

IS IT A KEEPER? ROCK ID FIELD CARD

Four tests, thirty seconds, no gear. Print both pages, fold, keep with the sieves.

1 WET IT

Water is the test that costs nothing and reveals the most. Dry sapphire looks like gravel; wet, it glows. Lustre - waxy, greasy, glassy - is the tell, not sparkle.



Wet it in the creek



Waxy lustre



Greasy lustre



Glassy lustre

2 WEIGHT

Gem minerals are dense - a keeper feels heavier than a same-sized pebble. Gold feels absurdly heavy. That is the entire basis of panning.



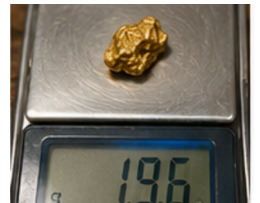
Keeper feels heavier



Same size, lighter



Gold feels heavy



Gold is dense

3 HARDNESS

Sapphire scratches glass and steel effortlessly; quartz scratches glass with effort. Test the stone's least attractive corner - never its face.



Sapphire on glass



Quartz on glass



Sapphire on steel



Quartz on steel

4 LIGHT

Hold it to the sun. Gem material glows, transmits or flashes colour. Ordinary rock stays mute.



Transmits blue



Transmits red



Transmits yellow


Ordinary rock,
no glow

THE RULE: HEAVY, HARD, OR GLOWS - JAR IT

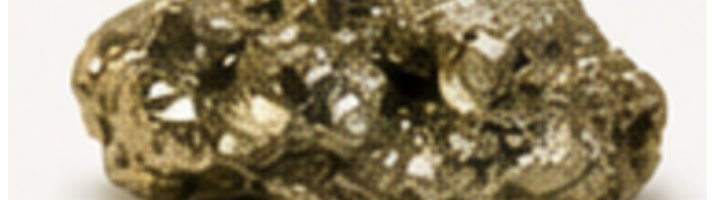
Sort at home in good light with a loupe. Field judgement is terrible judgement.

TELLING THE FAKES APART

GOLD OR FOOL'S GOLD?



Gold does not glitter. It GLOWS a rich buttery yellow that stays the same shade in shadow.



Pyrite and mica glitter and flash. Tilt them and the shine comes and goes.

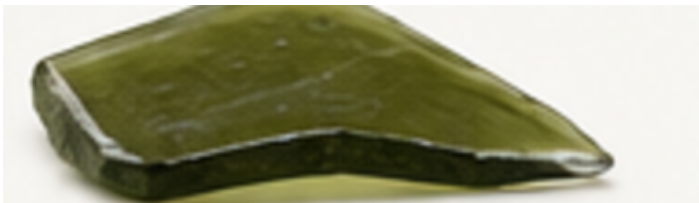


The streak test: rub it on unglazed ceramic, the back of a tile. Gold streaks gold.



Pyrite streaks greenish-black.

THE LOOKALIKES THAT FOOL EVERYONE



Bottle glass. Old diggings are littered with it, the number one false alarm: light, and it scratches easily.



Smoky quartz mistaken for sapphire. The hardness test settles it, quartz will not scratch steel.



Mica mistaken for gold. It glitters, floats out of the pan, and weighs nothing.



The reverse mistake matters more: small dull zircons, garnets and sapphires get thrown back as gravel.

FOUND SOMETHING PROMISING?

Take it to your state museum's mineral identification service, or a local gem and lapidary club. Thirty seconds of experience beats three hours of internet.