

FROM AMERICA, WITH LOVE: NEW VODKAS

Distillers from Minnesota to Florida are making artisanal vodkas with homegrown ingredients like organic corn and maple sap. Here are four worth inviting into the liquor cabinet

ENTERPRISING AMERICAN

distillers are taking a spirit long associated with Eastern Europe—more specifically, with burly, bundled-up men drinking it by the tankard—and turning it into a homegrown favorite. They're making vodka that's true to its regional origins and emphasizing the use of local ingredients for flavorings or as the spirit's base. (Contrary to popular belief, vodka can be made from just about anything that's fermentable, from potatoes to wheat to maple sap.) We tasted our way through four brands that are starting to show up on liquor store shelves. Two things to keep in mind: 1) Availability varies from state to state; many of these and other American vodkas can also be purchased through such online retailers as klwines.com and astorwines.com, depending on your local shipping laws. 2) Creative cocktails are tempting, but for the most part, we preferred these vodkas straight—Russian-style.

—Charles Passy

VERMONT GOLD

The back story: Maple sap is the New England equivalent of liquid gold, so why not a hand-made vodka derived from sap?

The taste: A luxurious mouthfeel and an underpinning of sweetness; it's like buttered pancakes with Vermont maple syrup in alcoholic form.

To drink: Solo over ice, and preferably with brunch. \$42 for a 750ml bottle (375ml bottle is pictured), vermontspirits.com

4 ORANGE

The back story: From the land of citrus comes a citrus vodka, one made using fermented molasses derived from four different orange varieties (hence, the name).

The taste: A whole lot of orange in a mouthful with a subtle hint of Creamsicle. Perhaps a bit much straight.

The cocktail: A drink that invites a splash of citrus, like a re-conceived negroni. \$25, 4orangevodka.com



BOYD & BLAIR

The back story: It's no Idaho, but Pennsylvania grows its share of potatoes. Those spuds are the basis for this vodka, made by two business executives.

The taste: Like a traditional vodka, which means it gives off a strong scent of alcohol, but has an almost tap-water-like taste and texture.

To drink: In classics like Bloody Marys or martinis. \$35, boydandblair.com

PRAIRIE

The back story: This one is straight from the heartland: An organic corn vodka made by a 75-year-old distillery and a co-op of more than 900 Minnesota farmers.

The taste: Slightly sweet on the nose and mild in flavor—not quite tasteless, but vaguely reminiscent of rainwater.

To drink: Over ice with a few slices of cucumber or, as the distiller suggests, with organic lemonade. \$25, prairievodka.com