

Before You Sell That Coin

A No-Nonsense Guide for First-Time U.S. Coin Sellers

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1. Introduction: How to Use This Guide

Welcome to the **U.S. Coin Seller's Guide** – a simple and practical handbook to help you figure out if your old **U.S. coins** might be worth more than face value.

This guide covers **United States coins only**. If you have coins from other countries, they are not included here. While foreign coins can be interesting or valuable too, the tips and information in this guide are focused on U.S. coins made by the U.S. Mint.

What is a Coin?

A coin is a **piece of metal officially issued by a government** for use as money. Coins are stamped with a **denomination** (like 1 cent, 5 cents, etc.), a **year**, and often a **mintmark**, which shows where the coin was made.

First Things to Look At

Before you know if a coin might be valuable, start by checking:

- **The Year** – Older coins tend to have more value, especially those made before the 1960s.
- **The Mintmark** – A small letter on the coin tells you which U.S. Mint made it.
Common mintmarks include:
 - **P** = Philadelphia
 - **D** = Denver
 - **S** = San Francisco
 - **O**, **CC**, or **W** are also seen on certain older coins.

Some coins are common from one mint but rare from another. For example, a coin from 1916 may be easy to find from Philadelphia but extremely rare from Denver.

What This Guide Will Help You Do

Each chapter in this guide covers a specific coin type — like pennies, nickels, dimes, and even gold coins. It explains:

- Which **dates** and **mintmarks** are worth checking
 - What makes a coin **rare or collectible**
 - What most people overlook when searching through old coins
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A Reality Check About Rare Coins

While rare coins do exist, it's important to know that **most coins are not rare** — and finding a truly valuable one is like hitting the lottery. For a coin to have collector value, it usually needs:

- A **specific year**
- A **rare mintmark**
- And to be in **excellent, original condition**

For example, in 1921, a fire broke out at the San Francisco Mint, limiting the number of coins produced that year. As a result, coins from that location and year are more collectible. But even then, **only coins in top condition are worth serious money.**

That means even if you do have a rare year and mint, collectors may not pay much extra unless the coin is **clean, untampered with, and shows little wear.**

The bottom line?

Don't get your hopes too high — but don't throw anything away until you've checked this guide.

Let's get started.

Chapter 2: Pennies (1 Cent Coins)

Overview

U.S. one-cent coins, commonly known as pennies, have undergone several design changes and compositional shifts since their inception. Understanding these variations is crucial for identifying potentially valuable coins.

Types of U.S. Pennies

1. Large Cents (1793–1857)

- **Composition:** Pure copper.
- **Size:** Approximately the size of a modern half dollar.
- **Notable Designs:**
 - Flowing Hair (1793)
 - Liberty Cap (1793–1796)
 - Draped Bust (1796–1807)
 - Classic Head (1808–1814)
 - Coronet (1816–1839)
 - Braided Hair (1839–1857)
- **Value:** Most large cents are collectible due to their age, with values varying based on condition and rarity.

2. Flying Eagle Cents (1856–1858)

- **Composition:** 88% copper, 12% nickel.
- **Design:** Features an eagle in flight on the obverse.
- **Key Date:**
 - **1856:** A pattern coin with limited mintage; highly sought after by collectors.

3. Indian Head Cents (1859–1909)

- **Composition:**

- 1859–1864: 88% copper, 12% nickel.
- 1864–1909: 95% copper, 5% tin and zinc.
- **Design:** Depicts Lady Liberty wearing a Native American headdress.
- **Key Dates:**
 - **1877:** Low mintage; highly valuable.
 - **1908-S:** First Indian Head cent minted in San Francisco; scarce.
 - **1909-S:** Final year of issue; low mintage.

4. Lincoln Wheat Cents (1909–1958)

- **Composition:** 95% copper, 5% tin and zinc.
- **Design:** Features President Abraham Lincoln on the obverse and wheat stalks on the reverse.
- **Key Dates:**
 - **1909-S VDB:** Initials of designer Victor D. Brenner; low mintage.
 - **1914-D:** Scarce due to low production.
 - **1922 No D:** Denver mintmark omitted; rare variety.
 - **1931-S:** Low mintage during the Great Depression.

5. Lincoln Memorial Cents (1959–1982)

- **Composition:** 95% copper, 5% tin and zinc.
- **Design:** Lincoln Memorial replaces wheat stalks on the reverse.
- **Note:** In 1982, the composition changed to 97.5% zinc and 2.5% copper (copper-plated zinc).

Copper Content and Melt Value

- **Pre-1982 Pennies:** Contain about 95% copper, with a melt value that can exceed face value depending on current copper prices.
- **Post-1982 Pennies:** Made primarily of zinc with a thin copper plating; lower intrinsic metal value.

Current Copper Price: As of May 9, 2025, the market price for copper is approximately **\$4.66 per pound**.

Estimated Melt Value:

- **Pre-1982 Penny:** Weighs about 3.11 grams (0.00686 pounds).
- **Melt Value:** $0.00686 \text{ lbs} \times \$4.66/\text{lb} \approx \text{\$0.032}$ per coin.

Note: While the melt value exceeds face value, the actual collectible value of most pennies is minimal unless they are rare or in exceptional condition.

Identifying Valuable Pennies

While most pennies are common and hold minimal value beyond face value, certain key dates and mintmarks in **Extremely Fine (XF) grade** can be worth significantly more. Here's a list of such coins:

Indian Head Cents

- **1877:** Considered the key date of the series. In XF grade, it can fetch over \$2,000.
- **1909-S:** Final year of issue with a low mintage of 309,000. In XF grade, values can exceed \$500.

Lincoln Wheat Cents

- **1909-S VDB:** Features the designer's initials; only 484,000 minted. In XF grade, values can exceed \$1,000.
- **1914-D:** Low mintage of 1,193,000. In XF grade, values can exceed \$500.
- **1922 No D:** A variety where the Denver mintmark is missing; rare and valuable. In XF grade, values can exceed \$500.
- **1931-S:** Only 866,000 minted during the Great Depression. In XF grade, values can exceed \$100.

