

## LAND OF ODDS – BE DAZZLED BEADS

### CLEANING STERLING SILVER JEWELRY

It always amazes me about how many people think that when their sterling silver jewelry turns black, it's *Dead* and they throw it out. So, especially if you are selling your stuff, you always need to educate people about cleaning sterling silver.

Sterling Silver tarnishes from the interaction of silver and sulfides in the air. First the tarnish will take on a golden hue, and eventually, it will turn the piece black. This is a natural process.

Higher sulfide levels are associated with humidity and/or pollution. Remember, the more humid the climate, the faster sterling will tarnish. On a summer day in Miami, Florida, all you have to do is walk out the door and the sterling starts turning black very quickly.

#### Soft Cotton Cloth

Sterling Silver will polish up by rubbing or buffing it with a soft cotton cloth. The best cloth to use is a piece of *denim*. Yes, rub it on your pants.

Jewelry stores either sell or give away what is called a *Rouge Cloth*. This is a little bit gimmicky, in that what is taking the tarnish off is the rubbing, not the rouge. In most cases, denim works better.

Denim has ridges on it. The ridges get inside the links on chains. The ridges get into the crevices in your jewelry. The rouge cloth is terrible for chains. However, if you want the crevices in your jewelry to remain black, the rouge cloth, which is a smooth surface, will work better.

You might also invest in what is called a *Sunshine Cloth*. Many bead stores and jewelry stores sell these. The Sunshine Cloth has a chemical in it that eats the tarnish but does not harm gemstones. And that's its greatest selling point – it does not harm gemstones.

### Dips, Pastes, Silver Cleaners

Sterling Silver dips, as well as pastes and most silver cleaners, are fast and easy, but are not the best choices here.

Ideally you would never use a dip (or paste or most silver cleaners), or only use these in an emergency.

First, many dips will take the color and the polish off many gemstones. Second, the dips work by pulling silver out your jewelry and creating a silver salt. The salt is usually white, sometimes black. This salt or residue gets caught inside the links of chains. It gets caught in the crevices in your jewelry. It is difficult to pick it out.

If you do have to use a dip, the way you use this dip is that you take your piece of jewelry, and put it in, and immediately take it out and rinse it off. If not clean enough, repeat. Never leave your jewelry in the dip. Then buff your jewelry with a soft cotton cloth. The buffing brings out more of the shine, and helps take off any residue left on the piece.

One cleaner that works well is Tarni-Shield by 3M. Tarni-Shield, or similar silicon polish, will keep the piece of jewelry shiny until the shield wears off. We primarily use this product when we make a lot of jewelry that has to be on display for a long time, such as when we're selling our pieces at an arts and crafts fair.

There are lacquer dips which coat your jewelry in order to keep the shine. The lacquer, however, wears off unevenly, allowing some places to tarnish and others not. As the lacquer coating loosens in some areas, the silver will tarnish underneath the

lacquer, but this area will still be inaccessible to your polishing cloth, until that lacquer actually chips or peels off. This can leave your pieces unsightly. If the piece is a chain, or a filigree, the lacquer will form a film within the openings and cracks. This obviously makes the piece ugly.

### Good Ole Reliable Baking Soda

If you have some heavy duty tarnishing to deal with, then the easiest thing to do is to make a paste of baking soda and warm water, use a soft bristle toothbrush and scrub and rinse. Even dry baking soda will take the tarnish off.

With dry baking soda, you rub your jewelry back and forth into a pile of dry baking soda, then pat the jewelry or brush it with a cosmetic brush to get the powder off. The effects of the baking soda are almost instantaneous. You can also use baking powder. You can use baking soda toothpaste. If you want to polish a large tea-pot, for example, you can make a dip instead of a paste.

Never use a cleaner with ammonia or sulfur in it.

### Storing Your Sterling Silver Jewelry

Sterling Silver is best stored in an air-tight, zip lock plastic bag, and in a drawer or somewhere out of the light. When you put the silver into the plastic bag, be sure to push out all the air before sealing the bag.

If your sterling jewelry includes real pearls, then store in a natural fabric bag, like silk or cotton. Plastic bags will ruin the pearls.

*[Note: Sometimes you can restore that oily polished look on gemstones by rubbing them with black shoe wax.]*