

# Spotlight on Gems

August birthstone: Peridot

by *Bethany Homrighaus*

Peridot, the August birthstone, has carried the moniker “poor man’s emerald” for centuries, and has been mistaken for that stone. Of course, it’s hard to compete against the imperial emerald, but as Cleopatra herself might have agreed, there is nothing poor about the lustrous, olivine mineral we now know as peridot.

An ancient stone, peridot (pronounced pare-ih-doe) graced Egyptian jewelry dating back to 1500 BC. Legend has it that miners on a tiny volcanic island in the Red Sea, called Zagbargad Island (also known as St. John’s Island) searched for the crystals at night because moonlight illuminated them so well. Peridot forms in deep rock as magma solidifies, but is ripped away and delivered to the Earth’s surface during volcanic eruptions. Imagine ancient Egyptian miners discovering these “olivine bombs” by the light of a full moon, marking their discoveries, and journeying back to the site when the sun rose to dig it all up. Eventually the stones were set in a hair clip or brooch for their queen, to help ward off evil spirits...

The stone remained in favor –600 years later, ancient Romans fancied it enough to contribute the name “evening emerald,” which some jewelers still use today.

As time passed, it seems this semi-precious gem was almost forgotten, as well as the volcanic island from whence it came. A quick burst of digging took place there just before World War I (reportedly yielding 2 million dollars’ worth of peridot), but today, St. John’s Island is nearly dry.

Now, plenty of peridot comes from our own back yard. Arizona reportedly yields 80-90% of the world’s supply. Because of sheer abundance, these gems are more affordable than higher quality stones found in other parts of the world, most notably in Pakistan. Termed “Kashmir peridot”, this variety was discovered in 1994. Stones larger than 100 carats have been reported from this mountainside region, and they are a “deep and breathtakingly beautiful green.”

A stone doesn’t have to be beautiful, however, to infuse the wearer with its healing properties. Many people believe, as the ancient Egyptians did, that peridot is a powerful healer. Author Judy Hall writes in her book, *The Crystal Bible: A Definitive Guide to Crystals*, “Peridot ... heals and regenerates tissues. It strengthens the metabolism and benefits the skin. Peridot aids the heart, thymus, lungs, gallbladder, spleen, intestinal tract, and ulcers, and strengthens eyes. Its energy balances bipolar disorders and overcomes hypochondria.”

Legend, lore, and its luxurious appeal create a grand case for peridot.

Interested in creating jewelry with beads made of this August birthstone? All three Beadazzled stores stock strands and loose beads in varied shapes, sizes, and prices. (Also look for sterling silver pendants and clasps set with a stone.) Pair it with purple amethyst for an evening look, or with carnelian and olive jade, as notable designer Amy Kahn Russell did in her necklace that appears in [Beadazzled: Where Beads and Inspiration Meet](#) (by Beadazzled owner Penelope Diamanti; No matter what you decide, using this stone in your designs virtually guarantees beautiful creations.