Locating Mintmarks on Pennies

Mintmarks indicate the U.S. Mint facility where a coin was produced. On pennies, the mintmark is typically located on the obverse (front) side of the coin, just below the date. Here's how to identify them:

- **No Mintmark:** Philadelphia Mint.
- **"D" Mintmark:** Denver Mint.
- **"S" Mintmark:** San Francisco Mint.

For example, if you see a tiny "D" mintmark beneath the date, it was minted in Denver.

Conclusion

When evaluating pennies for potential value:

- **Check the Date and Mintmark:** Key dates and specific mintmarks can significantly increase a coin's value.
- **Assess the Condition:** Coins in better condition (e.g., XF grade or higher) are more desirable to collectors.
- **Be Realistic:** While some pennies can be worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars, most are common and hold minimal value beyond face value.

If you believe you have a valuable penny, consider consulting with a professional coin dealer or submitting the coin to a reputable grading service for authentication and grading.

Chapter 3: 2-Cent Pieces

Overview

The 2-cent coin is one of the shortest-lived U.S. coin types, minted only from **1864 to 1873**. Despite its brief run, it's an important piece of American coin history and was the **first coin to feature the motto "In God We Trust."**

Basic Facts

- **Years Issued:** 1864–1873
 - **Metal Composition:** 95% copper, 5% tin and zinc
 - **Weight:** 6.22 grams
 - **Design:** The front (obverse) features a shield, while the back (reverse) has a simple wreath with the denomination "2 CENTS" in the center.
-

Copper Melt Value (May 2025)

With the current copper price at **\$4.66/lb**, the melt value of a 2-cent piece (0.0137 lbs) is approximately:

$$\text{\$4.66} \times 0.0137 \approx \text{\$0.064}$$

➡ That's about **6 cents**, meaning the coin's metal content is worth more than 2 cents — but still far less than what collectors will pay for rare dates or good condition pieces.

Where to Look for the Date and Mintmark

- **Date:** Centered at the bottom of the front (obverse).
- **Mintmark:** There are **no mintmarks** on 2-cent pieces — all were minted in Philadelphia.

So when it comes to rarity, **the year alone** is what matters.

What to Look For (Valuable Dates)

Most 2-cent pieces are not worth much unless they're in excellent condition. However, one year stands out as truly valuable:

1872

- **Low mintage** (just 65,000 coins made)
- **XF Value:** Over **\$150**
- In higher grades, prices can exceed **\$1,000**

Other Notes

- **1864 (Small Motto):** There are two varieties of 1864 — “Large Motto” (common) and “Small Motto” (scarce).
 - **XF Value** for the **Small Motto:** Around **\$150–\$300**
 - The difference is subtle, so these are usually verified by experienced collectors or grading services.
 - **1873 (Closed 3):** Very low mintage; mostly proofs. Circulated versions are rare and valuable.
-

Condition is Key

Just like with other old coins:

- Coins that are **worn, scratched, or corroded** are worth less.
 - If it has **sharp details, a smooth surface**, and hasn't been cleaned, it may be worth grading.
-

Conclusion

Most 2-cent pieces are fun historical coins but not rare. However:

- **1872 and 1864 Small Motto** are worth checking carefully
- If yours looks different or in especially nice shape, **don't clean it** — get it checked by a dealer or grading service

Chapter 4: 3-Cent Pieces

Overview

The U.S. Mint produced **two very different 3-cent coins** in the 1800s — one made of silver, the other of nickel. These were created to help people make small purchases (like stamps) during times when coins were scarce, especially around the Civil War.

Types of 3-Cent Coins

1. Silver 3-Cent Piece ("Trime")

- **Years Issued:** 1851–1873
- **Metal Composition:** 75% silver, 25% copper
- **Weight:** 0.8 grams
- **Design:** A six-pointed star on the front, with a Roman numeral “III” on the back

2. Nickel 3-Cent Piece

- **Years Issued:** 1865–1889
- **Metal Composition:** 75% copper, 25% nickel
- **Weight:** 1.94 grams
- **Design:** Lady Liberty wearing a coronet (like on the Liberty Head nickel) with a Roman numeral “III” on the back

Melt Value

- The **silver version** contains very little silver — even at today’s silver price (~\$28/oz), the melt value is about **\$0.70**.
- The **nickel version** has **no melt value** beyond face — and can’t legally be melted anyway.

So **metal content isn't where the value comes from** — it’s all about **rare dates and condition**.

Where to Look for the Date and Mintmark

- **Date:** On the front (obverse), usually at the bottom.
 - **Mintmark:** All were minted in **Philadelphia**, so **no mintmarks** to look for on either type.
-

Valuable Dates to Look For

Most 3-cent coins are worth **less than \$20** in average condition. But a few stand out and can be worth much more in **XF (Extremely Fine)** condition:

Silver 3-Cent (Trime) Key Dates

- **1851-O** (*the only one from New Orleans*)
 - XF value: **Over \$200**
- **1855**
 - XF value: **Around \$150+**
- **1862–1863**
 - Low mintage Civil War years
 - XF value: **Over \$100**

Nickel 3-Cent Key Dates

- **1877**
 - Mintage under 1,500
 - XF value: **Over \$500**
 - **1878–1881**
 - Low mintages, can bring **\$100–\$300** in XF
 - **1885**
 - XF value: **Over \$100**
-

What Makes Them Valuable

3-cent pieces are **thin, light, and easy to miss** in a pile of coins. But:

- Their odd design stands out once you know what to look for.
 - The **rare dates** are almost always the **later years** when the coin was being phased out.
 - Most collectors will only pay good money if the coin is **not damaged, not cleaned**, and shows most details clearly.
-

Conclusion

3-cent coins may look odd, but some are real sleepers when it comes to value. Keep an eye out for:

- **1851-O, 1855**, and **Civil War years** in the silver version
- **1877, 1878**, and other late years in the nickel version

If your 3-cent coin looks clean and readable — **don't clean it** — it might be worth grading.

