

# HOW TO CATCH FLOUNDER

Last night I drove the mile-and-a-half down the street (a hill all the way) to lower Tampa Bay, to a neighborhood they named \*CoffeePot Bayou\* many, many years ago. A charming area, the tiny fisherman's shacks gave way to stunning mansions in the twenties, decrepit again in the early seventies, until money found its way back to the waterfront. The houses face a sidewalk that is a two-mile long seawall onto grass-rich and fish-heavy flats. A small bridge, plenty of rocks, and small points make for structure like you dream about. Like always, I had a fishing pole with me and stopped to fish for a few minutes. After a few casts, I hooked a flounder and let him go gently into the water. It weighed around two pounds. The fish would have made one of the best seafood dinners you could imagine, but it was late, and I have eaten more than my share. Learning *how to catch flounder* is pretty easy, and after reading this article you should be able to do just that.

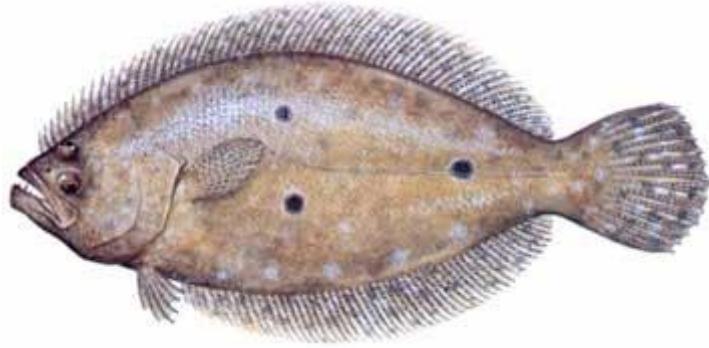
## Finding Flounder

You can catch a flounder by sheer luck. In fact, until about ten years ago here in Tampa bay, the only flounder I personally ever caught was by pure and unadulterated luck. Why? They just did not seem to be around. Growing up until I was about 12 in the Garden State we caught them all the time. One type we caught in the summer, and one we caught in the winter. The flounder in the summer we caught on strips of squid and [Fish Finder Rigs](#) and the flounder we caught in the winter (with much smaller mouths and bigger lips than the summer variety, also called Fluke) were big - seven or eight pounds sometimes. We caught them on the beaches. The winter variety were caught on red worms and small hooks on rigs using pyramid sinkers and a three-way swivel. I remember tying those rigs like it was last night that I tied them with that old guy with the cigar (hey Uncle Eddie wherever you are fishing!!!)



*This is the Summer Flounder that represents 99% of the fish you will catch in Florida waters. We called them fluke when I was a kid fishing the Jersey shores. They are around all year, and you can find them on sandy bottoms, in potholes, and even in estuaries. They come alive in November, though, and are an incredible culinary treat: fried, baked, or eaten with soy sauce and wasabi.*

You can find flounder near the passes and on the beaches. But you can also catch them inside bays and they are even found - now that the population seems to have exploded over the past ten years - in the tidal creeks and mouths of the estuaries. The key to finding them is to find sandy spots. You can find sandy spots within vast areas of grass; the flats in the bay and coastal waters are spotted with flounder-friendly sandy homes. The flounder was made to sit flat on the bottom. They change color to blend in with the color of the sand they are on.



***Paralichthys albigutta**, or Summer Flounder - are found inshore on sandy or mud bottoms and are often found in tidal creeks. This image came from the FWC and Diane Peebles. Diane actually put every one of these fish on a table, and matched the colors to the freshly-frozen animal thawed to reach its true color. Her library is truly a work of Americana in many ways, and her stuff is "used" on every fishing site known to man. The very least we could do is talk about what a cool lady she is, what an outstanding artist, and what a true resource she is. Thanks Diane!*

#### Tackle Used for Flounder Fishing

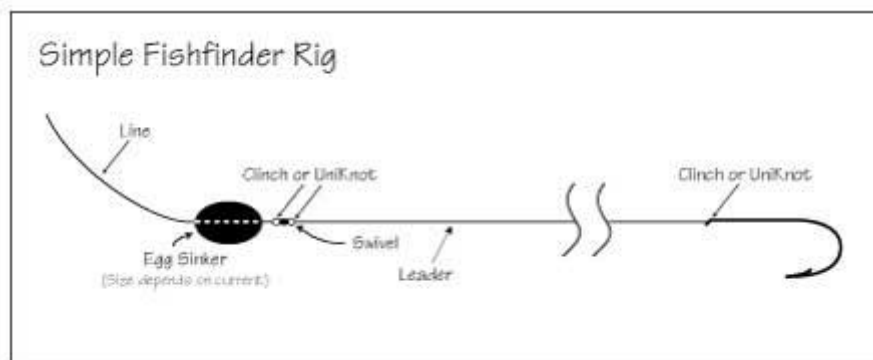
These are not nice fish, nor are they going to start running for the Gulf of Mexico like a thirty pound over-sized redfish will do, leaving you nothing but snapped line, or worse yet a spooled reel. Believe me when I say I have the t-shirt for that one; palming the reel at the very last moment before the line was all gone. The redfish might still be dragging that braided 20lb line for all I know. A **light to medium-weight spinning rod** seven or seven-and-a-half foot long with an appropriately-balanced spinning reel is just perfect to learn how to catch flounder (like it is for 80% of the species we target).

