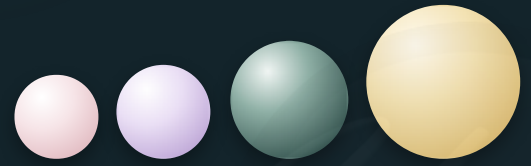




Pearl Cheat Sheet

The four main types, the seven quality factors, and the words that matter when you buy or sell.



01 • The four types at a glance

Pearls shown to scale at typical size

Akoya



Typical 7 mm

MOLLUSK

Akoya oyster (*Pinctada fucata* group)

GROWS IN

Saltwater. Japan is the benchmark; also China and Vietnam

SIZE

6-8 mm common. Over 10 mm is exceptional

LOOK

White or cream with rose or silver overtone. Natural silver-blue is rare

LUSTER

Mirror-sharp, crisp reflections

KNOW THIS

Nearly all are bleached and many are pinked. Black akoya are always treated

Freshwater



Typical 8 mm

MOLLUSK

Freshwater mussels (*Hyriopsis cumingii* and hybrids)

GROWS IN

Ponds and lakes. China is the principal source

SIZE

6-12 mm common. Bead-cultured goes beyond 12 mm

LOOK

White, pink, peach, lavender; deeper purple and bronze. Traditional: potato, button, oval, baroque. Edison: round

LUSTER

Soft to metallic; orient possible

KNOW THIS

Grown with or without a bead; both are cultured. Edison and Ming are trade names, not grades. Black freshwater is always dyed

Tahitian



Typical 10 mm

MOLLUSK

Black-lip oyster (*Pinctada margaritifera*)

GROWS IN

Saltwater lagoons of French Polynesia, mostly Tuamotu and Gambier

SIZE

8-13 mm common

LOOK

Silver to charcoal. Overtones include peacock, rose, blue, pistachio and cherry

LUSTER

Varies; overtone and orient can add play of color

KNOW THIS

Dark does not mean Tahitian. Fiji and Cook Islands are separate origins. Peacock is an overtone, not a body color

South Sea



Typical 13 mm

MOLLUSK

Pinctada maxima, silver-lip or gold-lip

GROWS IN

Tropical saltwater. Australia (white), Philippines (golden), Indonesia (both)

SIZE

10-16 mm common

LOOK

White, silver, cream; or champagne to deep gold

LUSTER

Satiny glow; the finest show crisp edges

KNOW THIS

Golden color can be natural or dyed, so ask. Gold-lip and silver-lip are the same species

02 · How to judge a pearl

SEVEN QUALITY FACTORS

- 1 **Luster.** Brightness and edge sharpness of the reflection. Compare within a type
- 2 **Nacre.** Thickness and density of the layer. A photo cannot show it
- 3 **Shape.** Round, near-round, oval, button, drop, baroque, circled
- 4 **Color.** Bodycolor, overtone and orient. Natural or treated is a separate question
- 5 **Surface.** Spots, pits, ridges. Judge how visible they are and where they sit
- 6 **Size.** Diameter in mm. "Large" depends on the type: 10 mm is big for akoya, ordinary for South Sea
- 7 **Matching.** In a strand or pair, all of the above should agree

Quick luster test: turn the pearl under one light and look at the reflected window or lamp. Compare pearls of the same type: a crisp edge means high luster, a soft spreading glow means less. A satiny glow is normal for South Sea.

COLOR WORDS

Bodycolor. The dominant overall color

Overtone. A secondary color that moves as you turn the pearl (rose, green, silver)

Orient. Rainbow-like iridescence from the nacre structure. Rare and separate from luster

NATURAL, CULTURED, BEAD, KESHI

Natural. No human started the pearl. **Cultured.** A person started it and the mollusk made it. Both are real pearls

Bead-cultured. Bead plus donor tissue: akoya, Tahitian, South Sea, some freshwater

Non-bead. Tissue only: traditional freshwater. No bead does not mean natural

Keshi. Non-bead cultured pearl, often from a rejected bead. Say "keshi cultured pearl" for saltwater. "Freshwater keshi" is common trade usage

03 · Certified Akoya: PSL names

Pearl Science Laboratory, Tokyo

PSL sorts its Akoya names into two series. They are not rungs of one ladder.