Chapter 5: Nickels (5 Cent Coins)

Nickels can be confusing for new collectors because they've come in several designs and compositions over the years. While most nickels are common and only worth face value, there are a few **key dates**, **war-era silver nickels**, and **rare mintmarks** to watch out for.

Nickel Types

1. Shield Nickels (1866–1883)

- First U.S. nickels made of a copper-nickel alloy
- Difficult to find in circulation due to age
- Most are only valuable in higher grades
- **Key Dates:** 1877, 1878 — low mintage

2. Liberty (V) Nickels (1883–1913)

- “V” stands for the Roman numeral 5 on the reverse
- First year (1883) had no “CENTS” on the coin, which led to fraud (gold-plated versions passed as \$5 coins)
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1885 and 1886 – both scarce
 - 1912-S – low mintage
 - 1913 – **extremely rare**, not released to the public; worth millions

3. Buffalo Nickels (1913–1938)

- Features a Native American on the obverse and a buffalo on the reverse
- Popular with collectors
- Date often worn off in circulated examples
- **Mintmark Location:** On the reverse, under the words “Five Cents”
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1913 Type 2 (raised mound)
 - 1916 Doubled Die Obverse

- 1918/7-D Overdate
- 1937-D “Three-Legged Buffalo”

4. Jefferson Nickels (1938–Present)

- Modern design showing Thomas Jefferson
 - Mintmark location:
 - Pre-1965: on the reverse to the right of Monticello
 - 1968–2004: on the obverse (next to the date)
 - 2005–Present: back to the obverse under the year
-

Important: Silver War Nickels (1942–1945)

- Due to wartime metal shortages, nickels made from **mid-1942 to 1945** contain **35% silver**
- These nickels have a **large mintmark above Monticello**, including a “P” for Philadelphia (normally no mintmark)
- **Years to watch:** 1942-P, 1942-S, 1943-P, 1943-D, 1943-S, 1944-P, 1944-D, 1944-S, 1945-P, 1945-D, 1945-S

✅ **All silver war nickels have melt value based on their silver content**, even in worn condition

Mintmark Locations Summary

- **Buffalo nickels:** reverse, under “FIVE CENTS”
 - **Jefferson nickels (1942–1945 silver):** large letter above Monticello
 - **Modern nickels:** small letter on the obverse (next to or below the date)
-

Conclusion

Most nickels are common and only worth face value, but there are a few that are worth much more. Here’s what to look for:

- ✓ **Key dates** like 1885 Liberty or 1937-D 3-legged Buffalo
- ✓ **War nickels with silver** (1942–1945 with big mintmark)
- ✓ **Rare varieties** like doubled dies and overdates

Be cautious with worn Buffalo nickels — if the date is completely gone, they're usually not worth much. But always check for unusual mintmarks and errors — sometimes value hides in the details.

Chapter 6: Dimes (10 Cent Coins)

Dimes are one of the smallest and most overlooked coins in circulation — but they can carry serious value. Many pre-1965 dimes are made of silver, and a few key dates can be worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

What to Look For First

- ✓ **Date** — Older usually means better
 - ✓ **Mintmark** — Small letter indicating where the coin was struck
 - ✓ **Condition** — Wear significantly affects value
 - ✓ **Silver Content** — Dimes minted before 1965 contain 90% silver
-

Dime Types

1. Seated Liberty Dimes (1837–1891)

- Design: Lady Liberty seated with a shield
- Mintmarks: Below the wreath on reverse (or below seated figure)
- Many dates are rare; most are collectible in any condition
- **Key Dates:** 1843-O, 1846, 1856-S, 1860-O, 1871-CC, 1874-CC, 1877-CC

2. Barber Dimes (1892–1916)

- Design: Liberty head with laurel wreath
- Mintmarks: Below the wreath on reverse
- Common in circulated condition but scarcer in high grade
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1895-O — major rarity
 - 1896-S, 1897-O, 1913-S — all scarce
 - 1901-S — especially valuable in higher grades

3. Mercury Dimes (1916–1945)

- Design: Winged Liberty (often mistaken for Mercury)

- Mintmarks: Reverse, lower left near “E” in ONE
- **90% silver**
- **Key Dates:**
 - **1916-D** — extremely rare; worth hundreds even in low grade
 - 1921 and 1921-D — low mintage
 - 1942/1 and 1942/1-D — overdate errors

4. Roosevelt Dimes (1946–Present)

- Design: Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Mintmarks:
 - Pre-1965: Reverse, left of torch
 - Post-1967: Obverse, near the date
- **Only 1946–1964 are 90% silver**
- Most post-1964 dimes are common unless they’re error coins or high-grade proofs

Silver Value (Melt Value)

Dimes minted **1964 and earlier** are 90% silver and have melt value.

- Each silver dime contains about **0.0723 troy oz of silver**
- At \$25/oz, that’s about **\$1.80 melt value** per dime (as of early 2025)

✅ **Any dime dated 1964 or earlier** has silver value, even if it’s very worn.

Conclusion

Dimes are small but mighty. Look for:

- ✅ **1916-D Mercury dime** — one of the most famous U.S. key dates
- ✅ **1942/1 overdates** — valuable errors
- ✅ **Pre-1965 silver** — always worth more than face
- ✅ **Low mintage years** like 1921 or 1895-O

Even if most dimes aren't rare, those made of silver or with key dates can be worth holding onto — or getting appraised before selling.

Chapter 7: Quarters (25 Cent Coins)

U.S. quarters have gone through several design changes over the last 200+ years. Many people overlook quarters, but if you know what to look for, they can be surprisingly valuable — especially those made before 1965 when they still contained real silver.

