

corn syrup for cane sugar and other ingredients.

Many of these root beers, such as Gale's Root Beer, which Gand developed after returning to the States in 1993, are geared to an adult palate. Dry with strong cinnamon, vanilla and ginger notes, the flavor of Gale's Root Beer is unique. But it's not for everyone, warned Ginsburg.

"Some people will like some root beers more than others—and it has nothing to do with quality," he said. "It's similar to beer, not everyone likes the same flavors."

We stocked up on eight premium root beers--many of them with hometown or Midwest ties--for a blind tasting. Opinions and scores of the five tasters ranged all over the place, suggesting the tasters' preference for a certain style (whether milder or more strongly spiced) played a significant role. The root beers were ranked on a scale of 1 to 9, with 9 being excellent. Prices are what we paid per six-pack (unless otherwise noted) in local stores.

Gale's Root Beer (\$1.59 per 12-ounce bottle)

Looks: "Very dark." "Good fizz." "Burnt caramel."

Aroma: "Spicy." "More herbal than roots." "Cinnamon."

Taste: "Very unusual, not a traditional root beer taste." "Medicinal and herbal." "Extremely strong cinnamon flavor."

Score: 6.6

Sprecher Root Beer (\$1 per 16-ounce bottle)

Looks: "Good carbonation." "Very dark." "Amber."

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