

1920's Slang

A

Ab-so-lute-ly: affirmative

All wet: incorrect; describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."

And how!: I strongly agree!

Ankle: to walk, i.e.. "Let's ankle!"

Apple sauce: an expletive; same as horsefeathers, As in "Ah applesauce!"

Attaboy!: well done!; also, Attagirl!

B

Baby: sweetheart. Also denotes something of high value or respect.

Baby grand: heavily built man

Baby vamp: an attractive or popular female, student.

Balled up: confused, messed up.

Baloney: Nonsense!

Bank's closed: no kissing or making out ie. "Sorry, mac, bank's closed."

Bearcat: a hot-blooded or fiery girl

Beat it: scam, get lost.

Beat one's gums: idle chatter

Bee's knee's: terrific; a fad expression. Dozens of "animal anatomy" variations existed: elephant's eyebrows, gnat's whistle, eel's hips, etc.; an extraordinary person, thing, idea; the ultimate.

Beef: a complaint or to complain.

Beeswax: business, i.e. "None of your beeswax." Student.

Bell bottom: a sailor

Bent: drunk

Berries: that which is attractive or pleasing; similar to bee's knees, as in "It's the berries."

Big cheese: the most important or influential person; boss, same as big shot.

Big six: a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful six cylinder engines.

Bimbo: a tough guy

Bird: general term for a man or woman, sometimes meaning "odd," i.e. "What a funny old bird."

Blind Date: going out with someone you do not know

Blotto: drunk, especially to an extreme

Blow: a crazy party; to leave

Bluenose: an excessively puritanical person, a prude, creator of "the Blue Nozzle Curse."

Bohunk: a derogatory name for an Eastern European immigrant. Out of use by 1930, except in certain anti-immigrant circles, like the KKK.

Bootleg: illegal liquor

Breezer: a convertible car

Bubs: breasts

Bug-eyed Betty: an unattractive girl, student.

Bull: a policeman or law-enforcement official, including FBI; nonsense, bullshit; to chat idly, to exaggerate

Bump off: to kill, to murder

Bum's rush, the: ejection by force from an establishment

Bunny: a term of endearment applied to the lost, confused, etc., often coupled with "poor little."

Bus: any old or worn out car.

Bushwa: a euphemism for "bullshit"

Butt me: I'll take a cigarette.

C

Cake-eater: An effete ladies' man, or someone who attends tea parties

Caper: a criminal act or robbery.

Carry a Torch: To have a crush on someone

Cat's meow: Something splendid or stylish; similar to bee's knees; the best or greatest; also "cat's pajamas" and "cat's whiskers"

Cash: a kiss

Cash or check?: Do we kiss now or later?

Cast a kitten: to have a fit. Used in both humorous and serious situations. i.e. "Stop tickling me or I'll cast a kitten!" Also, "have kittens."

Chassis: the female body

Cheaters: eye glasses

Check: Kiss me later.

Chewing gum: double-speak, or ambiguous talk.

Choice bit of calico: attractive female, student.

Chopper: a Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, due to the damage its heavy .45 caliber rounds did to the human body.

Chunk of lead: an unattractive female, student.

Ciggy: cigarette

Clam: a dollar

Coffin varnish: bootleg liquor, often poisonous.

Copacetic: excellent

Crasher: a person who attends a party uninvited

Crush: an infatuation

Cuddler: one who likes to make out

D

Daddy: a young woman's boyfriend or lover, especially if he's rich.

Daddy-o: a term of address; strictly an African-American term.

Dame: a female, did not gain widespread use until the 1930's.

Dapper: a Flapper's dad

Darb: a great person or thing. "That movie was darb."

Dead soldier: an empty beer bottle.

Deb: a debutant.

Dewdropper: a young man who sleeps all day and doesn't have a job

Dick: a private investigator. Coined around 1900, the term finds major recognition in the 20's.

Dinge: a derogatory term for an African-American. Out of use by 1930.

Dogs: feet

Doll: an attractive woman.

Dolled up: dressed up

Don't know from nothing: doesn't have any information

Don't take any wooden nickels: don't do anything stupid.

Dope: drugs, esp. cocaine or opium.

Doublecross: to cheat, stab in the back.

Dough: money

Drugstore cowboy: a well-dressed man who loiters in public areas trying to pick up women.

Dry up: shut up, get lost

Ducky: very good

Dumb Dora: an absolute idiot, a dumbbell, especially a woman; flapper.

E

Earful: enough

Edge: intoxication, a buzz. i.e. "I've got an edge."

Egg: a person who lives the big life

Ethel: an effeminate male.

F

Face stretcher: an old woman trying to look young

Fag: a cigarette. Also, starting around 1920, a homosexual.