Key Things to Check First

- ✓ **Date** — Anything before 1965 may be silver
 - ✓ **Mintmark** — Often found on the reverse or near the date
 - ✓ **Condition** — Worn coins are often worth only melt, but rare dates hold value even in low grades
 - ✓ **Errors or varieties** — Some coins have double strikes, off-center designs, or overdates
-

Quarter Types

1. Seated Liberty Quarters (1838–1891)

- Design: Lady Liberty seated holding a shield
- Mintmarks: On the reverse, under the eagle
- Many dates are rare; even common ones are collectible
- **Key Dates:** 1854-O Arrows, 1870-CC, 1871-CC, 1872-CC, 1873-CC (No Arrows), 1878-S

2. Barber Quarters (1892–1916)

- Design: Liberty head with laurel wreath
- Mintmarks: Below the eagle on reverse
- Some dates are scarce in any condition
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1896-S, 1901-S, 1913-S — all low mintage and valuable

3. Standing Liberty Quarters (1916–1930)

- Design: Liberty standing with shield
- Type 1 (1916–1917) has exposed chest; Type 2 (1917–1930) has covered

- Mintmarks: On the obverse, below “IN GOD WE TRUST”
- **Key Dates:**
 - **1916** — extremely rare and valuable
 - 1921, 1923-S — scarce and desirable

4. Washington Quarters (1932–Present)

- Design: George Washington profile
- **1932–1964** are 90% silver
- Mintmarks:
 - 1932–1964: Reverse, below the wreath
 - 1968–Present: Obverse, near the date
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1932-D and 1932-S — low mintage, highly collectible
 - 1950-D/S and other small mint errors can be worth more

Silver Melt Value

All quarters dated **1964 and earlier** contain 90% silver.

- Each has **0.1808 troy oz of silver**
- At \$25/oz, melt value is about **\$4.50 per quarter**

✓ Even if it's beat up, a silver quarter is worth more than face value.

State and America the Beautiful Quarters (1999–Present)

- These are generally only worth face value unless they're errors or rare proof/mint sets
 - Some collectors seek full sets in pristine condition, but modern quarters are not typically worth saving in circulated condition
-

Conclusion

Quarters are more than just parking meter change — they can be valuable if you know what to look for:

- ✓ **Silver content (pre-1965)**
- ✓ **Key dates like 1916 Standing Liberty and 1932-D/S**
- ✓ **Rare mintmarks and errors**
- ✓ **Even common silver quarters have melt value**

Check every quarter before you spend it — it might be worth far more than 25 cents.

Chapter 8: Half Dollars (50 Cent Coins)

Half dollars are large, heavy, and often forgotten in modern circulation — but they're one of the best denominations to find valuable coins. Many older half dollars contain **90% or 40% silver**, and there are some major key dates and varieties worth real money.

What to Look For First

- ✓ **Date** — Pre-1971 coins are often silver
 - ✓ **Mintmark** — Location varies by type
 - ✓ **Design** — Tells you the era and silver content
 - ✓ **Condition & Strike** — Determines if it's collectible or just melt value
-

Half Dollar Types

1. Seated Liberty Half Dollars (1839–1891)

- Design: Liberty seated with a shield
- Mintmarks: Reverse, below eagle
- Many are collectible in any condition
- **Key Dates:** 1847/6, 1853-O (No Arrows), 1878-S

2. Barber Half Dollars (1892–1915)

- Design: Liberty head with laurel wreath
- Mintmarks: Reverse, below eagle
- Often worn, but still desirable
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1892-O, 1892-S
 - 1897-O, 1897-S
 - 1913-S — low mintage

3. Walking Liberty Half Dollars (1916–1947)

- Design: Lady Liberty walking toward the sun

- Mintmarks: Reverse, bottom left under “E” in “United”
- Very popular series
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1916-S, 1917-D Obverse Mintmark
 - 1921, 1921-D, 1921-S — very scarce
 - 1938-D — semi-key

4. Franklin Half Dollars (1948–1963)

- Design: Benjamin Franklin on front; Liberty Bell on back
- Mintmarks: Reverse, above bell
- All are **90% silver**
- **Key Dates:** Most are common, but high grades and full bell lines bring premiums

5. Kennedy Half Dollars (1964–Present)

- Design: John F. Kennedy
- **1964** = 90% silver
- **1965–1970** = 40% silver
- **1971+** = copper-nickel (not silver)
- Mintmarks: Obverse below the neck (modern); reverse on 1964

✓ Many 1965–1970 coins are overlooked because they don’t “look” silver — but they are 40% silver!

Silver Melt Values

- **1964 Kennedy** = ~0.3617 oz silver → ~\$9.00 melt
 - **1965–1970 Kennedy** = ~0.1479 oz silver → ~\$3.50 melt
 - **Pre-1965 Franklin/Walker/Barber/Seated** = 90% silver → ~\$9.00 melt
-

Conclusion

Half dollars are big, bold, and often packed with silver. Keep an eye out for:

- ✓ **1964 and earlier (90% silver)**
- ✓ **1965–1970 Kennedy halves (40% silver)**
- ✓ **Key dates like 1921, 1938-D, and 1913-S**
- ✓ **Full bell lines on Franklins** — a hidden premium for collectors

Even well-worn examples can be worth melt value or more. If you find an old half dollar, it's almost always worth pulling aside to check more closely.

Chapter 9: Dollar Coins (\$1 Coins – Silver & Modern)

U.S. dollar coins have been issued in many designs, metals, and sizes over the past 200 years. While most modern dollar coins are only worth face value, silver dollars — especially **Morgan and Peace dollars** — are widely collected and can be quite valuable.

What to Look For First

- ✓ **Design and size** — Silver dollars are large and heavy
 - ✓ **Date and Mintmark** — Big factor in value
 - ✓ **Metal content** — Pre-1935 coins are silver
 - ✓ **Condition** — Cleaned or worn coins are worth less than crisp originals
-

Dollar Coin Types

1. Morgan Dollars (1878–1921, 2021)

- Design: Liberty head, eagle on reverse
- **90% silver**
- Mintmarks: Reverse below the wreath (“O,” “S,” “CC,” “D”)
- Very collectible — lots of low-mintage years
- **Key Dates Worth Over \$200+ in Fine Condition:**
 - 1889-CC, 1893-S, 1892-S, 1895-O, 1895-S
 - 1884-S, 1881-CC in high grade
- Many others are worth melt value unless uncirculated or rare mint

2. Peace Dollars (1921–1935)

- Design: Liberty with rays in her hair
- **90% silver**
- Mintmarks: Reverse, below “ONE”

- **Key Dates:**

- 1921 (High Relief)
- 1928 — low mintage
- 1934-S — tougher to find

✅ All Peace and Morgan dollars contain about **0.7734 oz of silver**, so even common ones are worth **~\$19 melt value** at \$25/oz silver.

