
BIRTHSTONES

January Birthstone

Garnet is actually the name of a group of minerals that comes in a rainbow of colors, from the deep red of the Pyrope garnet to the vibrant green of Tsavorite. Some rare garnets are even blue, colorless, or—most rare of all—change colors in different lights. But the most common color is a beautiful range of reds, from rust colored to deep violet-red.

The garnet is found all over the world, including Wyoming, Czech Republic, Greece, Russian, Tanzania, Madagascar, Sri Lanka and India.

The folklore on garnet is extensive. Legend has it that the garnet can bring peace, prosperity and good health to the home. Some even called it the “Gem of Faith,” and it’s believed that to those who wear it and do good, more good will come. (Conversely, it was also said to bring very bad fortune to those who commit bad acts while wearing it.)

The garnet also symbolized deep and lasting friendship. With that legend in mind, give a garnet to someone whose friendship you deeply value.

February Birthstone

Amethyst is purple quartz and is a beautiful blend of violet and red that can be found in every corner of the earth. The name comes from the Ancient Greek, derived from the word “methustos,” which means “intoxicated.” Ancient wearers believed the gemstone could protect them from drunkenness.

Amethyst, as previously mentioned, is composed of quartz, which is the second most abundant material found in the Earth’s crust. Amethyst gets its color from irradiation, iron impurities and the presence of trace elements. Its hardness (a 7 on the Mohs scale) is the same as other quartz, which makes it a durable and lasting option for jewelry.

While amethyst is most commonly recognized to be a purple color, the gemstone can actually range from a light pinkish violet to a deep purple that can read more blue or red, depending on the light. Sometimes, even the same stone can have layers or color variants, so the way the gemstone is cut is important to the way the color shows in a finished piece.

Amethyst often occurs in geodes or in the cavities of granitic rocks. It can be found all over the world, including the United States, Canada Brazil and Zambia.

March Birthstone

Aquamarine is most often light in tone and ranges from greenish blue to blue-green; the color usually is more intense in larger stones, and darker blue stones are very valuable. This gemstone is mined mainly in Brazil, but also is found in Nigeria, Madagascar, Zambia, Pakistan, and Mozambique.

Like emeralds, this gemstone is actually a variety of a mineral called beryl. Large stones have been found all over

BIRTHSTONES

the world, including one stone found in Brazil that weighed over 240 pounds. Aquamarine grows in large, six-sided crystals that can be up to a foot long, making it a great gem to be cut and polished in larger carats for statement pieces.

Not only is aquamarine one of the March birthstones, it's also used to celebrate 19th wedding anniversaries. It's a beautiful stone with little or no yellow in it, so it looks great in many settings with different colored metals and gemstones.

You probably already know of the diamond's toughness. In fact, it's the hardest gemstone and is made of just one element: carbon.

April Birthstone

Diamonds come in several colors, including yellow, red, pink, blue, and green, and range in intensity from faint to vivid. Generally speaking, the more saturated the color, the higher the value.

In fact, diamonds sparkling with intense color are rare and may be priced higher than a colorless diamond of equal size. Because fancy-color diamonds are very desirable, color is sometimes introduced in a laboratory. These are correctly called color-treated diamonds.

Its unique physical properties means it has the best possible luster of any gemstone when cut and polished well. So if you're in the market for "sparkle," the diamond is the gemstone for you.

As the birthstone for May, the emerald, a symbol of rebirth, is believed to grant the owner foresight, good fortune, and youth. Emerald, derived from the word "smaragdus," means, quite literally, "green" in Greek.

May Birthstone

Like aquamarine, emerald is a variety of beryl, a mineral that grows with six sides and up to a foot in length. Emerald color can range from light green (though there is some argument whether these very light beryls are truly emeralds) to a deep, rich green. Emeralds are also like aquamarine in that the way the color is presents itself in jewelry depends on a good cut by a skilled gemologist.

Most emeralds end up being heat treated to deepen or enhance the color. The deeper or more green an emerald, the more valuable it is. The rarest emeralds will appear to be an intense green-blue.

Emeralds are found all over the world, including Colombia, Brazil, Afghanistan and Zambia. The availability of high-quality emerald is limited; consequently, treatments to improve clarity are performed regularly.

June Birthstone

Pearls are the only gemstones made by living creatures. Mollusks produce pearls by depositing layers of calcium carbonate around microscopic irritants that get lodged in their shells—usually not a grain of sand, as commonly believed.

BIRTHSTONES

While any shelled mollusk can technically make a pearl, only two groups of bivalve mollusks (or clams) use mother-of-pearl to create the iridescent “nacreous” pearls that are valued in jewelry. These rare gems don’t require any polishing to reveal their natural luster.

The rarest, and therefore most expensive, pearls are natural pearls made in the wild. The majority of pearls sold today are cultured or farmed by implanting a grafted piece of shell (and sometimes a round bead) into pearl oysters or freshwater pearl mussels.

