
Mark Fox

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Thank you,  
Monica Haller

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Joseph P.W. Vigil Jr. lives in Pueblo West Colorado with his wife Grace and their dog Tuzic. His family has been in Colorado for as long as he can remember. Joseph has been in the CO Army National Guard for 30 years. He had the rare honor of serving with both his dad and his son in the same unit. Joseph has been mobilized several times for Katrina, blizzards, hurricanes, 9-11 and the war in Iraq, but he have never seen combat. He volunteered to go to Iraq so he could be with his son, taking a voluntary reduction in rank to do it, but that is when they found the cancer. Joe says, "I will always feel like serving in combat is a debt I will always owe that I will never be able to pay." Joe is currently in the WTU (Warrior Transition Unit) still waiting for his MEB (Medical Evaluation Board) to be medically discharged from the military. In his civilian life, Joe is a Correctional Officer for the state of Colorado. If he's not tying a knot in something, then he's doing his second favorite things—hunting and fishing.



