

1920s Slang Dictionary

A

ab-so-lute-ly: affirmative, yes
absent treatment: dancing with a timid partner
air tight: very attractive
Airedale: an unattractive man
alarm clock: a chaperone
all wet: incorrect
And how!: I strongly agree!
ankle: to walk, i.e.. "Let's ankle!"
applesauce: flattery, nonsense, i.e.. "Aw, 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!
banana oil!: I doubt that!
Bank's closed: no kissing or making out i.e. "Sorry, mac, bank's closed."
bearcat: a 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 such as: elephant's eyebrows, gnat's whistle, eel's hips, etc.
beef: a complaint or to complain.
beeswax: business, i.e. "None of your beeswax."
bell bottom: a sailor
bent: drunk
berries: (1) perfect (2) money
Bible Belt: Area in the South and Midwest where Fundamentalism flourishes
big cheese: important person
big six: a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful six cylinder engines.
big timer: A charming and romantic man
billboard: a flashy man or woman
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
blooey: the condition when one has gone to pieces
blotto: drunk, especially to an extreme
blue serge: a sweetheart
bootleg: illegal liquor
breezer: a convertible car
Bronx Cheer: A loud spluttering noise, used to indicate disapproval. Same as raspberry
bunk: nonsense
bunny: a term of endearment applied to the lost, confused, etc. Often coupled with "poor little."

C

cake-eater: a lady's man
canceled stamp: A shy girl at a dance or party
caper: a criminal act or robbery.
Carry a Torch: To have a crush on someone
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."
cat's meow: great, also "cat's pajamas" and "cat's whiskers"
Cat's Pajamas: Same as cat's meow
Charlie: a man with a mustache 61. chassis: the female body
cheaters: eye glasses
check: Kiss me later. 64. chewing gum: double-speak, or ambiguous talk.
chin music: gossip
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.
clam: a dollar
coffin varnish: bootleg liquor, often poisonous.
copacetic: excellent
crasher: a person who attends a party uninvited
crush: infatuation

D

Daddy: a young woman's boyfriend, especially if he's rich
daddy-o: a term of address
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.
declaration of independence: a divorce
dewdropper: a young man who sleeps all day and doesn't have a job
dimbox: a taxi
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.
doublecross: to cheat, stab in the back.
dough: money

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D

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
dud up: to dress up
dumb Dora: an absolute idiot, a dumbbell, especially a woman; flapper.

E

earful: enough
Edisoned: questioned
egg: a person who lives the big life
embalmer: a bootlegger

F

face stretcher: an old woman trying to look young
Father Time: any man over 30
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: (1) a college freshman (2) a first timer in prison
flapper: the modern woman of the 1920s.
flat tire: a bore
flivver: a Ford 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

G

gams: legs
gatecrasher: see "crasher"
get-up: an outfit.
get a wiggle on: get a move on, get going
get in a lather: get worked up, angry
giggle water: booze
gin mill: a seller of hard liquor; a cheap speakeasy
glad rags: "going out on the town" clothes
go chase yourself: get lost, scam.
gold-digger: a woman who pursues men for their money.
goods, the: (1) the right material, or a person who has it (2) the facts, the truth,

G

goof: a stupid or bumbling person, a boyfriend, flapper.
goofy: in love
greenland: a park
grubber: one who borrows cigarettes
grummy: depressed grungy: envious
hair of the dog: a shot of alcohol.
handcuff: engagement ring
hard-boiled: tough, as in, a tough guy, ie: "he sure is hard-boiled!"
harp: an Irishman
hayburner: (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on
heavy sugar: a lot of money
heebie-jeebies: "the shakes," named after a hit song.
heeler: a poor dancer
hen coup: a beauty parlor
high hat: a snob, haughty, unapproachable
hike: a walk.
hip to the jive: cool, trendy
hit on all sixes: to perform 100 percent; 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".
hokum: nonsense
hooch: booze
hood: hoodlum
hooey: nonsense.
hoof: to walk
hooper: Dancer or chorus girl
hope chest: pack of cigarettes
hopped up: under the influence of drugs
hopper: a dancer
horn in: to get into a dance without an invitation
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."

