

Birthstones:

Gemstones are found almost all over the world, mostly in remote areas. They are brought to market in beautiful jewellery at great expense and with enormous effort. Precious gems are ever increasing in value as they pass through many hands from rough stone to cut and polished gem and on to becoming adornments.

There is a great deal of lore connected to gemstones, many gemstones are said to have healing powers for both body and spirit. Some stones have a curse legend associated with them. The most well known lore is about *Birthstones*. At different periods of history and through a myriad of cultures there have been numerous *Birthstone Charts*. Following are the most commonly accepted, in North America, *Birthstones* representing the twelve calendar months. Some of the months have alternate birthstones; in some cases these are more appealing to gentlemen.

JANUARY - GARNET + Although this Birthstone for January is generally thought to be of a deep Blood Red or Purplish Red hue, **Garnets** are actually a group of gemstones with a color range including Golden Yellow, Orange, Pink, and most surprising to many people, Green. The garnet is said to have great curative powers, especially against fever. In gem lore a traveler wearing Garnet is said to be protected from perils and ill health. Garnet is found in Brazil, Russia, Austria, Africa, Sri Lanka, Burma, India and the U.S.A. Given as a gift Garnets are supposed to bestow upon the new owner the double gifts of constant affection and loyalty.

FEBRUARY - AMETHYST + **Amethyst** is the most popular of the colored quartz gems it can vary in shades of Purple from the palest lilac to the richest royal violet. It is said to ward off drunkenness and protect against spells. There is a legend that a heart shaped Amethyst, mounted in silver or gold, then given by the bride to her husband will bring to the couple endless happiness and tranquility. Some sailors believe that wearing Amethyst will bring them to safe harbor. Amethyst comes from mines in Russia, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, Canada, U.S.A., Europe, Africa, China and Sri Lanka.

MARCH - AQUAMARINE/ BLOODSTONE + The shade of **Aquamarine** may vary from a very pale, nearly colorless blue to a rich and deep blue or blue-green. Aquamarine is a member of the Beryl Gemstone family; the most well know beryl is Emerald. Mostly found in Brazil, U.S.A., SW Africa, Madagascar, Burma, India, the Malagasy Republic, and the Ural Mountains of Russia.

APRIL - DIAMOND/ ROCK CRYSTAL + **Diamond** is certainly the most famous gem. This is the Earth's hardest stone by far. That hardness has inspired a worldwide advertising campaign touting it as representing "*forever*". Diamond is universally regarded as being magical in its ability to help overcome difficulties, to remedy all manner of ailments and to make one rich. It is made of pure carbon which is the same element that is regarded as the foundation of life.

MAY - EMERALD/ CHRYSOPRASE + The symbol of immortality and faith, **Emerald** is one of the most highly prized of all gems This Green stone is truly rare and very valuable. Emeralds over a couple of carats are rarely found in a deep pure green hue with few inclusions. Inclusions in Emeralds are so commonly found, and considered to be beautiful in their own right, that they are commonly referred to as *Jardin* (French for *Garden*) The stones of the richest color and clarity still come from Columbia, South America. There are mines today in North Carolina, Brazil, Africa, Russia, Rhodesia, Zambia, Tanzania, Pakistan and India. Emerald is held to be a symbol of Faith and a balm for tired eyes, it is also the symbol for success. It is said that it can smooth the road and calm the seas. The Ancient Egyptians dedicated Emerald to Eternal Youth.

JUNE - PEARL/ MOONSTONE/ ALEXANDRITE + One of the most inquired about gemstones is **Alexandrite**. It is so rare as to be virtually unknown in manufactured jewellery. It has the fascinating ability to change color as the type of light is changed. Almost every Alexandrite that is

over a half carat is a man made gem imitating this dramatic color change. The color change in the natural gem material goes from a Moss Green or and almost Emerald Green to a Reddish Purple or Raspberry Pink. The imitations are laboratory grown synthetic sapphires or synthetic spinels which change in color from a blue-gray or a bluish lavender to a vibrant purplish pink. The extreme rarity of a gem quality Alexandrite makes it one of the most costly to obtain. Color changing corundum (sapphire) was first synthesized in the late 1800's so many pieces of antique jewellery are set with these "look like" stones and not the natural ones.

Pearls represent purity, innocence and peace. They were used, powdered, in ancient times to cure ailments of the heart and were thought to be effective against poisoning. Pearls are found in nature as a growth in numerous mollusks, both in fresh and salt water. Divers specialize in retrieving them from the ocean depths. They are more commonly cultivated by man in live beds of oysters and other mollusks. Pearls are not actually a gemstone, they are organic in nature. Since they are somewhat absorbent, care must be taken to keep them from unattractive discoloring or peeling as a result of exposure to perfumes or oils. They should be stored separately from other jewellery to ensure that they do not get chipped or scratched.

Moonstone, as does pearl, represents purity, innocence and peace.

JULY - RUBY/ CORNELIAN + **Ruby** has been said to remove evil thoughts and control amorous desires. It is often considered the colored gemstone of the highest value. A large, deep red, transparent Ruby (over two or three carats) is worth more than a clear, white Diamond of equal size. Ruby is the red variety of Corundum (Sapphire), which comes in a full spectrum of colors. It stands alone as the second hardest gemstone with only Diamond having greater hardness. It is hardly ever found as large clear crystals. Today most of the Rubies in manufactured jewellery are from Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. Ruby was first synthesized around 1880 and by the early 1900's was manufactured in quantity. Many antique pieces of jewellery are mounted with large laboratory grown **real, but not natural**, Rubies.

