

# MONTANA SAPPHIRE: THE U.S.'S MOST POPULAR GEM

Brecken Branstrator, GIA GG

Though the United States produces several varieties of gem minerals, the queen of those gems, especially in the past decade, has to be Montana sapphire.

Their popularity has risen greatly over the past decade, moving beyond the national market to the international market, led by a sentiment to buy American goods. Demand is especially high for the blues and teals, though Montana also produces bicolor and parti color sapphires, as well as yellows, oranges, and pinks. Many of them are unique in the sapphire category for their interesting color zones.

There are a few key areas for production in the state: Rock Creek (near Philipsburg), Missouri River (near Helena), Dry Cottonwood Creek (in Deer Lodge County), and Yogo Gulch (near Lewistown). The former two are currently producing, while Yogo Gulch does not currently have new material coming out, though there have been efforts in the past few years to get it going again, and Dry Cottonwood Creek production remains limited.

The biggest miner involved in Montana operations right now is Potentate mining, producing in the Rock Creek area. The company started by building domestic demand and is now working on building the international market, launching its first rough gemstone tender with Bonas Group last year in Bangkok. The Missouri River area is known, meanwhile, for its historic sapphire deposits, particularly those produced at the Eldorado Bar.

Yogo Gulch produces saturated true blues that do not need heat treatment (as opposed to Rock Creek and Dry Cottonwood Creek corundum, which is almost always heated) in small, flat pieces of rough. It also



*The Celosia ring from Earth's Treasury, featuring a 2.15-carat teal Montana sapphire in platinum with diamond accents.*



*Montana sapphire rounds in 1-carat sizes and above from Columbia Gem House.*

lacks much of the zoning seen in material from other areas of Montana. Missouri River material, too, is often sold in its natural state, rarely needing heat treat-

ment. Almost all Montana sapphire material finishes in small sizes; polished stones over 1 carat are rare.

Yogo Gulch is a primary deposit, but the placer deposits at Rock Creek, Dry Cottonwood Creek, and Missouri River have been the subject of much research into their origins.

Because corundum is a 9 on the Mohs scale, and with Montana sapphires offering unique colors and unique cuts because of their popularity with gemstone cutters, they have become very popular in the colored stone commitment jewelry space, especially with independent designers.

In response to the strong market performance of Montana sapphire of late, GemGuide is debuting price charts for limited categories of blue, blue/green, and green Montana sapphires in its January/February



*A 2.64-carat Montana sapphire from Americut Gems.*

2026 issue. The team is always performing research to evaluate the market and plans to add more new stones to its pricing charts next year. ◆

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