

# PLACES TO FISH FOR OTHER SPECIES

Fishing often evokes an image of a relaxed angler patiently perched in his boat. To the non-fisherman, it's an easy sport; drop a line overboard and wait for the fish to bite. But for the casual angler many times the fish never bites.

How many times have you heard a Charlotte County resident say they rarely catch fish when they go fishing. It's hard for me to believe because there are more fish within Charlotte Harbor, Pine Island Sound and the surrounding waters than most anywhere else in the U.S.. Most folks who live here came from a northern state and they are not used to fishing in shallow waters, often less than 5 feet or what we refer to as a deep hole of 20 feet. Our waters are generally clear and you would think that if there are fish in the water then you should be able to see them. Right? Up north, 15 feet is shallow and deep is over 50 feet. Everyone does occasionally have a skunked day on the water, but more often it's when they pursue the glamorous species, tarpon, snook and redfish. But this article brings us back to earlier southern Florida fishing experiences when we had a hard time catching fish before we employed the basics.

This article is primarily about catching many subtropical species that do not include the tarpon, snook or redfish. The fish you can expect to easily encounter without a sophisticated effort includes mangrove snapper, assorted bottom species including grunts and flounder, ladyfish, sharks (primarily blacktip and bonnethead), jack crevalle, speckled trout, bluefish, mackerel, goliath grouper, hardhead and gafftop catfish, black drum, barracuda and many others. There are a lot of other fish besides snook, redfish and tarpon and primarily these fish can be pursued in open waters not around extreme shallows and mangrove islands.

In short, to catch fish on just about any occasion there are 3 basic styles of fishing to employ- drift fishing, anchored bottom fishing and trolling. It sounds simple enough and the baits to use for each style are actually simple enough as well. The warm weather bait of choice would be live shrimp, live baitfish, live

crabs or fresh cut bait including ladyfish and threadfin herring. Perhaps the easiest and cheapest baits are frozen squid and Spanish sardines. The most relaxed fishing is drift fishing and it is very productive as well.

The biggest thing to fishing success is fishing in the right spot. The basic rule of 'where-fish-will-be-found' typically involves a bottom change in depth. For example, an 8-foot bottom that falls off quickly to a 12-foot depth offers the fish a breakline of depth to ambush from and becomes a fish magnet. The second rule is current flow which helps fish position themselves to take advantage of an incoming or outgoing tide on a bottom feature. With these 2 rules in mind here are 2 examples of spots that are pretty much a sure thing: Go to the Jug Creek Bar and set up a drift on an incoming tide on the outskirts of the bar where shallow meets deep and you will catch fish. Location No. 2 is Johnson Shoals just outside Boca Grande Pass where you let the tide pull your boat past the edge of the shallow water ledge as it juts down into the channel. These locations are fish super-highways and there are thousands of fish in our area. Set up a bottom rig with a light sinker with a snelled hook about 12 inches above the sinker and bait-up with a shrimp or squid. Match the hook size to the bait size. Another approach is to use a jighead tipped with bait and drift this behind the boat. You will not go home skunked!

This same tactic can be employed around the harbor adjacent to heavy weedbeds or in the middle of a large expanse of grass. A different rig would be one that suspends your bait below a float as you drift along. Impart an occasional jerk as you drift along which creates sound and draws the fishes attention to your bait.

A second productive fishing technique is bottom fishing from an anchored boat. Again, being where the fish are is the key. The many public reefs hold fish however less visible spots hold plenty more fish. For instance, the mouth of the Peace River or intersection of Matlacha Pass with Charlotte Harbor are great places to throw the anchor and put a few lines out. My general rigging method is to place a 1/0 to 3/0 hook on 2 feet of 30-pound mono leader and pitch a shrimp or cut-bait out. Have at least 2 lines out so that one can be fished weightless and the other with a few split shots to get it the near the bottom. Heavier current flow may require more weight. You can expect sharks, trout, jacks, ladyfish, mackerel and occa-