

BIRTHSTONES~ALEXANDRITE (*June*)



Alexandrite - Another of June's birthstones is the Alexandrite. The stone is named after Prince Alexander of Russia (which is why the "A" in Alexandrite is capitalized), who was to later become Czar Alexander II in 1855). Discovered in 1839 on the day of the prince's birthday, Alexandrite was found in an emerald mine in the Ural Mountains of Russia. Because it is a relatively recent discovery, there has been little time for myth and superstition to build around this unusual stone. In Russia, the stone was also popular

because it reflected the Russian national colors, green and red, and was believed to bring good luck. The Alexandrite possesses an enchanting chameleon-like personality. In daylight, it appears as a beautiful green, sometimes with a bluish cast or with a brownish tint. However, under artificial lighting, the stone turns reddish-violet or violet.

Alexandrite belongs to the chrysoberyl family, a mineral called beryllium aluminum oxide in chemistry jargon, that contains the elements beryllium, aluminum and oxygen. This is a hard mineral, only surpassed in hardness by diamonds and corundum (sapphires and rubies). The unusual colors in Alexandrite are attributed to the presence of chromium in the mineral. Chrysoberyl is found to crystallize in pegmatites (very coarse-grained igneous rock, crystallized from magma) rich in beryllium. They are also found in alluvial deposits, weathered pegmatites containing the gemstones that are carried by rivers and streams. Alexandrite is an uncommon stone, and therefore very expensive. Sri Lanka is the main source of Alexandrite today, and the stones have also been found in Brazil, Malagasy, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Burma. Synthetic Alexandrite, resembling a reddish-hued amethyst with a tinge of green, has been manufactured but the color change seen from natural to artificial lighting cannot be reproduced. Such stones have met with only marginal market success in the United States.