

MICROBRAID

Hair Replacement

BY LYNN SMITH

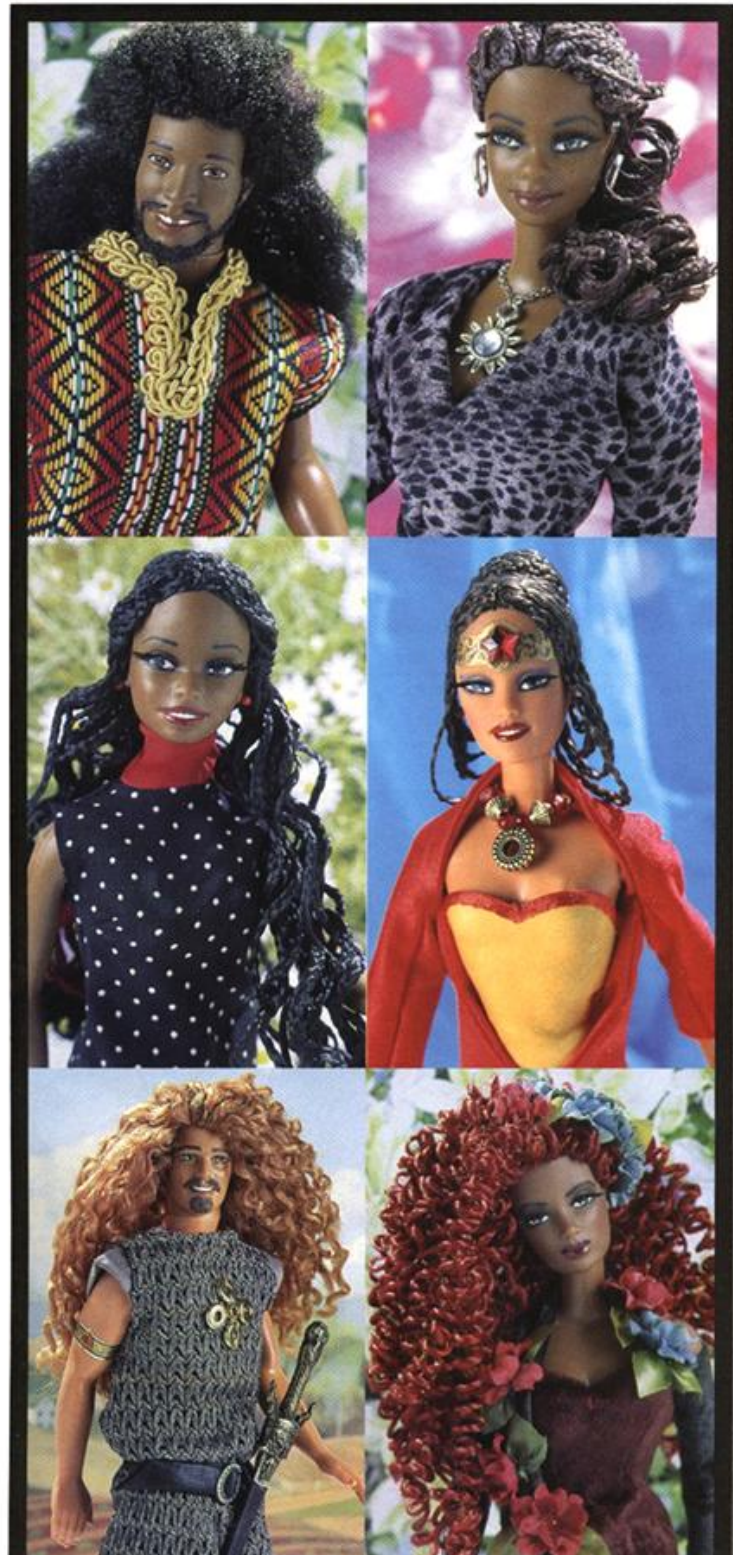




PHOTO 1: Various types of Micro Braid.

Supplies for this project:

- One fashion doll (I am using a University Barbie for this project, but you can use other vinyl fashion dolls.)
- Scissors
- Small crochet hook (I use size US8/1.25mm.)
- Tweezers
- Optional: acetone-free nail polish remover and cotton balls to remove the paint on the scalp
- Pen or fine tip marker that doesn't smear
- One-half package of Micro Braid Synthetic Hair (I'm using the "S" braids for this project.)
- Ruler or measuring tape
- Heavy duty or upholstery thread to match the color of the braids
- Cotton darners needle (This type works well because the needle is long but the eye isn't too large.)
- Small pliers
- Crazy Glue or Super Bond Glue
- 2 small rubber bands (Dental bands or the bands that come in Barbie's hair work best.)
- Optional: a lighter to singe the ends of the hair

While hunting through wig shops and Afro hair care stores for straight synthetic hair, I discovered a wide variety of other synthetic hair products. These packages of long loose sections of hair have many different names, style variations, and shades. They come braided, twisted or in wavy strands. The small braids come in at least three variations that I have seen — straight braids, "S" wave braids, and spring curl braids. The dolls on the title page model some of the different types of hair available, and the "braids" are also pictured at left (See photo 1).