Pearls used to be found in many parts of the world, but natural pearling is now confined to the Persian Gulf waters near Bahrain. Australia owns one of the world’s last remaining pearl diving fleets, and still harvests natural pearls from the Indian Ocean.

July Birthstone

Ruby is the red variety of the mineral corundum, colored by the element chromium. All other colors of gem-quality corundum are called sapphire, which means color is key for this royal stone.

The Mong Hsu region of Myanmar began producing rubies in the 90s after discovering that heat treatment improved the color saturation. Other ruby deposits exist in Vietnam, Thailand, India, parts of the Middle East, East Africa and even the United States.

Ruby’s strength and red fluorescence make it valuable for applications beyond jewelry. Both natural and synthetic rubies are used in watchmaking, medical instruments and lasers.

Due to its deep red color, ruby has long been associated with the life force and vitality of blood. It is believed to amplify energy, heighten awareness, promote courage and bring success in wealth, love and battle.

August Birthstone

Peridot is the rare gem-quality variety of the common mineral olivine, which forms deep inside the earth’s mantle and is brought to the surface by volcanoes. In Hawaii, peridot symbolizes the

tears of Pele, the volcano goddess of fire who controls the flow of lava. Rarely, peridot is also found inside meteorites.

Peridot’s signature green color comes from the composition of the mineral itself—rather than from trace impurities, as with many gems. That’s why this is one of few stones that only comes in one color, though shades may vary from yellowish-green to olive to brownish-green, depending how much iron is present.

Most of the world’s peridot supply comes from the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona. Other sources are China, Myanmar, Pakistan and Africa.

Also known as “the Evening Emerald” because its sparkling green hue looks brilliant any time of day, peridot is said to possess healing properties that protect against nightmares and evil, ensuring peace and happiness. Babies born

BIRTHSTONES

in August are lucky to be guarded by peridot's good fortune.

September Birthstone

Although sapphire typically refers to the rich blue gemstone variety of the mineral corundum, this royal gem actually occurs in a rainbow of hues. Sapphires come in every color except red, which earn the classification of rubies instead.

Sapphires are found in India, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, China, Australia, Brazil, Africa and North America (mainly Montana). Their origin can affect their value as much as color, cut, clarity and carat size.

Due to the remarkable hardness of sapphires—which measure 9 on the Mohs scale, second only to diamond—they aren't just valuable in jewelry, but also in industrial applications including scientific instruments, high-durability windows, watches and electronics.

Sapphires symbolize loyalty, nobility, sincerity and integrity. They are associated with focusing the mind, maintaining self-discipline and channeling higher powers.

October Birthstone

Tourmaline is not one mineral, but a fairly complex group of minerals with different chemical compositions and physical properties. Certain trace elements produce distinct colors, and many resulting varieties have their own names:

Tourmaline is mined in Brazil, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Mozambique, Madagascar, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the U.S. — mainly Maine and California.

One of this gem's most impressive traits is its ability to become electrically charged through heat (pyroelectricity) and through pressure (piezoelectricity). When charged, tourmaline can act as a magnet by oscillating, and by attracting or repelling particles of dust.

Ancient magicians used black tourmaline as a talisman to protect against negative energy and evil forces. Today, many still believe that it can shield against radiation, pollutants, toxins and negative thoughts.

November Birthstone

Through much of history, all yellow gems were considered topaz and all topaz was thought to be yellow. Topaz is actually available in many colors, and it's likely not even related to the stones that first donned its name.

Pure topaz is colorless, but it can become tinted by impurities to take on any color of the rainbow. Precious topaz, ranging in color from brownish orange to yellow, is often mistaken for "smoky quartz" or "citrine quartz," respectively—although quartz and topaz are unrelated minerals.

The largest producer of quality topaz is Brazil. Other sources include Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Russia, Australia, Nigeria, Germany, Mexico and the U.S., mainly California, Utah and New Hampshire.

BIRTHSTONES

Topaz is a soothing stone that has been said to calm tempers, cure madness and eliminate nightmares.

December Birthstone

Tanzanite is the exquisite blue variety of the mineral zoisite that is only found in one part of the world. Named for its limited geographic origin in Tanzania, tanzanite has quickly risen to popularity since its relatively recent discovery.

Zoisite had been around more than a century and a half before this rare blue variety was found in 1967. Trace amounts of vanadium, mixed with extreme heat, cause the blue color – which ranges from pale blue to intense ultramarine with violet undertones.

Tanzanite is still only found on a few square miles of land in Tanzania, near majestic Mount Kilimanjaro. Its price and availability are directly tied to mines in this region.

Between its deep blue color and its limited supply, tanzanite is treasured by many – whether one is born in December or not!

Credit: American Gem Society/ www.americangemsociety.org