

7 FLAVORED VODKAS THAT DON'T SUCK (THEY'RE ACTUALLY PRETTY GREAT)

By [Jason Horn](#)

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PHOTO COURTESY OF COLD RIVER

IN THE SPIRIT

There's nothing craft bartenders (and drinks writers) love to hate more than flavored vodka. The stuff now accounts for almost a quarter of all vodka sold in the U.S., and most of that is made with tons of sugar and artificial flavorings, in absurd varieties like birthday cake, whipped cream and even Cinnabon cinnamon rolls.

But as hard as it is for me to admit, not all flavored vodkas are designed for sorority sisters celebrating someone's 21st birthday. The bottles below have sophisticated, complex and—most importantly—*real* flavors that actually inspire cocktail creativity.

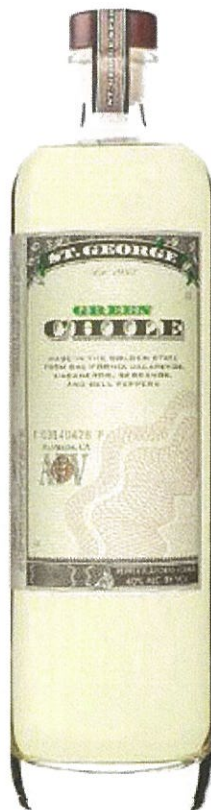


PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. GEORGE

ST. GEORGE GREEN CHILE VODKA (\$30)

Many new distilleries start out making vodka to generate cash flow while their other spirits spend years in barrels, but St. George did just the opposite: Its trio of vodkas just came out this year, after more than three decades of making brandies, whiskies, absinthe and more. The Green Chile is infused with jalapeño, serrano, habanero and two types of bell peppers for a highly complex flavor. It's not terribly spicy, instead capturing the peppers' combo of vegetal and fruity flavors. Savory drinks like the Bloody Mary are an obvious choice, but it also goes surprisingly well with lime in a Gimlet, Collins or Sour-type cocktail.

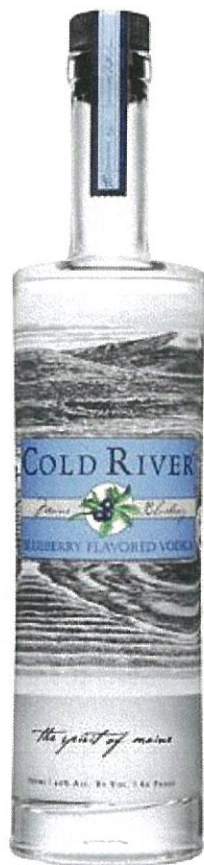


PHOTO COURTESY OF COLD RIVER

COLD RIVER BLUEBERRY FLAVORED VODKA (\$40)

Maine is known for its blueberries, and this Maine-distilled vodka is made by simply soaking fresh wild blueberries in alcohol—no flavorings, no added sugar, just pure fruit flavor. As you'd expect, the liquid tastes like real, actual blueberries. On top of that, the base spirit is distilled from potatoes, giving it a nice creamy mouthfeel that complements the blueberry well.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SQUARE ONE

SQUARE ONE BERGAMOT VODKA (\$35)

You may not have ever heard of bergamot, but you've probably tasted it: It's a yellow, orange-sized citrus fruit whose flesh isn't good to eat but whose peel produces lots of oil with an intense orange-lemon flavor, often used to punch up citrus-flavored foods and drinks. It forms the core of this great new vodka from Square One, with essential oils of three other citrus fruits and a bit of ginger, coriander and juniper layered on top. The result is a sophisticated citrus vodka that will blow your mind in a Cosmo.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BAY

THE BAY SEASONED VODKA (\$25 FOR 1 L)

Yes, that is a crab on the bottle, and yes, this vodka's flavor is modeled after Old Bay, the seasoning mix that New Englanders pour on clambakes and crab boils. But it's not until you taste this vodka in a [Bloody Mary](#) (or really anything involving tomato juice) that you understand the genius behind its flavor. The mix of celery seed, pepper, nutmeg, cardamom, sea salt and other ingredients ensures a nicely seasoned beverage without any guesswork.



TRU ORGANIC VANILLA VODKA (\$37)

There are a lot of vanilla vodkas out there, and most of them are awful, tasting more like canned frosting than anything else. Tru's take on the genre uses whole vanilla beans rather than vanilla extract or any kind of artificial flavor, yielding a spirit with an unmistakable floral, nutty aroma and taste. The vodka itself isn't sweet, but it enhances sweet cocktail ingredients like juices and syrups. Use it in any cocktail that contains a bit of sugar for a deeper and more complex flavor.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANGAR 1

HANGAR 1 KAFFIR LIME VODKA (\$35)

Kaffir lime, native to Southeast Asia, is used to add tart tang and a hard-to-describe savory *something* to the region's dishes. Its thick peel is rich in oils, which makes it an excellent choice to flavor a vodka—lime juice doesn't fare well going through distillation or sitting in a bottle for weeks or months. Hangar 1's version has a flavor recognizable as lime first and foremost, but with peppery bitterness adding depth. Mix it with other ingredients you might find in Indian or Thai food, like ginger, basil, lemongrass or chile peppers.

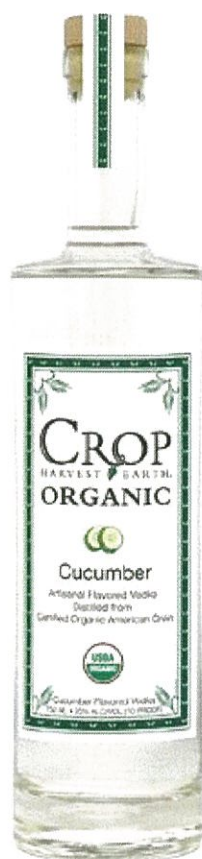


PHOTO COURTESY OF CROP ORGANIC

CROP ORGANIC CUCUMBER VODKA (\$28)

Want to make just about any classic cocktail—from a Martini to a Margarita—more refreshing? Muddle in a couple slices of cucumber. This tippie has the same effect but eliminates the need for any actual vegetables. Its flavor is so crisp, clean and simple that it requires only ice and one or two other ingredients—some club soda, a little lime juice—to make a lovely drink.



Jason Horn is Playboy.com's spirits columnist. He lives in Los Angeles and you can follow him on Twitter [@messyepicure](#).