



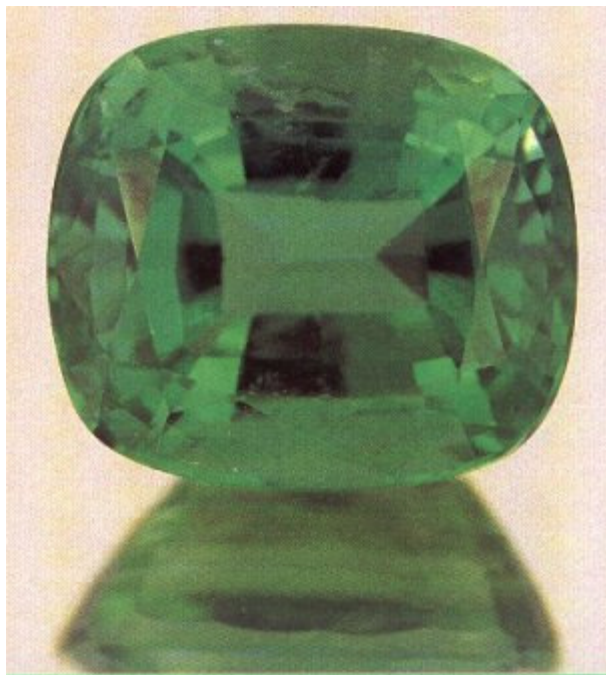
Gem Talk

by Michael S. George

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Emeralds: May's Birthstone



In this article we will be discussing emeralds, the birthstone for those born in the month of May. Emeralds are minerals that come from the mineral known as beryl (pronounced barrel). It has a color range from light green to dark green and at times bluish green depending on how much chromium is in the stone. It is this chromium that gives the emerald its rich green color and its value.

There are many legends about emeralds - in the Babylonian days it stood for fertility; in 18th century Europe it was thought to soothe eye fatigue and when placed under the tongue was thought to give the bearer the ability to see in the

future. It was worn for strength and memory enhancement as well as to ward off evil spirits. Emeralds also were used to reveal the truth about love.

Emeralds are also used as the 20th and 45th wedding anniversary gifts. Known as a soft stone, it has a 7.5 - 8 hardness rating on the MOHS scale, but has a toughness rating of "poor" which means that it cannot withstand impact very well. Remember that hardness refers to scratchability of one element to another. In caring for your emerald jewelry it is important to note that sudden temperature changes, harsh chemicals, and ultrasonics can damage them. It is the opinion of this author to allow a professional jeweler to clean your emerald items when they are in need to minimize your risk. Additional factors to consider are the enhancements done to improve the appearance of emeralds. In most cases, and up to 95% of the time, emeralds are enhanced by oiling them with a colorless oil such as mineral oil. This process evens out the color of a heavily fractured or included stone, however caution should be taken when purchasing an oiled emerald due to the fact that the oiling process is not a permanent process and may bleed out of the stone eventually revealing the fractures or inclusions it was initially enhanced to cover up.

This oiling process is very well accepted as an enhancement in the jewelry industry even though it is not a permanent process. Sunlight as well as the above mentioned care precautions are the main reason for problems with this enhancement process. When properly cared for, most emeralds will not display any problems due to oiling.

Emeralds are predominantly found in Colombia-South America, Zambia, Brazil, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Russia, and Australia, with the finest quality emeralds coming from Colombia's Mute Mine. This mine has produced the finest quality emeralds the world has known for the last 400 years. Many men have staked their claim and worked day after day in the hopes of striking it rich in the Black Soot Fields of South America only to find that their efforts have earned them a meager income at best. Less than two years ago due to torrential rains, a mud slide occurred that was drastically close to this mine. Had the huge mud slide found its way to the Mute Mine we would have seen the price of fine Colombian emeralds soar overnight. The potential damage that could have occurred would have been devastating to the mine itself as well as the industry in general. We in the business thank God that He spared us from this terrible calamity and loss of such beauty.

When purchasing fine quality emerald jewelry look for well cut stones that are not too deep or too shallow. Inclusions are normally eye visible in emeralds and it is not unusual to purchase them this way, noting that eye clean gems are

much more expensive. There is a three type inclusion in emeralds that proves its authenticity. The three phase inclusion consists of liquid, gas, and solid type inclusions. If one of these inclusion types is not found in a stone you are considering it is quite possible it is a created emerald or simulated stone of lesser value and should be investigated further by a professional to determine its true value and whether or not it meets your purchasing requirements. Remember the difference between synthetic and simulated is that synthetic is identical chemically to the natural, and simulated is man made of totally unrelated materials that only look like the natural. It is best to stay away from gemstones that are heavily included, opaque, heavily fractured, or pale in color. These characteristics greatly effect the overall value of the emerald and should be carefully considered before buying.

This green species of beryl is generally cut in round, oval, and emerald shapes and only occasionally seen in pear or marquise cuts due to the difficulty of cutting these shapes.

The price of emeralds varies greatly based upon place of origin, clarity, and intensity of color. Colombian stones of a carat or more can easily sell for several thousand dollars and gem quality can exceed ten thousand dollars per carat.

If you are considering a fine quality emerald and find the price to be more than your budget will allow, consider investing in a Chatham created emerald rather than lowering the quality standards you have set. A Chatham emerald is chemically identical to the natural emeralds mined in the ground. Through many years of research, the Chatham Company has been able to create beautiful Colombian color emeralds. The size and clarity are still the product of nature during the growing process, but a fine quality Chatham emeralds will cost significantly less and look as good as any natural stone as well as carry a lifetime replacement guarantee. The logical comparison for the lab created gemstones we are speaking of here would be pearls. Cultured pearls differ from natural pearls in that man intervenes in the production of cultured pearls, and the natural pearl is made through an accident that occurs naturally. The result is a pearl that has a nucleus of nacre (the pearl's natural covering) and the cultured pearl has a nucleus of glass or porcelain inlaid by man to speed up the process. Either way you have a beautiful gemstone that takes a professional, and at times special equipment to determine whether it is natural or lab created.

For more information on this, or for questions regarding any of your jewelry concerns call us at (314) 353-9488.

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