Fall Guy: victim of a frame

Fella: fellow. As common in its day as "man," "dude," or "guy" is today. "That John sure is a swell fella."

Fire extinguisher: a chaperone

Fish: a college freshman; a first timer in prison

Flapper: a stylish, brash, hedonistic young woman with short skirts and shorter hair.

Flat tire: a dull witted, insipid, disappointing date. Same as "pill," "pickle," "drag," "rag," or "oilcan"

Flivver: a Model T; after 1928, also could mean any broken down car.

Floorflusher: an insatiable dancer

Flour lover: a girl with too much face powder

Fly boy: a glamorous term for an aviator

For crying out loud!: same usage as today

Four-flusher: a person who feigns wealth while mooching off others.

Frame: to give false evidence, to set up someone.

Fried: drunk

Futz: a euphemism for "fuck." i.e. "Don't futz around."

G

Gams: a woman's legs

Gatecrasher: see "crasher"

Gay: happy or lively; no connection to homosexuality. See "fag."

Get Hot! Get Hot!: encouragement for a hot dancer doing her thing

Get-up: an outfit.

Get a wiggle on: get a move on, get going

Get in a lather: get worked up, angry

Giggle water: an intoxicating beverage; booze

Gigolo: dancing partner

Gimp: cripple; one who walks with a limp. Gangster Dion O'Bannion was called Gimpy due to his noticeable limp.

Gin mill: a seller of hard liquor; a cheap speakeasy; bar

Glad rags: "going out on the town" clothes

Go chase yourself: get lost, scram.

Gold-digger: a woman who pursues men for their money.

Goods, the: ;the right material, or a person who has it; the facts, the truth, i.e. "Make sure the cops don't get the goods on you."

Goof: a stupid or bumbling person; a boyfriend, flapper.

Goofy: in love

Grummy: depressed

Grungy: envious

H

Hair of the dog: a shot of alcohol.

Half seas over: drunk, also "half under."

Handcuff: engagement ring

Hard-boiled: tough, as in, a tough guy, ie: "he sure is hard-boiled!"

Harp: an Irishman

Hayburner: a gas guzzling car; a horse one loses money on

Heavy sugar: a lot of money

Heebie-jeebies: the shakes; the jitters; named after a hit song.

Heeler: a poor dancer

High hat: a snob; to snub

Hip to the jive: cool, trendy

Hit on all sixes: to perform 100 per cent; as "hitting on all six cylinders"; perhaps a more common variation in these days of four cylinder engines was "hit on all fours". See "big six".

Hooch: booze; bootleg liquor

Hood: hoodlum

Hooey: bullshit, nonsense. Very popular from 1925 to 1930, used somewhat thereafter.

Hooper: dancer

Hop: opiate or marijuana; a teen party or dance

Hope chest: pack of cigarettes

Hopped up: under the influence of drugs

Horsefeathers: an expletive; same usage as applesauce

Hot dawg!: Great!; also: "Hot socks!" Rarely spelled as shown outside of flapper circles until popularized by 1940s comic strips.

Hot sketch: a card or cut-up

Hotsy-Totsy: pleasing

I

I have to go see a man about a dog: "I've got to leave now," often meaning to go buy whiskey.

Icy mitt: rejection

Insured: engaged

Iron: a motorcycle, among motorcycle enthusiasts

Iron one's shoelaces: to go to the restroom

Ish kabibble: a retort meaning "I should care." The name of a musician in the Kay Kayser Orchestra of the 1930s.

J

Jack: money

Jake: great or okay, i.e. "Everything's Jake."

Jalopy: a dumpy old car

Jane: any female

Java: coffee

Jeepers creepers: "Jesus Christ!"

Jerk soda: to dispense soda from a tap; thus, "soda jerk"

Jigaboo: a derogatory term for an African-American

Jitney: a car employed as a private bus. Fare was usually five-cents; also called a "nickel."

Joe: coffee

Joe Brooks: a perfectly dressed person; student.

John: a toilet

Joint: a club, usually selling alcohol

Juice joint: a speakeasy

K

Kale: money

Keen: attractive or appealing

Kike: a derogatory term for a Jewish person

Killjoy: a solemn person

Kisser: mouth

Knock up: to make pregnant

Know one's onions: to know one's business or what one is talking about

L

Lay off: cut the crap

Left holding the bag: to be cheated out of one's fair share; to be blamed for something

Let George do it: a work evading phrase

Level with me: be honest

Limey: a British soldier or citizen, from World War I

Line: a false story; insincere flatter; as in "to feed one a line."

Live wire: a lively person

Lounge Lizard: a guy that is sexually active.

Lollapalooza: a humdinger

Lollygagger: a young man who enjoys making out; an idle person

M

Manacle: wedding ring

Mazuma: money

Mick: a derogatory term for Irishmen

Milquetoast: a very timid person; from the comic book character Casper Milquetoast, a hen-pecked male.

