

expert jeweler customize a necklace so its proportions and color are a good match for you. Use this guide to necklace lengths and terminology:

Choker — A necklace 14 inches to 15 inches in length that rests on the collarbone.

Princess — An 18-inch necklace strung with either graduated or uniform cultured pearls.

Matinee — A slightly longer necklace, usually 20 to 24 inches in length.

Opera — A 30- to 36-inch necklace. This length necklace should fall to the breastbone and can often be worn long or doubled.

Rope or sautoir — Any necklace longer than opera length. Ropes are often worn knotted or with a shortener for added versatility of style.

Dog collar — A multiple strand necklace that fits closely around the neck.

Bib — A single necklace with multiple strands of varying lengths that are worn nested together.

Torsade — A necklace in which several strands of cultured pearls (usually freshwater) are twisted together and held with a special clasp.

Graduated — A necklace with cultured pearls of gradually increasing size with the smallest at the back and the largest at the center.

Uniform — A necklace in which all cultured pearls appear to be the same size, although there is usually a slight difference between the center and end cultured pearls.

Your Cultured Pearl Wardrobe

Begin your cultured pearl jewelry wardrobe with a matching necklace, earrings and bracelet. The necklace can be lengthened to a rope or sautoir by letting your jeweler match new cultured pearls to the size and color of existing ones, or it can be updated with a pendant or jeweled clasp. Add a ring, pin or earrings set with dramatic mabé cultured pearl or South Sea cultured pearls. Or, consider a long cultured pearl strand with several invisible clasps that allow it to be worn in different lengths or combined with a matching bracelet. Go for high drama with a ring or earrings set with one white cultured pearl, one black.

Caring for Cultured Pearls

Remember that cultured pearls are precious jewels and should always be treated as such. Follow these guidelines to care for your cultured pearl jewelry:

Do treat your cultured pearls gently. Keep them in a chamois bag, or wrap them in tissue when you put them away.

Don't toss them in a purse or jewelry box where they can become scratched by metal or stones.

Do apply perfume, hairspray and cosmetics before putting on your cultured pearl jewelry.

Don't clean cultured pearl jewelry with any chemicals or abrasives.

Do wipe them with a soft, clean cloth after each wearing to remove any traces of hairspray or perfume, and occasionally wash them with mild soap and water.

Do buy strands of cultured pearls that are strung with a knot between each cultured pearl, to avoid abrasion and to prevent loss if the string should break.

Do bring your cultured pearl necklace to your jeweler for restringing once a year, as cosmetics and ordinary wear can damage or stretch the threads on which the cultured pearls are strung.

Where to Buy Cultured Pearls

When you are buying cultured pearls or any piece of fine jewelry, you are making an important decision. To make sure you get jewelry that you will be happy with now and for years to come, follow a simple rule: buy from a professional jeweler, someone you can trust. Choose a retailer who has been serving the community for a number of years and has an established reputation.

Ask if the jeweler is a member of Jewelers of America, the national association for retail jewelers. Or look for the "J" mark on the door. Your JA jeweler is knowledgeable and can help you select and match your cultured pearls and guide you, not only through this purchase, but any fine jewelry purchase. They will be there in the future to answer all your questions and help you with your purchases, repairs, and custom design. JA members have signed and abide by a Code of Ethics, so you can buy with confidence from your JA member jeweler.



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WHAT YOU
SHOULD
KNOW
ABOUT
CULTURED
PEARLS



Pearls have been a source of fascination and desire since ancient times. Viewed as magic charms, symbols of purity and love, or sources of wisdom and power, pearls have been revered by countless civilizations.

Legend has it that Cleopatra dissolved a large pearl in a glass of wine and drank it to impress Marc Antony with her wealth and power. Knights in the Middle Ages wore pearls onto the battlefield to protect themselves from harm. Queen Elizabeth I so loved the white gems that she had them sewn on all her clothing and wore ropes of them around her neck. In addition to their fascinating beauty, pearls occupy a unique spot in the world of precious gemstones. Instead of being found in a core of rock, a pearl is made over time by a living creature, an oyster. Today, cultured pearls combine the beauty of nature with the genius of man to create organic gems available in a wide array of styles and prices.