Properly loaded onto the spinning reel you should have light 15lb-test braided line. You do not need anything more than 20lb-test. Use a leader at least four-foot long. If you took the advice of team member Captain David Rieumont, he would tell you you're crazy if your leader is ever less than six feet, with eight feet being more effective. For flounder fishing, four feet is fine in our venal opinion.

## Rigs Used for Flounder Fishing

You can learn how to catch flounder effectively using a number of different rigs. Remember, these are fish that have two eyes on the same side of their head; they can only look up from the bottom where they live and they can only see so far.

The first rigging we love for flounder is a standard **\*\*Fish Finder rig\*\***. We do put a red bead in the line between the egg sinker and the barrel swivel, as you can see below.



*A Fish Finder rig works just about anywhere for any species that lives on or very near the bottom. You can add a small torpedo cork into the leader as you see above, and control the distance the bait rides above the actual bottom. The rigging works into dead bait like a strip of cut squid, or live bait like minnows or shrimp.*

The second rig is the one we use the most - especially when we are using live bait. What is our favorite? Is it hard to tie? The answer is no. It is as simple as it gets. We tie a six-foot leader to the braided line using a knot called a Surgeon's knot, and we tie a hook to the end of the leader. To get the bait to the bottom we use Split Shot. They are cheap, they come in a wide range of weights, you can get them made out of a non-toxic substance now, and you can put them on and off easily. That is something bad about using a Fish Finder, even though it is a superb and very effective rig. You can use larger weights in heavy tides, but to change the weight you have to retie the rig.

This rig is simple, and the one we use the most to freeline live baits or add a little split shot to get the baits to the bottom in medium tides. In strong

water, you need to move to a FishFinder for sure. This common **\*\*freeline rig\*\*** works just fine for flounder, but we have more luck using fish finders with heavier weights. It could have to do with the retrieve and attracted the attention of the fishies.

The third and for many anglers and the species they catch is their favorite is the simple jig. Using a Cal 1/16 ounce or 1/8 ounce jig head and a Cal or Mirrolure tail will ring the dinner bell if you fish them where the fish are. Again, you will most often find flounder on sandy edges, in sandy holes, and on sandy spots near the mouths of estuaries.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3Edt52DgKY>

*This video we found on YouTube shows a guy catching flounder using a Gulp! Bait. The smelly, organically produced baits are not cheap, but a lot of our friends and fellow site visitors use them for almost every species they target. If they didn't catch every species we target using them in one color, scent, size, style, or form or another we might believe it was the company's excellent marketing and social networking strategy. It's obviously not -- they work and they work well. If you're targeting a flounder in the bay these baits are a sure-fire way to (maybe) catch one. That's why they call it fishing, not catching. Our favorite's still the squid strip.*

## **The Ultimate Secret for Catching Tasty Flounder**

What is the secret of all professional flounder men? We would bet our best custom rods there are flounder men out there, and if we wait long enough there will be a reality tv show called something like FlatMen. Or EyesUp; The Lives of the FlounderMen. And obviously many menus tell us that there is a commercial harvest feeding those dining establishments. But all bad joking aside, the secret to catching flounder is a slow retrieve.

Think about it. This is a fish with a very toothy mouth that is no doubt dangerous to the bait fish the species normally feeds on. They clearly can move pretty fast, and the shape and relative size of their mouths are sure to create a serious suction and is more than able to effectively grab their targets. If not, they would be flounder fossils, not something on the menu of your local restaurant. But they are predators. That is another thing those mouths tell us. Think about a sixty footer in your swimming pool. It could hurt you bad opening up and sucking in all the water and you along with it.

Ditto the flounder and baitfish. But predators are lazy, and as a member of the family, flounder are not going to move one tiny inch more than they have to. Since they are on the bottom - literally stuck there - you have to put a bait very very near them to trigger a bite.



*When teaching people how to catch flounder, it just wouldn't be right if Andy S's name isn't mentioned. Andy is primarily a flounder fisherman and has probably caught more flounder than most people have ever seen in their life. Thanks for submitting this photo to us Andy!*

So find a spot - from a boat, wading, or from the shoreline - where there are good visible sandy spots. Here in Tampa bay one of the great places to catch them regularly is all along the Courtney Campbell Causeway: there are miles of shoreline next to grass flats loaded with sandy holes, edges, and spots. And lots of flounder that live there. Now in November is an excellent time, as the feed is best through the months of winter.

Again, fish your lure or bait slowly. You can even try dragging it simply in a straight line. Bounce it gently off the bottom, and do it slowly. You can try lifting the rod tip quickly a few times, to cause the bait to lift higher and move farther once in a while, but in general, fish very slowly and flounder



will cooperate much more often. A person fishing a jig like they were looking for redfish will make six casts to one the successful flounder angler retrieves.

### **Hooking and fighting a flounder**

When a flounder hits your lure, jig, or our personal favorite strip of squid cut to look like a plastic fish, stinky and long lasting, it picks it up and holds it for a moment. They do not strike hard like a redfish or snook, or run with the bait; they hold it and sit there in the dirt. If you are fishing (slowly!!!!) and it feels like you picked up a lump of grass weighing three pounds or more, it very well could be the flounder you are looking for.



*Do not set the hook hard!* It is not the redfish that other angler is casting for like there is no tomorrow. All you need do is slowly and gently lift the rod. If you are using a circle hook, which you should be using when you are fishing with dead or live bait, that is all you need to do; the hook sets itself in the corner of the fish's mouth. A jig has a "J" hook, and you will catch more flounder if you give the fish a little snap when you determine there is life on the end of that plastic and metal string thing.