Mind your potatoes: mind your own business

Moll: a gangster's girl

Mooch: to leave

Moonshine: homemade whiskey

Mop: a handkerchief

Munitions: face powder

N

Neck: to kiss passionately

Necker: a girl who wraps her arms around her boyfriend's neck.

Nifty: great, excellent

Noodle juice: tea

Nookie: sex

Not so good!: I personally disapprove.

Now you're on the trolley!: Now you've got it, now you're right.

O

Ofay: a commonly used Black expression for Whites

Off one's nuts: crazy

Oh yeah!: I doubt it!

Old boy: a male term of address, used in conversation with other males, denoted acceptance in a social environment, also "old man" or "old fruit." "How's everything old boy?"

Oliver Twist: a skilled dancer

On a toot: a drinking binge

On the lam: fleeing from police

On the level: legitimate, honest

On the up and up: on the level

Orchid: an expensive item

Ossified: drunk

Owl: a person who's out late

P

Palooka: a below-average or average boxer; a social outsider, from the comic strip character Joe Palooka, who came from humble ethnic roots

Panic: to produce a big reaction from one's audience

Panther sweat: whiskey

Percolate: to boil over; as of 1925, to run smoothly; "perk"

Pet: necking, only more; making out

Petting pantry: movie theater

Petting party: one or more couples making out in a room or auto

Piffle: baloney

Piker: a cheapskate; a coward

Pill: a teacher; an unlikable person

Pinch: to arrest. Pinched: to be arrested.

Pinko: liberal

Pipe down: stop talking

Prom-trotter: a student who attends all school social functions

Pos-i-lute-ly: affirmative, also "pos-i-tive-ly"

Punch the bag: small talk

Pushover: a person easily convinced or seduced

Putting on the ritz: after the Ritz Hotel in Paris (and its namesake Caesar Ritz); doing something in high style, also "ritzy."

Q

Quiff: a slut or cheap prostitute

R

Rag-a-muffin: a dirty or disheveled individual

Rain pitchforks: a downpour

Razz: to make fun of

Real McCoy: a genuine item

Regular: normal, typical, average; "Regular fella."

Reuben: an unsophisticated country bumpkin. Also "rube"

Ritzy: elegant (from the hotel)

Rhartz!: How disappointing!

Rub: a student dance party

Rubes: money or dollars

Rummy: a drunken bum

S

Sap: a fool, an idiot. It was a very common term in the 20s.

Says you: a reaction of disbelief

Scram: ask someone to leave immediately

Scratch: money

Screaming meemies: the shakes

Screw: get lost, get out, etc. Occasionally, in pre 1930 talkies (such as *The Broadway Melody*) screw is used to tell a character to leave. One film features the line "Go on, go on -- screw!"

Screwy: crazy; "You're screwy!"

Sheba: one's girlfriend; a woman with sex appeal (from the movie *Queen of Sheba*)

Sheik: one's boyfriend; a man with sex appeal (from the Valentino movies)

Shiv: a knife

Simolean: a dollar

Sinker: a doughnut

Sitting pretty: in a prime position

Skirt: an attractive female

Smarty: a cute flapper

Smoke-eater: a smoker

Smudger: a close dancer

Sockdollager: an action having a great impact

So's your old man: a reply of irritation

Spade: yet another derogatory term for an African-American

Speakeasy: a bar selling illegal liquor

Spiffy: an elegant appearance

Spill: to talk

Splifficated: drunk

Spoon: to neck, or at least talk of love

Static: empty talk; conflicting opinion

Stilts: legs

Struggle: modern dance

Struggle Buggy: the backseat of a car, a parent's worst nightmare

Stuck on: in love; having a crush on

Sugar daddy: older boyfriend who showers girlfriend with gifts in exchange for sex

Swanky: good; elegant; Ritz

Swell: good; a high-class person or rich man

T

Take someone for a ride: to take someone to a deserted location and murder them.

Tasty: appealing

Teenager: not a common term until 1930; before then, the term was "young adults."

Tell it to Sweeney: tell it to someone who'll believe it.

Tight: attractive

Tin Pan Alley: the music industry in New York, located between 48th and 52nd Streets

Tomato: a "ripe" female

Torpedo: a hired thug or hitman

U

Unreal: special

Upchuck: to vomit when one has drunk too much

Upstage: snobby

V

Vamp: a seducer of men, an aggressive flirt; to seduce

Voot: money

W

Water-proof: a face that doesn't require make-up

Wet blanket: see Killjoy

Wife: dorm roommate, student.

What's eating you?: What's wrong?

Whoopee: wild fun

Woof! Woof!: ridicule

X

Y

You slay me!: That's funny!

Z

Zozzled: drunk