3. Eisenhower Dollars (1971–1978)

- Large coins, but **only 40% silver in special collector versions**
- **Regular circulation coins** (mostly copper-nickel) are only worth face value
- **Silver versions:** Look for “S” mintmark and specific packaging (blue or brown Ike sets)
- **1972 Type 2 reverse** is a rare variety to watch for

Melt Value (for 40% silver Ikes)

~0.3161 oz of silver → ~\$8.00 melt

4. Susan B. Anthony Dollars (1979–1981, 1999)

- Small, round, easily confused with quarters
- No silver content
- All common except for:
 - 1979-P Wide Rim
 - 1981-S Type 2 Proof

➡ Most are worth \$1 unless high-grade or error

5. Sacagawea, Presidential, and Native American Dollars (2000–Present)

- Gold-colored but **not gold**

- Made of manganese-brass
 - Mostly only worth face value
 - Exceptions:
 - 2000-P Cheerios Sacagawea (rare reverse detail)
 - Mint errors or high-grade proof/mint sets
-

6. Modern U.S. Silver Commemorative Dollars (1983–Present)

- Issued by U.S. Mint for events (Olympics, WWII, Civil Rights, etc.)
 - **90% silver**, typically in proof sets
 - **Melt value** (0.7734 oz silver) \approx **\$19**
 - Most sell for melt unless certified high-grade or low-mintage special issue
-

7. American Silver Eagles (1986–Present)

- **1 troy ounce of .999 fine silver**
- Minted by U.S. Mint as bullion and collector coins
- **Always worth at least silver value**
- Some years (like **1986**, **1996**) are more collectible
- Rare proofs and burnished issues bring premiums

Current Melt Value: 1 oz \times \$25 = \$25 minimum

Conclusion

Not all dollar coins are equal — some are melt, some are face value, and some are rare collectibles. Look for:

- ✓ **Morgan & Peace silver dollars (pre-1935)**
- ✓ **Key dates like 1893-S, 1928, 1889-CC**
- ✓ **Modern Silver Eagles — always worth melt or more**

- ✓ **Commemorative dollars — usually worth melt**
- ✓ **Modern brass dollars — mostly face value unless error or rare variety**

When in doubt, weigh the coin, check the mintmark, and compare it to verified value charts. Silver content alone makes many of these worth holding onto.

Chapter 10: Gold Dollars (Type 1, Type 2, Type 3)

Gold dollars were the smallest denomination U.S. gold coins ever minted — both in value and size. Despite their tiny size, they were struck in solid gold and today are valuable primarily for their gold content and historical appeal.

Quick Facts

- **Metal:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Gold Weight:** 0.04837 troy oz
- **Melt Value (at \$3,300/oz):**
~\$160

✅ Even worn or common-date gold dollars are worth over **\$160** based on melt value alone.

Types and Date Ranges

Type 1 (1849–1854)

- Design: Liberty head, similar to a small \$2.50 gold piece
- Very small, about 13mm in diameter
- Easy to mistake for a foreign or novelty coin

Key Dates:

- 1849-C, 1849-O, 1850-D, 1854-D

Type 2 (1854–1856)

- Indian Princess head with smaller, more delicate features
- Very short-lived design — many weakly struck
- **Key Dates:**
 - 1855-D — extremely rare
 - 1856-S — lower mintage

Type 3 (1856–1889)

- Refined Indian Princess design with larger head
 - Struck in larger quantities
 - **Key Dates:**
 - 1861-D — Civil War issue from the Dahlonega Mint
 - 1875 — very low mintage
 - 1881 — collector interest in high grade
-

Mintmarks and Authentication

- Mintmarks appear on the reverse, near the bottom
- Coins from **Dahlonega (D)**, **Charlotte (C)**, and **New Orleans (O)** are especially collectible
- These coins are small, light, and frequently counterfeited — especially rare dates

💡 **Gold dollar coins should always be authenticated** if they appear valuable or unusual.

Conclusion

Gold dollars are rarely seen in circulation or casual collections, but they're easy to identify if you know what to look for:

- ✅ **Check the size** — tiny coins, about 13–15mm
- ✅ **Look for Type 2 or rare mintmarks (C, D, O, S)**
- ✅ **Even common ones are worth melt or more**
- ✅ **Send to a grading company if you suspect a rare date**

Because of their size and value, they are often faked or cleaned, so professional evaluation is a smart move for any gold dollar find.

Chapter 11: \$2.50 Gold Coins (Quarter Eagles – Liberty & Indian Head)

The \$2.50 gold coin, known as the **Quarter Eagle**, is a small but historic denomination minted for over a century. These coins are 90% gold and carry significant collector value depending on date, mintmark, and condition.

Quick Facts

- **Metal:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Gold Weight:** 0.1209 troy oz
- **Melt Value (at \$3,300/oz):**
~\$399

✅ All authentic \$2.50 gold coins are worth **well over \$390** just in gold value.

Design Types

1. Liberty Head (1840–1907)

- Design: Liberty with coronet (similar to larger denominations)
- Mintmarks: On the reverse, below the eagle
- Mints: Philadelphia (no mark), Charlotte (C), Dahlonega (D), New Orleans (O), San Francisco (S), Denver (D)

Key Dates & Mintmarks:

- 1841 — *considered a proof-only issue, extremely rare*
- 1848 CAL. — special commemorative strike
- 1854-S, 1856-D, 1875, 1876 — all scarce
- Any **C** or **D** mintmark = Southern gold = collectible

2. Indian Head (1908–1929)

- Design: Incuse (engraved below surface) Indian portrait — unique among U.S. coins
- Mintmarks: On the reverse, to the left of the arrows

- Smaller mintages overall, especially during WWI

Key Dates:

- 1911-D — most popular and valuable in the series
 - 1914 — tougher date in higher grades
 - 1921 — low mintage
 - 1929 — final year; high value in high grades
-

Counterfeit Warning

Because of their size and popularity, both Liberty and Indian Head \$2.50 coins are frequently **counterfeited** — often using real gold to pass weight tests.