The cultured pearl begins its life as an irritant to the oyster. To protect itself, the oyster coats an intruding object or grain of sand with nacre, a crystalline substance that builds up over time, resulting in a shimmering, iridescent creation. The culturing process developed by man mimics nature. Farmers implant a fine bead into the oyster where it cannot be expelled. The oyster does the rest and creates its lustrous masterpiece — the cultured pearl.

Types of Cultured Pearls

Akoya — This is the most familiar type of cultured pearl sold in necklaces. Akoyas from Japan and China are grown in pearl oysters and are known for their shimmering beauty and warm colors, which range from rose, cream and gold to silvery white and blue/gray.

South Sea — Large (10mm and up) cultured pearls grown in tropical and semi-tropical oysters in the South Seas and around the coast of Australia. Their color ranges from silvery white to gold. They are quite costly due to their size and rarity.

Tahitian Black — Large (10mm and up) cultured pearls grown in black-lipped oysters in French Polynesia. Colors range from silvery gray and green to deep purple and black. Their large sizes and unique colors command premium prices.

Mabé — Large, hemispherical cultured pearls grown against the inside shells of oysters rather than in the oysters' bodies. Due to their half-round shape, they are most popular in earrings, rings and brooches. Mabé cultured pearls are less expensive than round cultured pearls.

Freshwater — Pearls cultivated in mussels, not oysters, in freshwater lakes and rivers primarily in China, Japan and the United States. Shapes can be freeform, rice shaped, off-round or spherical, and colors range from milky white to peach, pink and lavender. Freshwaters can be less expensive than other varieties of cultured pearls.

Keshi — Also known as seed pearls, these tiny cultured pearls can be as small as a grain of sand and form accidentally in many cultured pearl oysters.

Baroque — These cultured pearls are irregularly shaped, yet often lustrous and appealing. Due to their shapes, baroque cultured pearls are often less costly than round cultured pearls.

How to Buy Cultured Pearls

When purchasing a piece of cultured pearl jewelry, it's best to buy from a knowledgeable, professional jeweler who can explain how to make the most of your purchase and ensure that you are getting the best quality cultured pearls within your budget. The higher the quality of cultured pearls you select, the more valued they will be over time. Use the following quality factors to evaluate cultured pearls and cultured pearl jewelry:

Lustre — A combination of surface brilliance and a deep glow that seems to emanate from within the heart of a cultured pearl. The lustre of a good quality cultured pearl should be bright, not dull, enabling you to see your own reflection clearly on the surface. A cultured pearl that appears too white, dull or chalky indicates poor quality.

Surface — Because cultured pearls are grown in oysters, it is rare to find a cultured pearl whose surface is free from any type of blemish.

Blemishes can include disfiguring spots, bumps, pits and cracks on the surface of a cultured pearl. The fewer blemishes on the surface of a cultured pearl, the more valuable it will be.

Shape — It is very rare to find a perfectly round cultured pearl, but generally, the rounder the cultured pearl, the more valuable it is. Cultured pearls also come in oval, pear and baroque shapes.

Color — Cultured pearls come in a wide range of colors, from white to pink to black. The color of a cultured pearl is often a matter of personal preference.

Size — Cultured pearls are measured by their diameter in millimeters. They can be smaller than 1mm, in the case of keshi cultured pearls, or as large as 20mm for a big South Sea cultured pearl. With all other quality factors being equal, the larger the cultured pearl, the more valuable it will be, since it is difficult for an oyster to grow a cultured pearl larger than 5mm.

Matching — When buying a strand of cultured pearls, matching is very important. All the cultured pearls in a good quality strand should be evenly matched in terms of luster, surface, shape, color and size. Well-matched cultured pearl necklaces command top prices, because cultured pearl growers must harvest about 10,000 oysters in order to find enough cultured pearls that match closely enough to make up a simple, 16-inch strand.

Selecting a Necklace

Choose your cultured pearl necklace based on your appearance, personality and style. Short necklaces are best for women with long necks, while longer lengths tend to slenderize and elongate the body. Let your