

Mid-Atlantic Koi

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**Selecting
a Young
Utsurimono**

Selecting a Young Utsurimono

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With credit to Art Lembke and Kate McGill, ZNA and AKCA Certified Judges

Utsurimono are black koi with either white (Shiro), red (Hi), or yellow (Ki) as its other color. A good Ki or Hi Utsuri has become a rarer occurrence, especially in the larger sizes.

Curiously, Kin (metallic) Ki Utsuri are relatively common, but is classified under another class (Hikari). Hi and Ki Utsuri often seem to gain “shimi’s” in the red or yellow area and start to look messy. Shiro Utsuri has become more and more refined, with many breeders attempting this type of koi. The most striking pond I have ever come across was at a breeder who bred only Shiro Utsuri. The reason that Shiro Utsuri can compete for major prizes at shows is because of this skin, pattern, and overall quality refinement. Consequently, we will concentrate on selecting a Shiro Utsuri.

In looking for a quality Shiro Utsuri, or any koi, one always starts with the body conformation. With that in good proportion, the next requirement is quality skin and well displayed finnage. A Shiro Utsuri is often thought of as a Showa without the Hi. In a mature koi, the black and white should be evenly placed though out the body and head, extending into the mouth. Sumi often spreads as a koi grows, so if one were to select a young koi that has that balance; it is likely to have too much sumi later on. A big challenge is predicting where the sumi will grow. Another is to have the quality white skin. This is an absolute requirement, as the white is the “ground” to show off the black. It should be the color of snow with fukurin (described as a subtle sheen by some). One common “fault” in tosaï or very young Shiro Utsuri is having a yellow head. This can be interpreted that the koi is a male, is a quality koi, or just has thin skin. I tend to believe the latter, but maybe that is what I want to see. 😊 Something to avoid in Shiro Utsuri is a koi with any red in it. Often this means the koi is from a Showa breeding, and may develop more red in it as it grows.

So now we have a young koi with both a good body and white. The sumi in a quality young koi is often very immature and much of it is usually “submerged” under the skin. But one can see where it is likely to emerge as the white will often have a

bluish gray tinge where it is to come. As in Showa, the sumi usually finishes from the back of the koi to the front. The black in the young koi

should give some indication of its strength. Definite and dark motoguro in the pectoral fins is preferred and one sign of the sumi strength. The motoguro can be large as it often shrinks as the koi grows. Another indication of quality sumi would be to have a dark marking inside the mouth.

The pattern in a young koi is not as important as the

strength of sumi. It takes a number of years for the black to develop. In an adult koi, the white and black are preferred to be 50/50 overall in a traditional checkerboard or “mirror” pattern, but it is acceptable to have a bit more white than black. The head pattern in an adult koi can be any interesting pattern, and the classic “V” or a lightening pattern is preferred. Again, balance is the key.

The sumi should be in large patches spread along the body, and it should be wrapping up from the koi’s belly. Do not be fooled by the sumi that is already apparent, but look for the “true sumi”, which appears as deep bruises. If you double the size of those “bruises”, then you can roughly estimate the sumi pattern in the future. Select a young Shiro Utsuri that has the promise of a mature sumi and shiro pattern that will complement each other in size and location. It will take some years to develop completely, but the result is a koi that has quite an impact. ❖