1920s Slang Dictionary

J

jack: money
Jake: great, ie. "Everything's Jake."
Jalopy: a dumpy old car
Jane: any female
java: coffee
jeepers creepers: exclamation
jerk soda: to dispense soda from a tap; thus, "soda jerk"
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: establishment or club, usually selling alcohol
juice joint: a speakeasy

K

kale: money
keen: appealing
killjoy: a solemn person
kisser: mouth
kneeduster: skirt
know one's onions: to know one's business or what one is talking about

L

lalapazaza: a good sport
lay off: cut the nonsense
left holding the bag: (1) to be cheated out of one's fair share (2) to be blamed for something
let George do it: a work evading phrase 199.
level with me: be honest
limey: a British soldier or citizen, from World War I
line: a false story, as in "to feed one a line."
live wire: a lively person 204. lollygagger: an idle person

M

mad money: carfare home to be used by a flapper if she has a fight with her date.
manacle: wedding ring
mazuma: money
meringue: personality
Mick: a derogatory term for Irishmen
Middle Aisle: To marry
milquetoast: a very timid person; from the comic book character Casper Milquetoast, a henpecked male.
mind your potatoes: mind your own business.

M

Moll: A gangster's girl 214. mooch: to leave
moonshine: homemade whiskey
mop: a handkerchief
Mrs. Grundy: A priggish or extremely tight-laced person
munitions: face powder

N

neck: to kiss passionately
necker: a girl who wraps her arms around her boyfriend's neck.
Nerts!: I am amazed!
nifty: great, excellent
Nobody Home: Describes someone who is dumb
noodle juice: tea
Not so good!: I personally disapprove.
"Now you're on the trolley!" Now you've got it, now you're right.

O

Oh yeah!: I doubt it!
oil burner: a person who chews gum
old boy: a male term of address, used in conversation with other males. Denoted acceptance in a social environment. Also "old man" "old fruit." "How's everything old boy?"
Oliver Twist: a skilled dancer
on the lam: fleeing from police
on the level: legitimate, honest
on the up and up: on the level
orchid: an expensive item
owl: a person who's out late

P

palooka: (1) a below-average or average boxer (2) 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
peppy: vigorous, energetic
percolate: (1) to boil over (2) As of 1925, to run smoothly; "perk"
pet: necking
petting pantry: movie theater 245. petting party: one or more couples making out in a room or auto 246. piffle: baloney
piker: (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward
pill: (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person 249.
pinch: to arrest. Pinched: to be arrested. 250.
pinko: liberal

1920s Slang Dictionary

P

pipe down: stop talking
prom-trotter: a student who attends all school social functions
pos-i-lute-ly: affirmative, also "pos-i-tive-ly"
prune pit: anything that is old-fashioned
punch the bag: small talk
Pushover: A person easily convinced
putting on the ritz: after the Ritz Hotel in Paris (and its namesake Caesar Ritz); doing something in high style. Also "ritzy."

Q

quilt: a drink that warms one up

S

sap: a fool, an idiot. 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.
screwy: crazy; "You're screwy!"
sheba: one's girlfriend
sheik: one's boyfriend
shiv: a knife
simolean: a dollar
sinker: a doughnut
sitting pretty: in a prime position
skirt: an attractive female 285. smarty: a cute flapper
smoke-eater: a smoker
smudger: a close dancer
snake charmer: a woman involved in bootlegging
sockdollager: an action having a great impact
so's your old man: a reply of irritation
speakeasy: a bar selling illegal liquor
Spiffy: An elegant appearance
spill: to talk
splifficated: drunk
spoon: to neck, or at least talk of love
squirrel: to hide
static: (1) empty talk (2) conflicting opinion
stilts: legs
streeted: thrown out of a party
struggle: modern dance
Struggle Buggy: the backseat of a car.
stuck on: having a crush on; in love.
stutter bus: a truck
sugar daddy: older boyfriend who showers girlfriend with gifts
swanky: (1) good (2) elegant
swell: (1) good (2) a high class person

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."
ten cent box: a taxi cab
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 female
torpedo: a hired thug or hitman

U

unreal: special
upchuck: to vomit
upstage: snobby

V

vamp: a seducer of men, an aggressive flirt
voot: money

W

water-proof: a face that doesn't require make-up
weasel: a young man who steals a girl from her boyfriend
wet blanket: see Killjoy
wife: dorm roommate, student.
What's eating you?: What's wrong?
whoopee: wild fun
windsucker: a braggart
Woof! Woof!: ridicule
wurp: a killjoy

Y

You slay me!: That's funny!

Z

zozzled: drunk