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Personal Jewelry: Summer Birthstones

By Linda Polansky

If you are looking for a jewelry gift that is not only pretty, but also personal, consider a birthstone.

Each month has a precious and semiprecious or alternate birthstone, so you should be able to find birthstone jewelry in a wide price range. Many people like to wear their birthstone, or their childrens' birthstones, as a personal expression, and many believe folklore that says their birthstones will bring them luck and good fortune. Here is some information on the summer birthstones of June, July, and August.

The precious birthstone for June is the pearl. Pearls come in two types, natural and cultured. Pearls are made by oysters, clams, and other mollusks. When sediment or parasites invade their shells, mollusks coat them with a substance that is hard and shiny, and eventually, a pearl is created. Natural pearls are those found in mollusks in the wild, and were created in a process unaffected by humans. They are difficult to find, and most of the pearls sold today are cultured pearls. They process is the same, but is forced when something is inserted into the mollusk to trigger the production of a pearl. An alternative and lesser known birthstone for June is Alexandrite, named for Russian czar Alexander II, since they were first found in Russia's Ural mountain range the day he was born. Like some other gemstones, its color can vary depending on the concentration of certain mineral elements in the stone, appearing either green or red. The semiprecious stone for June is the Moonstone, a type of feldspar. The most valuable ones are blue, but they can also be clear, green, pink, or any number of other colors.

July's precious birthstone is the ruby, and it is a red color. Many people do not know that rubies are second only to diamonds as the hardest substances on earth. Though perhaps not always as prized, they are also more rare than emeralds, diamonds, or other colors of sapphires. Unlike some other gems, rubies are only one color, red. The same stone, corundum, in different colors (and therefore different varieties) is called a sapphire.

August's stone is peridot, a form of the mineral olivine. These green colored gems are created by volcanic activity. It is associated with nature and strength. Unlike many other birthstones, it is not very rare, and it also scratches much more easily than other gems. The semiprecious stone for August is sardonyx, which is a layered stone, usually brown and white.

Linda Polansky writes about

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Fall Birthstones: Personal And Beautiful Gifts

By Dana Bradley

Most scholars believe that the tradition of wearing birthstones descended from the Breastplate of Aaron. In Jewish history, this was a garment worn by priests that was decorated with 12 stones. On the breastplate, they represented the 12 tribes of Israel, and over time came to correspond with the 12 months of the year, or the 12 signs of the Zodiac. While the stones that appeared on the breastplate are not the same stones we associate as birthstones today, the tradition of wearing stones and the belief that they convey power, strength, or protection has continued. Here is some information about the birthstones associated with the fall months of September, October, and November.

The birthstones for September are opal and lapis. Most people associate sapphires with the color blue, and this is the most common and popular color for sapphires, but they can also be found in colors like yellow and and white. Sapphires are the same mineral as rubies, corundum, so when sapphires are red or pink, they are called rubies instead. Sapphires are very hard, almost as hard as diamonds, and do not scratch easily. They are sometimes called the gem of the heavens because they are blue like the sky. Their blue color is also linked with loyalty and faithfulness, and many couples choose sapphires as the stone for engagement rings, with or without diamonds. Lapis is more common and not as expensive, but is the same brilliant color blue. It does not shine like a sapphire, but is dull instead.

October's birthstones are opal and tourmaline. Opals are unusual among gems in that you will find many different colors in a single stone. Most of the world's opals come from Australia, and they are sometimes called rainbow stones to reflect their multicolored nature. Opal is the same chemical composition as quartz, but contains water that refracts light, causing the different colors. Unlike sapphires, opal is very fragile and brittle. As such, a lot of opal jewelry is covered with clear protectants like resin or enamel. Opal becomes more brittle as it loses its water, so it should not be kept in very dry areas for lengthy periods of time. In fact, opal jewelry should be worn frequently, as it can absorb humidity from the skin. Like opal, tourmaline is a multicolored stone, but is a different chemical composition.

Yellow topaz, the birthstone for November, ranges from a warm brownish yellow, to shades with more red and orange. Both the ancient Romans and Egyptians associated topaz with their sun gods, and

many believe it has protective powers. Citrine resembles topaz, but is a variety of quartz and is much more affordable.

Dana Bradley writes about

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