AUGUST - PERIDOT/ SARDONYX + **Peridot** is the French name for the bright to pale Green to Yellowish Green or Brownish Green gemstone named Chrysolite otherwise known as Olivine. It is found around the world in small stones but very large, clear stones of an attractive hue are rare. Because Peridot is not a very hard stone and it is brittle as well, it will often become quite abraded on its facet edges when set in a ring and not protected. At one time it was believed that it could break evil spells. It had been associated with the Sun from whose rays life springs. It comes, principally, from the volcanic island of St. John (also called Zebirget) in the Red Sea, as well as from Burma, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, USA, Norway.

SEPTEMBER - SAPPHIRE/ LAPIS LAZULI + **Sapphire**, like Ruby, is Corundum. Only when corundum is blue is the word Sapphire used without a descriptive color name, such as Yellow Sapphire, Pink Sapphire or Violet Sapphire. The shades of blue range from the palest sky blue to an inky blue black or even an almost black greenish blue. The stones of the highest value are bright and lively cornflower blue to royal blue. These types are rarely discovered in large, clear specimens and the cost of such a stone would be a small fortune. Buddhists say that Sapphire is the "Stone of Stones" because it produces a desire for prayer. They declare that it gives peace of mind, tranquillity, happiness and spiritual enlightenment. In the Orient the Star Sapphire is most highly regarded as a bearer of good fortune with the three crossed rays representing the good spirits of Faith, Hope and Destiny. It is said that these spirits reward their owners with success in their daily dealings. Sapphire is found in Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Montana (USA), Sri Lanka and Tanzania.

Lapis Lazuli is an opaque stone of the richest deep royal blue. **Lapis Lazuli** is usually cut into cabochons or flat "wafers". It has been prized as an ornamental stone for over 6,000 years. The

finest quality is mined in Afghanistan and Siberia; Chile provides a less intense blue stone often veined with white calcite. It is credited with providing peaceful sleep, improved vision and purifying moral thoughts.

OCTOBER - OPAL/ PINK TOURMALINE + Precious **Opal** can be opaque or nearly transparent. It displays fiery iridescence within the stone which constantly changes appearance as it is turned in the light. The iridescence can range through the entire spectrum or can show just two or three colors. The background, or body color, of the Opal can vary as well. An Opal may exhibit a transparent or opaque colorless, white, yellow, red or slightly blue background. When the ground color is very dark, or extremely rarely, black, the gem is called **Black Opal**. The contrast of the play of color against a dark background adds to their attractive appearance and the rarity of this type of Opal make the Black Opal very valuable. They are principally found in Australia but are also mined in Mexico, Brazil, and Honduras. Prior to the discovery of Opal in Australia in the late 19th Century the only source for this sought after gem was in Hungary (now Eastern Czechoslovakia). All of the Opal in the older antique jewellery, going back to Roman times, came from this European deposit. Opals have many legends associated with them. On one side of the Opal legend arena they are believed to bring good fortune and are a symbol of power and dignity; while on the other end of the belief spectrum they are considered unlucky. In the East it is believed that the spirit of truth dwells within each fiery stone. Care must be taken with them while setting, wearing or storing them. It is a fairly soft stone whose water content must be maintained to prevent crazing or breaking. Keep an opal away from heat, don't hit it and it will remain beautiful for all time.

NOVEMBER - TOPAZ/ CITRINE + Golden **Imperial Topaz** or Precious Topaz is one of the most commonly misrepresented gemstones. Many other natural, or heat-treated yellow, brownish and sherry colored stones have been misnamed Topaz. Topaz has been credited as a cure for frenzy, lunacy, anger, sorrow, fear, melancholy and illusions. With all of those curative aspects it is no wonder that it has been sought after for a thousand years. The main sources of Nobel Topaz are Brazil, the Ural Mountains of Russia, Sri Lanka, and Africa.

Citrine is the yellow, yellowish-orange or yellowish-brown variety of Quartz. It is often called Topaz, Citrine Topaz or Smokey Topaz, but it is actually a distinct mineral. It was not distinguished, in ancient times, from other attractive yellow gemstones; therefore the legends and lore associated with Imperial Topaz are the same for Citrine. It is available from sources around the world such as Brazil, Burma, Sri Lanka Switzerland, Spain, Russia, France, Japan, Mexico, Scotland and the USA.

DECEMBER - TURQUOISE/ BLUE ZIRCON + **Turquoise** is another opaque gemstone which has been prized since the earliest civilization. It has a variety of appearances from the purest, intense sky blue, to dark or light greenish blue and bluish green. It can have veins of black (matrix) resembling spider webs or crystals of quartz or pyrite formed within the blue stone. Pieces of Turquoise dating to over 7,500 year old have been found on Egyptian mummies. It was used as money by 16th Century Native Americans. It is found in Persia (Iran), China, Australia, Tibet, Peru, Mexico and the USA. Turquoise is another stone believed by the 15th Century physicians to counter the harmful affects of poisons, even scorpion stings.

Blue Zircon is a mid-tone blue stone that has a very high refractive index and disperses light into its prismatic elements, even more so than diamond. **Blue Zircon** is also known as Starlite. It is a brittle stone whose facet edges are very easily chipped so it does not wear well in a ring. It is found in Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, France and Vietnam.