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MERRY FISHMAS, SANTA CARP IS COMING TO TOWN!

It's the time of year when everyone who has a spouse or significant other who loves fishing is looking for the perfect gift. If, like Oprah, your shopping budget ranges to 6 figures, your choice is easy. A new boat, outboard motor and/or truck is always welcome. If your budget is more modest, perhaps I can help.

You can always visit your local tackle shop and pick out a new rod and reel that is appropriate for their favorite type of fishing. No fisherman will ever tell you that they have too many rods and reels, there's always room for one or even ten more.

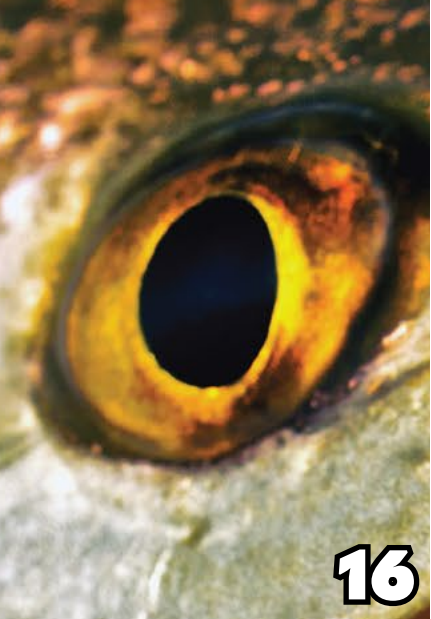
If even these are a bit too pricey for you, you can first consider your level of commitment to your significant other and if this does not do it, you can choose from a number of cheaper options like something from the following list:

- 1. Camsch makes a truly ugly Blobfish toy, it is very bloblike and squeezable for stress relief for when the real fish aren't biting or the weather is simply not cooperating.
- 2. Archie McPhee makes a truly annoying Yodeling Pickle. I don't know what it has to do with fishing, but who would not want one? The chances of this gift being something that they already have is miniscule, how many people have ever shown you their yodeling pickle?
- 3. Late for the Sky makes a board game named Fishin-opoly. It's a lot like Monopoly, but with Fish. What a great way to spend a rainy afternoon with your family or fishing buddies.
- 4. Probably the most desired fishing gift on my list is the Toilet Fishing Game made by Fairly Odd Novelties. Instead of spending toilet time reading Facebook or Twitter, This, fun for all ages, game potentially provides hours of catching fun. The family will be fighting over who gets the bathroom first.
- 5. Uncommon Goods offers a Fishing Pole Campfire Roaster that allows you to grill hot dogs, roast marshmallows or your other favorite campfire foods. Perhaps you could even roast a trout.
- 6. Haiboxing offers a Radio Controlled Boat all set up for fishing. Perfect for those who just have no casting skills. With this boat, you can get that lure right to where the big ones hide, just hope they aren't stronger than the boat.

If none of these suggestions tickle your fancy, there is always the option of scheduling a pre-paid fishing charter with one of our great contributors or advertisers. It's far cheaper than a new boat, but it nearly insures a fun family day on the water, with a great fresh fish dinner to follow.

If your significant other knows how to run a boat, but they just don't have one, you could buy a Boat Rental Gift Certificate from me and Flip the Bird here at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs. Call me at 727.243.1493 to get one sent out to you.

Merle



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ON THE COVER: Carol Fullerton, Plant City local & friend of OOM Writer, Misty Wells, caught this beautiful Red Grouper while fishing with Captain Tommy LaRonge of UnReel Fishing Adventures. Visit www.ucatchfish.com for more information.

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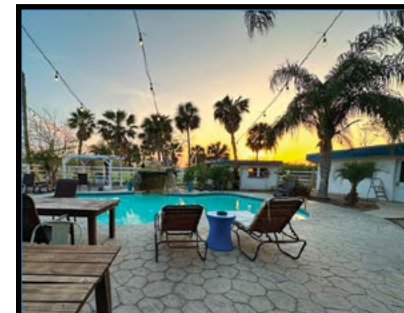


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FLORIDA HAS "FISHING SEASONS"

by Misty Wells

December is a great time of year to go fishing in Florida and one of the best places to fish is right here in my hometown of Clearwater, Florida. Most visitors and Floridians would say that Florida does not have any seasons, however, they are wrong because it's always "fishing season" and things are always changing.



Normally in December all of us anglers would be out trying to take advantage of our last month of Gag Grouper season, but as we all know, that season got shut down early this year. However, don't worry because there is still plenty of great fishing during December and starting the 1st of January, Red Grouper is back open. Now I know a lot of new anglers have moved here to Florida and Pinellas County, so I want to give a little run down of what is open and "on the hook", this time of year.

