

INSIDE THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS VOLCANO p.36

VACATION ON MARS p.58 9 PAGES OF PUPPIES! p.13

FEEL SMART AGAIN

mental_floss

SPECIAL TRAVEL ISSUE

HOW THE ROAD TRIP SHAPED AMERICA

32 POUNDS OF BEEF JERKY

12,939 MILES

1 CHARMING PRAIRIE DOG

0 REST STOPS

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Be More Bitter!

The secret to the perfect cocktail is an old staple from the Union army's first aid kit.

DRINKERS HAVE BEEN ADDING BITTERS—alcohol infused with herbs, spices, and botanicals—to their booze since the 18th century. While today's bitters are prized for cutting a drink's sweetness and balancing its flavor and aroma, during the 19th century, the booze enhancers also claimed to cure everything from malaria to indigestion. These little potions tasted so unpleasant that drinkers assumed they just had to be healthy.

During the Civil War the Union army fueled the bitters mania, purchasing whole train cars of Hostetter's Celebrated Stomach Bitters. The Pennsylvania-made elixir billed itself as "a positive protective against the fatal maladies of the Southern swamps, and the poisonous tendency of the impure rivers and bayous." Union officers called it "the Soldier's Safeguard." Although its medicinal effects were likely nil, the 94-proof potency did help to steel nerves, and demand for these booster shots continued to soar after the war.

Things turned sour for bitters at the beginning of the 20th century, when the government cracked down on the cure-all's dubious medical claims. And while a few companies managed to hang around thanks to savvy bartenders, the bitters market remained sluggish until the classic-cocktail revival in the early 1990s made them essential again.

Today, bitters are enjoying a sweet renaissance. Stalwarts like Angostura and Peychaud's share shelf space with tiny bottles from upstart alchemists, making for livelier, more interesting drinks. The next time you break out your jigger, reach for the bitters as well. Your taste buds will thank you.



5 TO TRY

These bitters will sweeten up your home bar.



► **BAD DOG BARCRAFT SARSAPARILLA DRY**
An explosion of root beer rounded out by wintergreen and vanilla. Perfect for turning any soda fountain into a bar! \$22



► **BITTERCUBE CHERRY BARK VANILLA**
This Milwaukee gem will make you look like a bartending genius each time you whip up a Manhattan. \$14



► **SCRAPPY'S AROMATIC**
Want a spicier, fancier old-fashioned? Balance out the cocktail's sweetness with lots of clove and cinnamon. \$26

OUR PICK



► **BITTERS, OLD MEN GANGSTA LEE'N**
Finally, a way to add smoky bacon to your cocktails without a skillet. Pair this with whiskey and call it breakfast. \$10



► **REGAN'S ORANGE**
Remember those gummy orange-peel candies your grandma always ate? They're back, in booze form and ready for a martini. \$6

All available from the Meadow. atthemeadow.com