✅ If you have one and suspect it may be rare or high-grade, it's smart to **send it to PCGS or NGC for grading** and authentication.

Conclusion

Small but powerful, \$2.50 gold coins are popular with collectors and investors alike. Keep an eye out for:

- ✅ **Charlotte, Dahlonega, or San Francisco mintmarks**
- ✅ **Key dates like 1841, 1911-D, and 1921**
- ✅ **Incuse Indian Head design (1908–1929)**
- ✅ **Authentication is important due to fakes**

Even lower-grade or common examples carry strong melt value — and rare dates in nice condition can bring in four figures or more.

Chapter 12: \$3 & \$4 Gold Coins

The \$3 and \$4 gold coins are among the rarest and most unusual U.S. coins ever produced. Most collectors will never encounter them outside of major auctions, but if one turns up in a collection, it's worth serious attention.

\$3 Gold Coins (1854–1889)

- **Metal:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Gold Weight:** 0.1451 troy oz
- **Melt Value (at \$3,300/oz):**
~\$479

These coins were created as a potential convenience for buying three-cent postage stamps by the sheet, but the denomination never caught on.

Design:

- Indian Princess head (different from the \$1 coin), with a wreath of corn, cotton, wheat, and tobacco on the reverse
- All were struck at the Philadelphia Mint, with a few rare branch mint issues

Key Dates:

- 1854-D — only year struck in Dahlonega, extremely rare
- 1875 — only 20 known
- 1876 — proof-only year
- All years are scarce, even the most common ones

✓ Even low-grade \$3 gold coins often sell for **\$1,000+**

\$4 Gold Coins (1879–1880) – “Stella”

- Never released for circulation — **pattern coins** only
- Created as an experimental coin for international trade (to match the value of foreign coins like the Latin Monetary Union's 20-franc piece)

- **Two main designs:**
 - Flowing Hair Liberty (1879–1880)
 - Coiled Hair Liberty (extremely rare)

These coins were struck in limited quantities and are now **extremely valuable**, with genuine examples often selling for **\$100,000+**

- ✓ Most “Stellas” are held by advanced collectors, museums, or high-end dealers
-

Counterfeit Warning

Because of their rarity and high value, **many fake \$3 and \$4 gold coins exist** — especially replicas sold online or used in jewelry.

If you believe you’ve found one, **do not try to clean or test it**. Submit it to **PCGS or NGC** for authentication.

Conclusion

Most readers won’t come across a real \$3 or \$4 gold coin — but if you do:

- ✓ Check for correct weight and size
- ✓ Look up key dates like **1854-D** or **1875**
- ✓ Beware of jewelry copies or fantasy pieces
- ✓ Send to a grading service before selling

Even the most common \$3 coins are highly collectible — and \$4 coins are among the rarest U.S. coins ever struck.

Chapter 13: \$5 Gold Coins (Half Eagles – Liberty & Indian Head)

The \$5 gold coin, or **Half Eagle**, is one of the most iconic U.S. gold denominations. It was produced continuously for over a century and exists in multiple designs. Every genuine Half Eagle contains nearly a quarter ounce of gold and is always worth well over melt value.

Quick Facts

- **Metal:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Gold Weight:** 0.2419 troy oz
- **Melt Value (at \$3,300/oz):**
~\$798

✅ Even common, low-grade examples are worth around **\$800+** just for their gold content.

Design Types

1. Liberty Head (1839–1908)

- Longest-running design
- Obverse: Liberty with coronet
- Reverse: Heraldic eagle
- Mintmarks: On reverse below the eagle
- Mints: Philadelphia, Charlotte (C), Dahlonega (D), New Orleans (O), San Francisco (S), Carson City (CC), Denver (D)

Key Dates & Rarities:

- Early issues from the 1840s and 1850s with **C** (Charlotte) or **D** (Dahlonega) mintmarks are rare and collectible
- 1875 — extremely low mintage
- 1887-S and 1892-CC — scarcer branch mint issues
- 1901-S — low population in higher grades

2. Indian Head (1908–1929)

- Unique **incuse design** (engraved below the coin's surface)
- No raised rim — unlike any other circulating U.S. coin
- Obverse: Native American profile
- Reverse: Standing eagle
- Mintmarks: On the reverse, left of the arrows

Key Dates:

- 1909-O — the only New Orleans \$5 gold coin; low mintage and very collectible
- 1911-D — most sought-after in the series
- 1929 — final year; scarce in all grades

Authentication Notes

Due to their high value and small size, both Liberty and Indian Head Half Eagles are **commonly counterfeited** — often with real gold.

✓ Have any potentially valuable examples authenticated by a trusted grading company like **PCGS** or **NGC**

Conclusion

\$5 gold coins are classic, historic, and always in demand. Look for:

- ✓ **Branch mintmarks** like **C, D, O, S, CC**
- ✓ **Rare dates** like 1875, 1909-O, and 1911-D
- ✓ **Indian Head incuse design (1908–1929)**
- ✓ **Even common examples are worth melt or more**

If you have a Half Eagle in good condition, especially with a rare mintmark, it could be worth **far more than just gold value**.

Chapter 14: \$10 Gold Coins (Eagles – Liberty & Indian Head)

The \$10 gold piece, known as the **Eagle**, was one of the highest denominations in early U.S. coinage. Minted for over 100 years, these coins are prized for their gold content and historical value, especially with rare mintmarks or early dates.

