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Serving Skagit County WA Since 1961

# Skagit Gems

Inspired by the rock critters at our last show, I glued up a bunch of agates and beach glass (and one Apache tear) to give a splash of color to my front window. It's still a work in process, as more treasures find their way here.

It cheers me up!

---Club member Diane D.

Happy  
Spring



# Stabilized vs Natural Turquoise

## What is stabilized turquoise?

Soft, low grade, turquoise that has undergone a stabilization process to enhance its hardness and color. During this process, the stone is put under pressure, causing it to absorb a clear epoxy or plastic filler. This results in a harder stone that is suitable for use in jewelry. The stabilization process was first invented in the 1950s in Arizona.

## Different types of altered turquoise?

**Stabilized or Enhanced:** An epoxy or a plastic filler is added via pressure to the stone. If the stone naturally formed with holes or pits, they can be filled with epoxy for a smoother surface area. Some stabilized turquoise is color enhanced.

**Reconstituted or Chalk:** Fragments of turquoise are crushed into a powder form, which is then mixed with epoxy to make harder blocks that can then be cut into slabs or stone shapes.

**Block or Imitation:** Synthetic material (dyed plastic) or the manipulation of another stone (such as the Howlite) made to look like turquoise, but with no actual turquoise stone in it at all.



Cabochons made from synthetic turquoise produced in Russia.

## Why is natural turquoise so much more expensive?

The price of natural turquoise is associated with its rarity. When turquoise is mined, the majority is too soft for use in jewelry. This inexpensive low grade material must be stabilized before it can be used in jewelry. It's estimated that as much as 90% of turquoise on the market today has been stabilized or enhanced. The lower grade the natural turquoise is, the more treatment it needs to become useful for jewelry. And generally speaking, the more the stone has been changed from its natural state, the less value it has.

## Is it bad to buy stabilized turquoise?

Stabilized turquoise isn't bad! It does have its benefits. In fact, some people prefer it. After treatment, stabilized turquoise is harder and is unlikely to break or crack. The stone is no longer porous, so it doesn't absorb liquids or oils and the color is "locked" - unlike natural turquoise where the color can change, or deepen, over time.

Buying stabilized turquoise is fine as long as you pay stabilized turquoise prices. You should expect jewelry with stabilized turquoise to be priced significantly lower than similar pieces with natural turquoise. The problem arises when there is dishonesty around the condition of the turquoise and its quality. Always buy turquoise from an informed and reputable business!

It's important to distinguish the fact that buying stabilized turquoise isn't buying a fake stone. Stabilization is a necessary process to make lower grade turquoise hard enough to be shaped.

The cheapest forms of "turquoise" are block and imitation. These types of "turquoise" are made from synthetic materials - usually plastic.

## Difference between American turquoise and non-American turquoise?

Natural turquoise is natural turquoise -- no matter where it is pulled out of the ground. Other areas of the world can offer high quality turquoise; most notably China and Iran ("Persian" Turquoise). Some high grade Chinese or Persian stones can be quite valuable and expensive to work with. In the case of Persian turquoise, the majority was imported to the U.S. before sanctions were imposed on Iran by the U.S. Government in the late 1970s.

Quality American turquoise stones from the Southwest fetch higher prices. Folk lore and history may play a role but this is largely due to scarcity. Many of the best American turquoise mines have been mined out and are closed.

In recent years, prices of American turquoise have skyrocketed. This has led to an increased use of non-American turquoise by Native American artists. Often, it's a more affordable way to work with natural stones.

## Price differences between turquoise mines?

Hardness, appearance, and rarity are three major factors when valuing natural turquoise. The hardest turquoise stones are considered "gem grade". Appearance is a matter of personal taste; the color and matrix will vary drastically between different mines. Generally speaking, darker color and a tighter matrix are considered desirable traits. Rarity refers to how much turquoise a mine produced and how much is still available for use.

Most collectors develop a preference for particular turquoise mines, and for the color and appearance it produces. The Lander Blue mine in Nevada (now closed) is widely considered to have produced the most expensive turquoise per carat. ---garlandsjewelry.com



**The Disk of Chichen Itza** is a Mayan artwork, made about 1000 years ago, in what is today the Yucatan State of Mexico. It consists of a central pyrite mirror, which has since oxidized, surrounded by a mosaic depicting four dragons. The design is an inlay work made of slate, coral, shell, and turquoise. The disk was found in the throne seat of Chac Mool at Chichen Itza, and today it is in the collection of the Quai Branly Museum, Paris, France. The photograph is a public domain image by Jebulon.



From left to right in the upper row: a greenish blue turquoise cabochon with black matrix from China; a teardrop-shaped, slightly greenish blue turquoise cabochon from Arizona's Sleeping Beauty Mine; and, two sky-blue turquoise cabochons with chocolate brown matrix from the Altyn-Tyube Mine in Kazakhstan. In the center row: a small sky-blue turquoise cabochon from the Kingman Mines in Arizona; and, two small round sky-blue cabochons from the Sleeping Beauty Mine of Arizona.



In the bottom row: two small cabochons with black matrix from unknown mines in Nevada; a teardrop-shaped cabochon with slightly greenish blue turquoise in black matrix from the Newlanders Mine in Nevada; and, a rectangular cabochon of slightly greenish blue turquoise in reddish brown matrix from the #8 Mine in Nevada.



**VISITORS ARE ALWAYS  
WELCOME!**

**Meetings on hold  
until further notice**

Meetings are on the **FIRST** Saturday of the month (except for Jan, July and Dec) at 10:00 am at the Mount Vernon Community (Senior) Center  
1401 Cleveland St. Mount Vernon WA 98273

- The purpose of this non-profit earth society shall be to stimulate interest in the study of geology, lapidary, and the collection of geological specimens
- We are a member of the Northwest Federation of Mineralogical Societies and the Washington State Mineral Council. We are affiliated with the American Federation of Mineralogical Societies.
- Dues are \$15.00 per year for adults and \$7.50 for those under age 16
- Visit our website: [skagitrockandgem.com](http://skagitrockandgem.com)

### 2020 Officers

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Annual Show Chair-Eric Self  
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 Scholarship-Noni Avery & Linda Keltz  
 Publicity-Frank Isca  
 Stamps-Virgil Keltz  
 Sunshine- Noni Avery  
 Swap-Vandenburgs





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## State Parks Free Days

- Jan. 1 — First Day Hikes; New Year's Day
- Jan. 18 — Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- March 19 — State Parks' 108th Birthday
- April 3 — Springtime free day
- April 22 -- Earth Day
- June 5 — National Trails Day
- June 12 — National Get Outdoors Day
- June 13 — Free Fishing Day
- Aug. 25 — National Park Service Birthday
- Sept. 25 — National Public Lands Day
- Nov. 11 — Veterans Day
- Nov. 26 — Autumn free day

## The Health Benefits

### OF GETTING OUTSIDE

Get healthy by getting outside.

**Here are the benefits:**



Reduce stress



Fight depression  
and anxiety



Increase  
creative drive



Improve  
mental focus



Raise  
vitamin D



Get more  
exercise