

Caring for & Cleaning your Jewelry – Ideas to Prolong the Life and Beauty of your Jewelry

Don't expose your jewelry to perspiration and dirt: remove jewelry before working in the garden or engaging in other physical labor, exercising, swimming, bathing, etc. Avoid exposing jewelry to household cleaners and other chemicals that can cause damage. It seems logical that pearls and other porous stones can be damaged by chemicals, but even karat gold could be discolored by chemical exposure (to chlorine, for example). Apply cosmetics, make-up, hair spray, and perfume before putting on jewelry. Remove bracelets and rings before applying hand lotions and creams. Remove earrings when you have your hair done, especially if you are having it colored.

Jade, pearls, turquoise, malachite, and lapis are among porous soft stones that should not be cleaned in an ultrasonic cleaner or soaked in jewelry cleaner solutions. Avoid even hot water - these softer, more porous stones require extra careful treatment - just wipe them off with damp soft cloth. If more cleaning is required try soapy water (shavings of Ivory) on a soft cloth and dry thoroughly. Never put your jewelry away wet - wipe it off with a damp cloth and air dry before you store it.

Store your clean jewelry in a clean dark dry place. Don't toss it into a jewelry box or drawer loose – the pieces will scratch each other. Jewelry often comes in a protective bag or box - use it or something equivalent. It helps to store your silver jewelry flat in a tarnish resistant bag or add anti-tarnish strips to a plastic bag to retard tarnishing. A fabric lined jewelry box is ideal and individual bags and jewelry boxes are excellent, too. Store pearls in soft bags away from other jewelry which might scratch the pearl's surface.

The tarnish that forms on silver pieces is black silver sulfide. A thin coating of silver sulfide on silver will darken its surface. Cleaning silver using most cleaning methods removes the tarnish, but polishing and most jewelry cleaners also remove some silver during the cleaning process.

Here's an approach to cleaning that does not remove any silver, but converts the tarnish back to silver. This approach works well to clean woven silver jewelry or silver metal jewelry. You need a container lined with aluminum foil. The container should be large enough to totally immerse the silver you want to clean. Use warm water and mix in the baking soda at the rate of a cup of baking soda to a gallon of water (adjust the amount of water to the size of your container and silver piece, then add the correct amount of baking soda for the amount of water used). Place the jewelry directly on top of the aluminum foil and add the water and baking soda solution. A chemical reaction between the silver sulfide and the aluminum occurs when the two are in contact while in a baking soda solution, so the silver jewelry has to touch the aluminum foil. Some bubbling may occur, so you might want to place your container in a larger pan or in a sink. The silver sulfide is converted back to silver and the sulfur is deposited on the aluminum either as yellow flecks of sulfur or as aluminum sulfide. The solution carries the sulfur from the silver to the aluminum. Tarnish will begin to disappear within a few minutes. You may need to repeat the process for badly tarnished pieces, reheating the baking soda and water mixture (remove jewelry first)

As always, caution is needed when cleaning jewelry set with stones. Note - some stones such as opals, turquoise, malachite, lapis, or pearls are porous and should not be immersed in water or any cleaner.

These tips are provided courtesy of Diana Kirkpatrick Art You Can Wear –
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