

## **Ancient Leaf Bead Necklace**

by Lady Tangwystl verch Gruffydd

When I think of autumn, the first thing that comes to mind is leaves. I found this picture of a beautiful leaf necklace from ancient Sumerian Ur (c. 2500 BCE) and decided to recreate it.



### **Methods/Techniques**

Wire wrapping was well-known even this far back in history, as is evidenced by multiple other pieces of jewelry from that time. For example, the double-spiral pendant visible in the above picture is made of gold wire. It is reasonable to assume that necklace fasteners were made using wire wrapping techniques and that the same wire used to make the fasteners might also have been used to string the beads. While it is also possible, and even likely, that there were necklaces made by stringing the beads onto string with a needle, I believe it is more likely that these necklaces would have been longer ones that could fit over the head and did not require fasteners to put on and remove the necklace. My reasoning is that necklaces made with string could simply be tied together at the ends, whereas necklaces made with wire lend themselves easily to making end clasps with the same wire that was used for stringing.

Given the wide-spread use of wire and wire wrapping, and given the fact that pliers have been in use since ancient times due to their nature as a very simple tool, it is reasonable to assume that pliers of some sort were used to create jewelry made with wire. I used either my fingers or a simple pair of pliers to twist the wire in various places as needed and to create wire-wrapped loops at the ends of the necklace.

### **Materials**

The original necklace was made of gold and lapis lazuli. The blue ovals (I was unable to find any blue leaf beads) are lapis lazuli. The round blue beads are glass, but they have the subtle pattern that is common in both lapis lazuli. I was unable to find lapis lazuli beads of the right size and shape locally and did not have adequate time to order them. The gold beads are gold-colored base metal. Again, I did not have time to order oval or barrel beads, so I used round ones to stay consistent with the shape of the blue beads.

It is difficult to determine what stringing materials would have been available, as I have been unable to find this detail documented anywhere. However, it is reasonable to assume that they might have used string or wire, as both of those materials were readily available. Hooks and eyes were used as fasteners for short necklaces, as I have seen these fasteners in several pictures of ancient necklaces for various times and locations. I have also seen pictures of several extant pieces which had loops at both ends. It is assumed that a string of some kind was tied through both loops to fasten it on the neck, which would have the added benefit of making the length somewhat adjustable for wear by people of all sizes. I chose to use wire for this necklace, as it worked better for the structure in the double-row section and because it is easily worked at the ends to create end loops without the need to fasten them on separately.

## Complexity

This piece at first glance seems to be a simple one. However, The change from a single strand to a double strand for part of the necklace adds a small degree of difficulty in that there are now multiple pieces of wire that need to be dealt with and worked into a useable fastener. In addition, the leaf beads in the original piece were made with a bale at the top, which was specially fashioned to account for two strands of beads. The beads I had were drilled so that the holes were lengthwise and did not have a bale. I therefore had to attach a bale to the beads so that they could be used in the same way as the leaf beads in the original. I chose to use gold leaf bales to complement the style of the necklace. In addition, because the bales were only for a single strand of beads, there was the added problem of the bead strands needing to join at each bale. The size of the beads thus made it difficult for the two wire strands to converge and lay nicely. I therefore opted to twist the wire at each juncture to help the necklace keep its shape while being worn.

In addition, the necklace as pictured is quite short. It is possible that the necklace shown is not the entire necklace. It is also possible that both ends of the necklace ended in a loop as I have made it and the necklace was tied on with string. As the back of the necklace would be hidden behind hair or head coverings, it would may well have been considered wasteful to adorn the back of the neck with costly beads.

Resource used: Tait, Hugh. *7000 Years of Jewelry*. The Trustees of the British Museum: 1986, 2006.