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Garnets

Garnets are famous for their intense red color, and most people think of red when they think about garnets. Found worldwide, garnets are common stones. They are not a single mineral with one chemical composition. For example, quartz has many colors, but quartz varieties are all silicon dioxide. Garnets are not quite as simple.

Garnets come in two main groups: pyrope, where the garnet includes aluminum in its chemistry (almandine, pyrope, and spessartine), and ugrandite, where the garnet contains calcium instead of aluminum (andrite, grossular, and uvarite). Within these two groups, garnets have chemical compositions that sometimes overlap.

This mixture gives us many different colors and a few unique features. Types of garnets appear below.

- Almandine: This most common garnet has the shade of red typically associated with garnet. Very few stones are gem quality, however, and many are opaque and dark and used for sandpaper. A deep burgundy red with brown undertones, the stone can easily extinct (or turn black) if it is too large or not cut correctly.
- Pyrope: This type of garnet has a distinctive red color that reminds one of pomegranate seeds. When this variety of garnet is found in antique jewelry, it is known as Bohemian garnet. Like almandine garnets, if the stone is too large or not cut correctly, it will seem black instead of red.
- Rhodolite: A blend of pyrope and almandine, this garnet has pinky red hues that remind one of a raspberry. Raspberry is the prized color, but this garnet also appears pink and lavender. North Carolina is a well-known source.
- Spessartite or Mandarin: Spessartite and Mandarin garnets are different names for the same garnet variety. They are an intense orange-red.
- Dementoid: Extremely rare, this andrite garnet was discovered in the Ural Mountains of Russia. It is green and has a sparkle brighter than a diamond. Though most dementoid garnets are eye-clean, this garnet has characteristic horsetail inclusions.
- Hessonite: A type of grossular garnet, this stone comes in a golden tone (often called imperial garnet) and a cinnamon color.
- Tsavorite: Found in East Africa, this bright green grossular gemstone owes its color to vanadium. The intense, bright green is easily confused with emerald.
- Uvarite garnets are also bright green garnets, but the tiny crystals mean they are rarely faceted.
- Color-change and asterism: Color-change garnets are rare and valuable, and the garnet composition is typically a mix of garnet types. The garnet will appear bronze or greenish in one type of light and pinkish in another. Garnets with asterism have rutile inclusions that line up within the crystal so that when light hits the stone, it forms a star.

My favorite garnets are color-change garnets, and a medium-saturated red garnet. Garnets are rarely treated so the stones are completely natural stones, and the garnet's high refractive index means it has excellent brilliance. You cannot beat a well-faceted red garnet for sparkle and flash.

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Comment [Editor1]: The explanation for color-change garnets appears in the paragraph above, so it's redundant here.

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