"Micro Braid Synthetic Hair" is the name used by some manufacturers to describe the tiny braids of synthetic hair. Other manufacturers use the name "Micro Braid" on synthetic hair products that aren't braided at all. "Microbraid Hair Replacement" is what I call the techniques I developed to apply all of these types of hair. Microbraid Hair Replacement is a form of rerooting, which primarily uses a needle and thread to secure a section of hair or braid, whereas traditional methods of rerooting refer to inserting a plug of hair directly into holes in the doll's vinyl head.



Photo 2: Supplies



PHOTO 3: Blow dryer.



PHOTO 4: Bowl.

Step 1: Beheading Barbie

The first thing you need to do is remove the doll's head. The following directions apply to newer Barbie dolls.

Heat the head slightly to soften the vinyl and allow the head to pull off more easily. You can do this one of two ways — using a blow dryer or using hot tap water. To use a blow dryer, cover the doll's face with your hand or a washcloth and aim the blow dryer at the neck for just a few seconds. Use care because too much heat will scorch the doll (See photo 3).

Hot tap water will also soften the vinyl head. Soak the doll's head and neck for just a minute or two in a deep bowl or sink (See photo 4).

There are two parts to the new neck knobs. The first part is like a flattened ball. Work around the head with your fingers or a flat screwdriver, and gently pry the head over this first part of the knob. Try not to pull or twist too much on the neck knob while doing this. If anything is going to break, it's usually the

top of the hard plastic neck that holds the knob in place (See photo 5).

The second part of the knob is like a two-prong hook, arching out in opposite directions like an open umbrella. Once you have the head over the first part, you will be able to feel this hook by pinching the jaw area of the head. Tip the head to the side, to position one side of the hook towards the opening. Once you get one end out, you're in the clear (See photo 6).

Cutting the hooks off makes it easier to remove the head the next time (See photo 7).

If you are not planning on leaving the earrings in, take them out now because the thread can get tangled around the earring post inside the doll's head. Reach up inside the doll's neck with a pair of small scissors, and cut off the hooks that anchor the plastic earrings. The earrings will now slip out without ripping the vinyl around the ear (See photo 8).



PHOTO 5: 1st knob.



PHOTO 6: 2nd knob.



PHOTO 7: Cut hooks.

PHOTO 8: Beheaded doll.



PHOTO 9: Cutting hair.



PHOTO 10: Plucking.

Step 2: Balding Dear Babs

I always feel like a bad child when I do this next step!

Cut the hair close to the scalp (See photo 9). I like to put the long hair in a ponytail first, then when the hair is cut it's easier to save for rerooting other dolls.

With the crochet hook or tweezers, reach up each inside the neck opening and pull out the plugs of hair. You can also pull the hair from outside the scalp, but you will generally feel more resistance that way. Just be careful not to tear the vinyl scalp (See photo 10).

An optional step at this point is the removal of the paint on the scalp of the doll. This is not necessary, but if the scalp is painted black, it will be difficult to see any guidelines you later mark on the head. I repaint all my dolls, so I normally remove both the scalp paint and the face paint at this stage. Use acetone-free nail polish remover and a cotton ball to do this. If you are not repainting the face, make sure the nail polish remover doesn't drip or run on that area. Wash the head with soap and water to remove any nail polish residue.

Step 3: Planning the Pattern

The microbraided hair can be styled numerous ways. I sometimes use Afro hairstyle magazines or other photos for inspiration and ideas. The basic patterns you might want to use are a middle-parted style (See photo 11), a spiral-wrap style (See photo 12), or an off-the-face style (See photo 13).

The dolls pictured on the title page also show various row patterns and combinations. You can let your imagination run wild, but if you want to start out slowly, I would suggest you choose the off-the-face style that I am using for these step-by-step project photos.

Using a pen or fine tip marker, make a few small marks on the scalp to indicate the direction of the rows of hair. Be careful not to smear the



PHOTO 12: Spiral-wrap style.



PHOTO 11: Middle-part.



PHOTO 13: Off-the-face style.



