

Pearl

Symbol of modesty, chastity and purity.

People have coveted natural pearls as symbols of wealth and status for thousands of years. A Chinese historian recorded the oldest written mention of natural pearls in 2206 BCE. The spherical shape of some pearls led many cultures to associate this gem with the moon. In ancient China, pearls were believed to guarantee protection from fire and fire-breathing dragons. In Europe, they symbolized modesty, chastity and purity.

Color

Pearl bodycolor varies by the type of mollusk it is formed in. Although white pearls are the most traditional, other colors are very popular. The main bodycolor of a pearl is often modified by additional colors called overtones, which are typically pink, green, purple or blue. Some pearls also show the iridescent phenomenon known as orient that adds to the overall color.

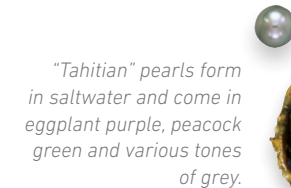
Formation

Pearls may form in any mollusk. Not all pearls are of the nacreous type commonly seen in jewelry.



Pinctada fucata

Akoya pearls form in saltwater mollusks and come in white, cream or light grey, some with hints of pink or green.



"Tahitian" pearls form in saltwater and come in eggplant purple, peacock green and various tones of grey.

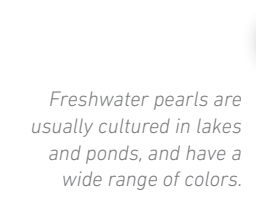


Pinctada margaritifera



Pinctada maxima

South Sea pearls are found in saltwater and come in silver, white and golden.



Freshwater pearls are usually cultured in lakes and ponds, and have a wide range of colors.



Hyriopsis cumingii, or hybrid

Conch, Melo and clam pearls are all examples of non-nacreous pearls.

The GIA 7 Pearl Value Factors™

The qualities that determine the overall value of a natural or cultured pearl are size, shape, color, luster, surface quality, nacre quality and matching.

Sources

Akoya cultured pearls are grown in Japan and China. Leading sources of South Sea cultured pearls are Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Tahitian cultured pearls are primarily cultivated around the islands of French Polynesia. China and the United States are leading sources for freshwater cultured pearls.

Treatments

Pearls may be dyed, coated, bleached, filled or irradiated to either enhance their luster or alter the pearl color. Dyed cultured pearls are usually detectable because they look artificial to the unaided eye. However, dyed pearls of lighter tones can be difficult to detect.

Images courtesy: Latendresse Family, American Pearl Company

Major Sources

Australia, China, French Polynesia, Gulf of Mannar, Indonesia, Japan, Panama, Persian Gulf, Philippines, United States, Venezuela

Mineral

Calcium Carbonate

Mohs Hardness

2.5 to 3

Toughness

Good

Color

White, cream, black, grey, silver, green, blue, pink, yellow, orange

Birthstone

June

Care and Cleaning

The best rule of thumb is that pearls are the last thing you put on and first thing you take off when getting dressed. For routine care, wipe pearls with a soft, clean cloth after each wearing. Pearls should never be cleaned in an ultrasonic or steam cleaner. It's safe to use warm, soapy water for occasional, thorough cleaning. It is also recommended that pearls not be stored in airtight areas for prolonged periods of time.

Courtesy of

