

FOOD & WINE

Rum Was Once Outlawed in Georgia, But Now the State Makes Some of the Best in the Country

The Peach State is experiencing a rum renaissance.

By [Caroline Eubanks](#) | Published on April 17, 2025



PHOTO: COURTESY OF 1861 DISTILLERY

America was still an abstract concept when the 13th colony, Georgia, was established in 1732 to honor King George II of England. Originally envisioned as a debtor's colony, a ship carrying founder James Oglethorpe and 114 men, women, and children landed near modern-day Savannah.

Oglethorpe was staunchly against alcohol consumption, but colonists and neighboring Indigenous tribes did not share his views. They were fond of rum, to put it mildly. One book estimates that individual colonists drank nearly 4 gallons annually in the years that preceded the Revolutionary War.

By 1735, "strong liquor" like rum was banned, the first act of alcohol prohibition in the not-yet-formed nation. The ban was overturned a few years later, but in the next century, it would take hold, county by county. The state's ban on alcohol lasted from 1907 to 1935, but legislation would make it difficult to create rum and other spirits for many years to come.

"We've always been drawn to spirits with deep historical roots and strong regional ties, and rum has both," says Jill Higgins, the distillery's co-owner and marketing director. "It's a spirit with a rich history, especially in coastal areas."

The distillery is located near one of the world's purest limestone aquifers. And it sources sugarcane syrup from a local man they call "Mr. Ronny."

"[He] lives in Ochlocknee and he makes the sugarcane syrup there in his backyard," says Higgins. It's this syrup that goes into the Caribbean-style white rum, spiced rum, and its barrel-aged offering, which matures in charred American oak barrels.

"Using sugarcane syrup instead of molasses allows us to create a smoother, more refined rum with a true expression of the sugarcane itself," says Higgins. "Unlike molasses, which is a byproduct of sugar refining, sugarcane syrup retains more of the natural sweetness and character of the cane, resulting in a cleaner, more complex flavor in the final spirit."

Whether you enjoy it in a grog, as the colonial forefathers did, or to simply sip it on ice, there's never been a better time to try Georgia-made rums.