

Cultured Pearls – The Organic Gems

Natural pearls are very rare and scarce. Odds are that in every 10,000 oysters, you might be lucky enough to find a single natural pearl. Because of this, most pearls today are cultured pearls. To culture a pearl, a tiny bead is implanted in an oyster so that it is gradually coated in layers of a beautiful, pearlescent substance called nacre which build up to create a lustrous pearl. Pearls are differentiated by their color, luster, shape, and size.



Color

A pearls overall color is also called its body color. Common body colors are white, cream, yellow, pink, silver, or black. Often, a pearl can also have a hint of secondary color which is referred to as its overtone. This is seen when light reflects off of the pearls surface.

Luster

The intense, deep shine that is produced by a pearl when light is reflected is called luster. The effect is created when light is reflected off the many layers of tiny calcium carbonate crystals called nacre. The larger a pearl, the more nacre it has and thus it will exhibit more luster.

Shape

The rarest pearl shape is round. Most often pearls are not spherical or even symmetrical. Certain cultured pearls such as Akoya, Tahitian, and South Sea pearls have a tendency to be rounder while freshwater pearls can be oval or off-round.

Size

Pearl sizes greatly depend on the type of pearl. Akoya pearls can range from about 6-8.5mm while Tahitian and South Sea pearls can reach sizes as large as 13mm. Freshwater pearls range in size from about 3mm-7mm.