ABOVE PHOTO 14: Plan. **RIGHT PHOTO 15:** Measured lengths of hair.

ink onto the face of the doll. If the ink appears wet, wipe it with a tissue or cotton swab (See photo 14).

Cut the hair into workable lengths. The hair I am using comes in 48-inch strands. I cut each strand into four 12-inch pieces. For the doll in this project, I used twenty, 12-inch pieces of hair. Once attached, the 12-inch braided strands are folded in two, making the spiral braids six inches long when stretched out and measured from the scalp (See photo 15).



PHOTO 20: Two strands attached.



PHOTO 21: Knotted thread.

holes. To get the needle in and out through these holes more easily, use the pliers to grab the needle and pull it through the holes. It also helps to cover your index or middle finger to make it easier to push the needle through the holes. Try cutting the finger out of an old leather glove for this purpose.

Cut a 3-foot length of heavy-duty thread. Thread the needle, doubling the thread and knotting the ends securely with a large knot. Starting from the middle of the front hairline, come up through an existing (or new) hole with your needle (See photo 16).

Sew over the center of the braided strand. Move the needle approximately two holes over (or the width of the braided strand) along the hairline, and sew back down into the head. Pull the needle back out through the neck opening. You have now created two braided strands—one backward-facing strand and one forward-facing strand (See photo 17).

Bring the needle up through another hole, approximately 1/4" to 1/2" back from the first hole, moving in the direction the braid will lie (See photo 18).

Keeping the braid flat against the head, stitch through the center of the backward-facing braid. Sew back down through a nearby hole in the head, pulling the needle out through the neck opening. The braid should now sit flat against this section of the head (See photo 19).

Repeat with the forward-facing braided strand, overlapping the first section of braid (See photo 20).

Move to a position beside the start of the first braided strands, and repeat the same steps with another length of braid. Repeat the process, attaching braids all along the front hairline. When you reach the end of the thread, tie a knot, burying it in the hair (See photo 21).

Step 4: Attaching the Strands

The braids are attached to the doll's scalp by sewing and sometimes gluing them in place, using both the existing holes and some new ones too. Along the hairline, the scalp may sometimes appear weak or ripped due to the original holes being placed too closely. If this is the case with your doll, try moving the hairline forward slightly and start your own row of new



LEFT PHOTO 16: Needle up through scalp. **RIGHT PHOTO 17:** First strands.



LEFT PHOTO 18: Needle up through 2nd hole. **RIGHT PHOTO 19:** Second row of stitches.



PHOTO 22: Braids being glued.

PHOTO 23: Braids glued in place.



PHOTO 24: Braids sewn flat.

Flat sections of hair can be sewn or glued in place. I use a drop of Crazy Glue or Super Glue for this purpose. The glue works best when used in areas less visible, such as on the back of the head or the underlayer of hair. The glue makes the head hard and darkens the appearance of the hair, so use it sparingly. Bring forward the braided strands that you don't want to glue, tying them out of the way if necessary. Space out the strands to be glued. To keep the spacing even, glue them one small section at a time, starting from middle of the head and then working from side to side (See photos 22 and 23).

Attach the upper or visible layers of hair by sewing them in place. The braids can be sewn to each other, as well as sewn into the vinyl head of the doll (See photo 24).

Step 5: Finishing the Do

Once all the braids have been sewn or glued in place, the loose strands can be twisted, braided, secured with a rubberband, pinned or sewn in place (See photos 25, 26 and 27).

The braids can now be trimmed to the desired length (See photo 28).

An optional last step is to seal the braids, to prevent them from fraying or unraveling. There are two easy ways this can be done. You can either glue or melt the strands of hair together. The wig shop where I purchase many of my hair supplies recommends using a drop of Crazy Glue to seal together the end of each braid, but remember the glue will darken

the appearance of light colored hair. If you choose to seal the synthetic hair braids by melting the ends, use a lighter with a low flame. Use extreme care when doing this because you don't want to have a "Barbie-Q." Seriously though, the hair can catch fire, so be VERY careful. You don't want all your hard work to go up in flames! To clean up the ends neatly, I trim a very small amount off the end of the braid after sealing it with the flame (See photo 29).

And here she is — a one-of-a-kind Microbraided hair doll (See photo 30)! Enjoy your creation. ☑



LEFT PHOTO 25: Ponytail. **MIDDLE PHOTO 26:** Double Ponytail.
RIGHT PHOTO 27: Bun and Ponytail.



PHOTO 28: Braids trimmed.



PHOTO 29: Braids singed.



PHOTO 30: Finished doll.

Instructional photographs and illustrations by Lynn Smith. Title page photographs by Barry Sturgill.