

## A Pearl Primer for Brides

by (ARA)

Pearls are perfect any time, but they seem especially appropriate for weddings. Known by some as the “Queen of Gems,” the classic elegance of pearls transcends centuries and style fads. Nothing looks more beautiful with a bridal gown than a single strand of flawless pearls. But pearls are not only for the bride – they’re the perfect accessory for the bridesmaids as well. Today, you can find pearls in shades ranging from the traditional white all the way through the color spectrum, including pink, green and even black, so they will coordinate with the wedding party’s dresses. If you’re confused by the different types of pearls on the market, you’re not alone. “Pearls are classified according to their origin and their shape,” explains Natalie Parman, vice president of merchandising at Jewelry TV. “Because of the wide variety of pearls available, you can choose a look and a price that is right for you.”

Pearls are formed when a foreign object enters the shell of a mollusk and triggers the release of nacre, which builds layer upon layer until a pearl is formed. Most of the pearls you see today are cultured pearls. They are less expensive than natural pearls, because they are mass-produced with the aid of technology. Instead of waiting for nature to take its course, pearl farmers insert an irritant and a nucleus (often a mother of pearl bead) into an oyster to speed up the process. Cultured pearls come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and many are dyed, which means you can find a wide range of colors. Akoya cultured pearls are produced by the Akoya oyster found in the waters surrounding Japan and are almost perfectly round and are well known for their high luster and rich color, which can range from white to cream, pink, green, silver and gold. These pearls can vary in size from between 2 millimeters to 10 millimeters. “Cultured Akoya pearls are the quintessential ‘Breakfast at Tiffany’s’ strand in a creamy white color,” says Parman. “Multiple strands or choker styles are hot wedding trends.” Because they are affordable, cultured Akoya pearls also make great bridesmaids gifts. South Sea cultured pearls are larger in size than Akoyas, usually more than 10 millimeters. Produced in the warm waters of the South Seas, they come mainly from Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines. These pearls are usually white, yellow or gold. Due to their size and rarity, South Sea pearls are expensive. Golden South Sea pearls in particular have gained particular popularity in the United States in recent years. “If you’re choosing a special strand of pearls for your wedding, this can be a good jewelry investment,” says Parman. Tahitian pearls are produced in Tahiti, the Cook Islands and Mexico. They range in color from black, to aubergine, pistachio and many other colors, often with overtones of blue, pink or green. These pearls range between 8 and 15 millimeters and are highly valued because of their rarity, since the culturing process dictates a smaller volume output. “Wear Tahitian pearls to your rehearsal dinner, or pack them as part of your honeymoon wardrobe,” says Parman. When choosing pearls, look for nacre thickness and quality. Nacre quality determines how long the pearl will last as well as how light reflects through the pearls. Check for any cracks or peeling in the nacre. Also, look for how the pearls on a strand are matched. Pearl matching affects the value of the piece, as mismatched pearls are not as aesthetically pleasing. Finally, look for pearls that are individually knotted between each pearl instead of just strung one after the other -- that’s a sign of quality. Whatever your jewelry wish for your wedding day, visit [www.jtv.com](http://www.jtv.com) for a great selection of pearl necklaces, bracelets and earrings.