

The Popularity of Freshwater Pearls

Contributed by Webmaster

By Michelle Yamamoto

Pearl farmers, docks and luminous pearls may be found on sandy Sout Sea beaches, but many popular pearls are actually grown in freshwater farms. Freshwater pearls now constitute a large part of the pearl market, whether it be due to the range of colors, shapes, or attractive prices.

Most pearls for sale today are cultured pearls. This means the pearl farmer places a little irritating particle into the oysters shell to cause the animal to secrete a substance called nacre. This will form a pearl. This process is the same for both saltwater and freshwater pearls.

American Freshwater Pearls

John R. Latendresse was the first person to successfully cultivate freshwater pearls in the United States. In the late 1970s, he picked out eight locations to try growing freshwater pearls, and eventually one site, on Kentucky Lake in Camden, Tennessee, proved viable. The farm has a showroom selling pearls from \$15 to \$1,800.

A visit here is a great way to learn about pearl cultivation. They offer a five-hour guided tour. If you want to know slightly less, there is a lighter half hour tour. They will shuck an oyster for you, and you can clearly see living mussels in a giant aquarium in the gift shop. For a tour, you must schedule ahead of time. Check out <http://www.tennesseeriverpearls.com> for more details.

Tennessee River Pearls claims to be the only freshwater pearl farm in North America. Other freshwater pearls come from China.

Chinese Freshwater Pearls

In the 1990s, Chinese farmers were improving the quality of their freshwater pearls and consumers began responding positively. In 1999, the owner of Tennessee River Pearls, speaking at a gemological conference, predicted a new pearl order.

Chinas freshwater pearl success had its genesis rather inauspiciously in the early 1970s. Until then, Japanese pearls from a single lake had dominated the market. But as pollution slowed down Japanese production, Chinese farms stepped into the void.

Though the first freshwater pearls out of China garnered sneers from jewelers, the quality has since skyrocketed. Now a diverse range of colors, large size, and fine luster distinguish much of Chinas product.

Michelle Yamamoto has been writing articles for the family business on black pearls for 12 years. More information and articles can be found at the Pearl Center.