HIGHEST QUALITY SERIES

Overall quality. Luster counts most, alongside nacre, shape and flaws.

Aurora Hanadama®

WHITE AKOYA

6 mm and up, nacre 0.4 mm or more, round, minimal flaws. Luster is weighted most

Aurora Tenny®

HANADAMA PLUS TOP LUSTER

Meets the Hanadama standard, with luster at the very top of PSL's scale

STRONGEST LUSTER SERIES

Judged on luster. Body color is not a quality tier.

Aurora Rosé®

ANY BODY COLOR

Luster at PSL's "strongest" level: sharp brilliance with vivid pink and other iridescence

Aurora Rosé Premium®

WHITE SERIES

Luster at the very top of "strongest." Not thin nacre, round or symmetrical, minimal or few flaws

Same criteria by color: Madama® (blue), Kinshoku® (gold), Akoya Queen® (other).

Blue Akoya use Aurora Blue Rosé® and Blue Rosé Premium®.

Tenny and Rosé Premium both sit at the top of PSL's luster scale. Hanadama means different things at different labs, so always name the lab. PSL reports include an Aurora Effect photo, a fingerprint for that strand. A certificate shows a threshold was met; it does not set a price.

04 • Treatments and tricky words

WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN DONE

Bleaching. Lightens and evens color. Common on white akoya and freshwater

Pinking. Adds a rosy overtone, mostly on akoya

Dyeing. Creates or deepens color, including dark shades

Irradiation. Darkens toward gray or blue

Maeshori. Luster-prep treatment; the effect may not last

Coating, filling, waxing. Hides features and needs special care

Four questions for any seller: What type is it? Natural or cultured? Is the color natural? What does any lab report actually cover?

SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Freshwater akoya, AK, baby akoya	Bead-cultured freshwater pearls, with mm sizes
Chinese akoya	Ask: saltwater or freshwater? Real akoya is grown in China, but the term usually means freshwater
Black pearl	The species, origin and color. Only some dark pearls are Tahitian
Natural cultured pearls	Cultured pearls, or natural-color cultured pearls
Shell pearl	Imitation pearl. Usually a coated shell bead
GIA Certified	Accompanied by a GIA report, with the report type
Edison, Ming, Biwa as grades	They are names, not grades. Biwa means grown in Lake Biwa
AAA, AAAA	Seller-defined. Ask what the letters mean

05 • Care and necklace lengths

PEARL CARE IN FIVE LINES

Last on, first off. Perfume, hairspray and lotion go on first and dry first

Wipe after wearing with a soft cloth. Lay flat until the thread is dry

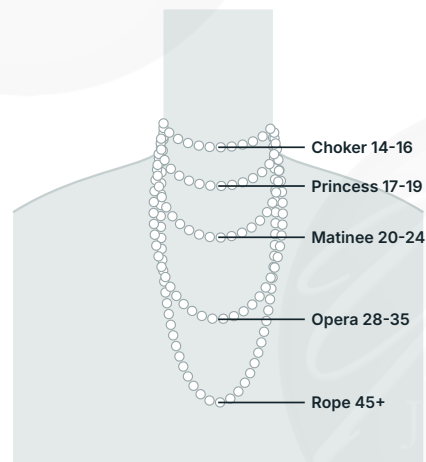
Never use ultrasonic or steam cleaners, acid, bleach, abrasives or jewelry dips

Store strands flat in a soft pouch, apart from diamonds and metal chains

Check the thread. Restring every 1-2 years if worn often, sooner if it shows wear

Nacre rates about 2.5 on the Mohs scale, softer than most gemstones. Lost nacre cannot be washed back.

NECKLACE LENGTHS ON THE NECK (INCHES)



Labels vary, so quote the measured length. Weight and size differ too: a carat is 0.2 g, a momme is 3.75 g, and round pearls are sized in mm.



Yen's Jewelry & Accessories, Inc.

Wholesale cultured pearls: Akoya, freshwater and Edison, South Sea and Tahitian.
San Francisco Gift and Jewelry Center, by appointment.

SCAN TO READ THE FULL GUIDES
yensjewelry.com/pearl-education

Compiled from Yen's Jewelry education guides and published trade references