Quick Facts

- **Metal:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Gold Weight:** 0.4838 troy oz
- **Melt Value (at \$3,300/oz):**
~\$1,597

✅ Even worn, common-date Eagles are worth over **\$1,500+** for gold value alone.

Design Types

1. Liberty Head (1838–1907)

- Obverse: Liberty with coronet
- Reverse: Heraldic eagle with shield
- Mintmarks: On the reverse, below the eagle
- Mints: Philadelphia, New Orleans (O), San Francisco (S), Carson City (CC), Dahlonega (D), Charlotte (C), Denver (D)

Key Dates:

- 1875 — extremely low mintage (less than 100 pieces struck)
- 1854-S, 1864-S — very rare Civil War-era coins
- Any **Carson City (CC)** coin is highly collectible
- Early Charlotte and Dahlonega mint coins are also sought after

2. Indian Head (1907–1933)

- Obverse: Incuse Native American profile

- Reverse: Standing eagle
- Mintmarks: On reverse, below the eagle, left of arrows
- Designed by **Augustus Saint-Gaudens**, this series is iconic for its artistic style

Key Dates:

- 1907 (No Motto) — high relief, collectible
- 1909-D, 1911-D, 1913-S — lower mintages
- 1933 — last year; few exist legally, high auction value

✓ Common dates still carry collector interest due to the design and history

Important Notes on Counterfeits

Like all U.S. gold coins, \$10 Eagles are often counterfeited — including high-quality fakes using real gold. Be especially careful with coins that appear too clean, unusually shiny, or lack detail around the lettering and edges.

✓ Coins with rare dates or mintmarks should **always be authenticated** by a reputable grading service like PCGS or NGC.

Conclusion

\$10 gold coins are large, historic, and valuable regardless of condition — but some can be worth many times melt value.

- ✓ **Always check the mintmark and date carefully**
- ✓ **Look for rare branch mints like CC, C, D, O**
- ✓ **Liberty Head and Indian Head designs both have key dates**
- ✓ **Have high-value coins professionally graded to verify authenticity**

If you find a real \$10 gold coin, you're holding a significant piece of American history — and possibly a valuable one too.

Chapter 15: \$20 Gold Coins (Double Eagles – Liberty & Saint-Gaudens)

The \$20 gold coin, or **Double Eagle**, is the largest denomination of circulating U.S. coinage made of gold. These coins are big, heavy, and highly sought after — especially by both collectors and bullion investors.

Quick Facts

- **Metal:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Gold Weight:** 0.9675 troy oz
- **Melt Value (at \$3,300/oz):**
~\$3,193

✅ Even common, circulated Double Eagles are worth over **\$3,100+** in gold value.

Design Types

1. Liberty Head (1849–1907)

- Obverse: Liberty with coronet
- Reverse: Heraldic eagle with shield and stars
- Mintmarks: On the reverse, just below the eagle
- Mints: Philadelphia (no mintmark), San Francisco (S), Carson City (CC), New Orleans (O), and Denver (D)

Key Dates:

- 1856-O — one of the rarest U.S. coins, very few known
- 1870-S — ultra-rare, museum-piece level
- 1881, 1882, 1885, 1886 — low mintage Philadelphia issues
- Any **Carson City (CC)** coin is collectible, especially in higher grade

✅ All Liberty Head Double Eagles are 90% gold and highly valued, even in lower grades

2. Saint-Gaudens (1907–1933)

- Designed by famed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens
- Widely considered the most beautiful U.S. coin ever minted
- Obverse: Full-length Liberty with flowing robes and torch
- Reverse: Flying eagle with rays of sunlight
- Mintmarks: On the obverse, above the date (near rim)

Key Dates:

- 1907 High Relief — beautiful and collectible
- 1920-S, 1921, 1927-D, 1930-S — all extremely rare
- 1933 — *Not legal to own unless one of the few government-authorized specimens*
- 1932 and 1924–1928 — more common dates for bullion investors

✅ Most **common Saint-Gaudens coins from 1924–1928** are more affordable and **only trade significantly above melt in MS66 or higher condition**

Authentication Notes

Because of the high value (often thousands of dollars), counterfeits exist — including high-quality replicas made of real gold. These are **frequently passed off to inexperienced sellers**.

✅ Submit any potential Double Eagle to **PCGS or NGC** for authentication before selling

Conclusion

Double Eagles are among the most beautiful and valuable U.S. coins ever made. Whether Liberty Head or Saint-Gaudens, they're prized by collectors and investors alike.

- ✅ **All are worth at least melt value — often much more**
- ✅ **Watch for rare years like 1856-O, 1927-D, and high-grade 1907**
- ✅ **Authenticate before selling — counterfeits are common**
- ✅ **Saint-Gaudens coins in top condition can be worth 2–3× melt or more**

These coins represent American gold at its peak — and owning one is a privilege for any collector.

Chapter 16: What to Do If You Find a Key Date Coin

You've checked the date. You've checked the mintmark. Maybe you even used this guide to confirm you have a **key date** or **rare mint** coin.

So now what?

This chapter will walk you through how to **protect, authenticate, and eventually sell** a valuable coin — without falling into common traps or getting lowballed.

Step 1: Handle It Carefully

If your coin looks like it might be rare:

- **Do not clean it**
- **Do not polish it**
- **Do not rub or wipe it**, even with a cloth

Put it in a small coin flip or soft container — or wrap it gently in tissue and place it in a plastic bag. Condition can make a big difference in value, and improper handling can knock hundreds (or thousands) off the price.

Step 2: Be Aware of Counterfeits

Key date coins are the most frequently counterfeited. Some fakes even use real gold or silver to match weight and metal content.

Popular targets include:

- 1909-S VDB penny
- 1916-D Mercury dime
- 1893-S Morgan dollar
- 1921 Peace dollar
- Carson City gold
- 1932-D and 1932-S quarters
- 1933 Double Eagles (almost all are illegal to own)

If you found a coin that's commonly faked — **do not assume it's real** until it has been authenticated.

