

BIRTHSTONES ~ PEARLS (*June*)



The pearl is unique in the world of gemstones, as it is the only gemstone that is formed within a living creature. Known as the birthstone for the month of June, pearls are truly a treasured gift of the sea and revered for their colors, shapes, sizes and luster. As the supply of naturally occurring pearls became exhausted man learned how to cultivate them by implanting an irritant into oysters, which produced pearls having the same outer appearance as their natural counterpart. Cultured pearls are grown and harvested in many parts of the world, including the fresh waters of the Tennessee River, and are available in many beautiful colors, from the palest crème and white to rose, lilac, green, gold, gray and the dramatic Tahitian black. The majority, however, come from Japan, China and the South Pacific. Today, the pearls from the Japanese Akoyah oysters are becoming the most prized, as unfavorable biological and environmental conditions have reduced the availability of larger and finer quality pearls from the salt waters of Japan. Human innovation, however, has compensated for nature's hardships as man has perfected the cultivation of the larger freshwater oysters in the lakes of China, producing an abundant crop of beautiful cultured pearls ranging from lustrous white to naturally occurring soft pastel colors. To find beautiful pearls in much larger sizes, exceeding nine and ten millimeters in diameter, one must look to warm waters of the South Pacific where magnificent whites from Australia and dramatic natural blacks from Tahiti are harvested to produce one-of-a-kind necklaces or combined with diamonds for truly magnificent pieces of jewelry. In the cultivation process of all pearls man can only begin the process by implanting an irritant within the muscle of the oyster. After that it is up to the mollusk to produce a fine gem, a very poor gem, or something in-between. Similar to the way any gemstone is judged, the value of any pearl will depend on rarity, beauty, size, color, luster and degree of perfection. In the case of a strand of pearls, the quality of how well the pearls are matched is also an important consideration. In the world of pearls there is something for everyone.

Enhancements - Today, cultured and freshwater pearls are often bleached to achieve a uniform color. Sometimes they may be polished in tumblers to achieve better roundness and luster.