

## C is for Coral

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C is for Coral, the stone that blesses the wearer with financial stability, brings good fortune in life and prosperity in business. It is also said to offer protection from danger and prevention of bad dreams. No wonder many young girls receive a coral necklace as their first piece of jewellery. But the question is, why would coral be the gift for celebrating the 35th wedding anniversary. It should be for the 1st instead.



Let us look closer at coral.

Precious coral, or red coral, is known as an organic gem material as it comes from living organisms existing as small sea anemone-like polyps. These organisms are called the 'corallium rubrum' and 'corallium japonicum'. It is the hard calcium carbonate outer skeleton of these animals that is being used as the red gem material known as coral. The black horny coral is conchiolin and not calcium carbonate. Coral is an ancient gem material and has been used for adornment since prehistoric times.

### Colour

Coral does not only come in red, but also in a variety of other colours such as rose, orange, blue, brown, white and black. The word 'coral' itself refers to a pinkish-red colour. It is the red shades, ranging from the palest petal pink, to salmon, to deep velvety red, that are the most in demand. However, white coral with a blush of pink, known as 'Angelskin coral', is exceptionally valuable. Other well known coral names are the intense red Japanese 'Moro coral' pale pink 'Boke' and the red 'Sardena'. The best quality coral has an even colour and is free of cracks, blotches, striations and holes.

### Care and Identification

As coral is an organic material, care should be taken with cleaning this gem as it is especially fragile. Coral should never be cleaned in an ultrasonic, but rather with a soft damp cloth. It should also be protected from cosmetics, and large temperature changes such as hot water or bright light. Coral scratches, or cracks easily and will therefore fall prey to sharp blows. It is easy to identify natural coral as it has a distinct wood grain texture. Plastic, glass, porcelain, and stained bone are often used to imitate natural coral.

### Gem Cut and Treatments

When the unprocessed, fragile coral trees are brought to the surface, they have a matt appearance. It has to be polished first before the beautiful shine comes out. The soft nature and opaque appearance of coral are the reasons why coral is usually cut in the cabochon shape, or as beads.

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Coral can often be quite porous, full of holes or cracks. This type of coral is obviously less valuable. The holes in bad quality coral can be filled with coloured wax to improve its appearance. The uneven colour of lower quality coral can also be evened out with red dye. Unfortunately these treatments are not always disclosed to the buyer. Untreated coral is rare and therefore expensive.

### Using Coral in Jewellery

Precious coral has a hardness of 3.5. This means the gem is relatively soft and should ideally be mounted in earrings and pendants. However, rings and bracelets are commonly worn too, as long as the wearer remembers the gem is very soft and can scratch easily when bumped.

Carved coral gardens are popular table top ornaments. It is thought that German religious rosaries from previous centuries were made from coral beads. Historically, African royalty used to wear magnificent coral head pieces to signify their status in their communities.

### Locations

Red coral is commonly found on the coasts of Africa, Australia, Japan, Mediterranean, Malaysia, and the West Indies. The coral colonies live in the ocean between three and 300 metres on rocky sea floors with low sedimentation. They thrive in a dark environment. Black coral is found off the islands of Hawaii.