Step 3: Submit It for Professional Grading

If the coin is potentially valuable, your best move is to send it to a **third-party grading service** like:

- **PCGS** (Professional Coin Grading Service)
- **NGC** (Numismatic Guaranty Company)

These companies will:

- **Authenticate** whether it's real
- **Grade** the coin's condition on a 1–70 scale
- **Seal** it in a tamper-proof holder
- Provide it with a **certification number**



Why grading matters:

- Dealers and buyers will trust the coin's authenticity
- You won't have to argue about condition or guess at value
- A high grade can multiply the price dramatically

Step 4: Optional — Professional Conservation

If the coin has dirt, glue, PVC residue, or environmental damage, the grading service may offer **professional cleaning**, which they call:

- **“Restoration”** (PCGS)
- **“Conservation”** (NGC)

This is **not DIY cleaning** — it's a controlled process done to preserve and stabilize valuable coins. In some cases, it can improve the appearance and increase market value.

Step 5: Sell It the Smart Way

Once your coin is authenticated and graded, you can now **sell with confidence**. At this point:

- Dealers are more likely to make strong offers
- Auction houses like **Heritage** or **GreatCollections** may accept your coin
- You can sell on **eBay** with better leverage using the certification number

💡 If your coin is **not graded**, most dealers will:

- Assume it's a lower grade
- Suspect it might be cleaned or fake
- **Pay you less just to be safe**

In other words, if you let a dealer grade it for you, they'll keep the upside. If **you** get it graded, **you keep the profit**.

Conclusion

✅ Found something rare? Good job. Now don't blow it.

- Handle it carefully
- Don't clean it
- Watch out for fakes
- Get it graded
- Then sell it once the value is confirmed

If your coin is real and in collectible condition, **grading is the bridge between "maybe" and real money**.

Chapter 17: Selling Common Coins (Non-Key Dates)

Not Every Coin Is a Winner — And That's Okay

After reviewing your coins using this guide, you might realize that **most of what you have is common** — and that's totally normal. These coins may not be rare, but they still hold value — especially if they contain silver or gold.

This chapter explains how to **sell bulk coins the right way**, without creating extra work for a dealer or sabotaging your own payout.

Step 1: Sort Your Coins Into Logical Groups

Dealers prefer coins to be sorted by type, which helps them **weigh or count faster**. Sample categories include:

- **40% silver halves (1965–1970)**
- **90% silver dimes, quarters, halves (pre-1965)**
- **War nickels (1942–1945)**
- **Wheat pennies**
- **Common Buffalo nickels**
- **Peace dollars**
- **Morgan dollars**
- **Pre-1933 U.S. gold coins**
- **Modern bullion gold coins (Eagles, Buffalos, etc.)**

● If you bring **unsorted coins all mixed up**, expect the dealer to **pay you less** — you're handing them extra work.

Step 2: Remove Unnecessary Packaging

One of the **biggest mistakes sellers make** is bringing thousands of coins in:

- Cardboard flips
- Albums

- Stapled holders
- Plastic display books

✗ Dealers don't want to spend hours removing coins from sleeves, albums, or paper.

✓ **Silver quarters and other bulk coins are typically stored in cloth or plastic bags, not individual packaging.**

If your packaging is **moldy, filthy, or smells bad**, don't bring it in. It's disrespectful — and no one wants dirty cardboard from an attic on their counter.

Step 3: Respect the Dealer's Time

Dealers are not free research assistants.

- If you have a **few coins**, it's okay to ask for a quick check.
- If you have **hundreds or thousands**, don't expect free sorting and evaluation.

✗ If your coins are common and low-value, most dealers can't justify spending hours digging through them — they have **rent, bills, and staff to pay**.

If you want help identifying lots of coins, **ask if they offer appraisal services** and be prepared to pay a fee.

Conclusion

If you're selling common coins, your best move is to be:

- ✓ **Organized**
- ✓ **Respectful**
- ✓ **Realistic**

Dealers are not charities — they're small businesses. The more labor you create for them, the less money they can offer you.

Your local coin dealer would love to tell you that you found a million-dollar coin — but **most coins are simply not winning lottery tickets**. That's okay.

- ✓ **Keep coins organized and sorted**
- ✓ **Avoid dumping coins in dirty packaging**

- ✓ Don't bring in albums or sleeves full of low-value coins
- ✓ Don't expect hours of free help unless you've paid for it

A clean, polite, well-prepared seller **gets better treatment, faster offers, and more money** — every time.

Chapter 18: Final Thoughts & Thanks

Thank you for reading the **U.S. Coin Seller's Guide**.

We hope this guide helped you feel more confident about the coins you've inherited, found, or collected — and gave you a starting point for making smart decisions.

But remember this: **coin collecting is deep**. To become a true expert, it takes **years (even decades)** of study, handling real coins, making mistakes, and building knowledge through experience. This guide was written as a **simple, beginner-friendly overview**, not as a PhD-level reference.

Do Your Own Research

We've done our best to keep this guide accurate, but we make **no guarantees** that every word here is complete, current, or mistake-free. The value of coins can change with:

- Market demand
- Precious metal prices
- New discoveries
- Condition updates and grading standards

That's why we **strongly encourage you** to go deeper by exploring:

- **Books**, such as the Red Book (*A Guide Book of United States Coins*)
- **Online price guides**, like PCGS and NGC
- **Numismatic encyclopedias** and auction catalogs
- **Coin shows**, clubs, and dealer networks

Use this guide as a launchpad — **not a final word**.

Becoming a Numismatist

If you're curious enough to read this far, you're already on the path. A numismatist is someone who studies or collects coins — and you don't need a certificate to become one.

You just need:

- ✓ Curiosity

- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Patience
- ✓ A love of history and detail

The more you learn, the more rewarding the hobby becomes — and the more likely you are to spot value where others don't.

A Sincere Thank You

We're grateful for the opportunity to share our passion for coins with you. Whether you use this guide to sell off an old collection or to dive deeper into the world of numismatics, we hope it gave you clarity and confidence.

For many, this is where the journey begins — and we hope it is for you too.

Thanks again — and happy collecting.