The offshore Hogfish bite is really on fire right now. Hogfish, if you have never had it, is one of my favorite fish to eat and they are fun to catch. Back in the day, you would get told that you can't catch a Hogfish on 'hook and line', however nowadays that is simply not true. Hogfish are commonly found over rocky bottoms and coral reefs ranging in depth from 10 to 100 feet. Hogfish prefer rocky and reef bottoms with hard sand with patch reefs. Hogfish usually are spread along the edges of the reefs or rock formations and will school up in small groups. The name "Hogfish" is derived from the species' elongated, hog-like snout that is used to dig around the bottom for food and prey. Hogfish have very strong jaws for their species size, and they have protruding canine teeth that are used for crushing hard shell prey such as mollusks and crabs. Color patterns of a hogfish vary considerably depending on sex, age, habitat and males will often have the brighter color pattern than females and young fish. When targeting this species, I like to utilize a light tackle spinning rod the one I use is the new Penn Spinfisher VII combo it is part of their new and affordable rod and reel series, and it reels them in. Remember hogfish like to hang on the outer edges of the reef or rock bottom and you really have to drop right down on them, they won't go too far out of their way for a meal. The bait that I personally have the best luck on is live shrimp, but they will also go for small crabs, sand fleas and sometimes squid. Your bag limit on these is 5 per person and they must be at least 14 inches from the fork to keep.

Another great species to target during this time of year is Triple-tail, and they are easy to spot right now because

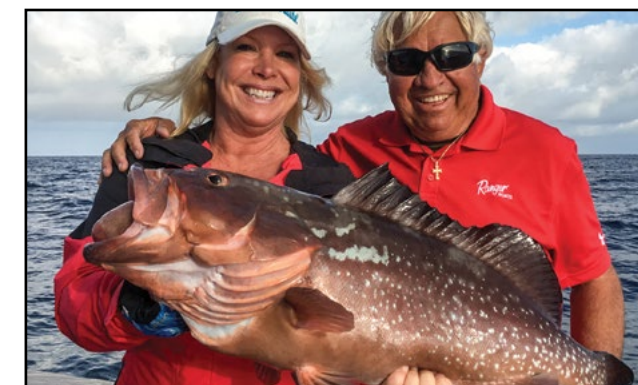
they love to swim around the Stone Crab trap balls all season. Triple-tail is also some of the best eating nearshore fish you can catch; it's a classic white flaky fish fillet. Most of the time you can just slow cruise along a "Stone Crab row" and just keep your eyes peeled for them on top of the water column. Again, you want to use a light tackle spinning rod and reel with 1/0 or 2/0 circle hook, no weight, 15 lbs. leader and some 21-25 count live shrimp or baby crabs for bait. Tripletails are very skittish so try not to cast a shadow and ease up on them, when they get spooked, they swim down but usually don't stay gone for too long. You want to cast your rig past the target then slowly reel your bait into the strike zone. When you hook a Tripletail be sure to reel him away from the ball or structure quickly, **Tip: Be sure to check your drag, and once you get the fish away from the crab ball you can reel it with ease.** Your bag limit on this species is 2 per person per day and they must be a minimum size of 18 inches.

Last species, before I get to Red grouper, is the Sheepshead, aka "convict fish" because of their black & white stripes. You can find sheepshead in some of the same places as tripletail as they generally migrate to inshore water from November through February. They love to stay around piers, pilings, docks, seawalls, and oyster bars. Your tackle set up is pretty much the same as it is for tripletail, however you may want to downsize to a 1/0 hook sheepshead have small mouths and are notorious for stealing your bait. Sheepshead love to eat shrimp, small crabs, mollusks and even barnacles, one reason they hang around the pilings is to eat the barnacles off them. One of the most unique things about sheepshead is the fact that they have teeth very similar to humans, it seems like they found someone's dentures and put them in to swim around with. If you are fishing on a pier or piling drop your bait right straight down the side of the piling or if you are casting cast right onto the piling and let it drop down beside it. Your bag limit on these species is 15 per day and they must be at least 12 inches, however, just keep what you need and don't overfish any species.

Now it's time to talk some Grouper! We are all excited that Red Grouper will be open January 1st, 2024 and Pinellas County is the "Grouper Capital of the World". We bring in more Grouper from offshore in the Gulf of Mexico than any other location that we know of. Red Grouper are not only fun to catch but they are great to eat, they offer a nice flaky white fillet and a notable lack of bones. Red Grouper is considered one of the best tasting groupers to eat and it is very forgiving when cooked as it remains moist, firm and has large flakes. Approximately 70% of the grouper harvested in U.S. water is red grouper and like I said the best place to fish for them is right here in my hometown of Clearwater, Florida. Red Grouper don't grow all that fast, on average they are anywhere from 5 to 20 lbs. however, they have been caught weighing up to fifty pounds. Red Grouper are not a migratory fish, so they are going to be caught in some of the same places you are catching your Hogfish on rocky bottom and ledges. Those monster Red Grouper you are seeing on the cover of this magazine were caught in about 80 to 100 feet of water right off the coast of Pinellas County.

Your Red Grouper tackle set up is going to be the same set up I would be using for Gag Grouper or American Red Snapper when they are in season. I like to start with my favorite setup, my Penn Reel paired with my Crowder Rod and because we usually are fishing deep, I use 60 to 80# test for line and leader, 6 to 8 ounce lead depending on the current and 6/0 circle hooks. Now if the fish are pretty big, I will switch over to my stiffer rod with my 6/0 Penn Reel to make sure I get them off the bottom and to the boat, using the same terminal tackle set up as my 4/0 and I don't like to use braid when bottom fishing at all. If you have read any of my articles you know that I am going to start fishing with cut Sardines to stink up the water and get the fish bite going, then once they are biting steady, I switch to "live

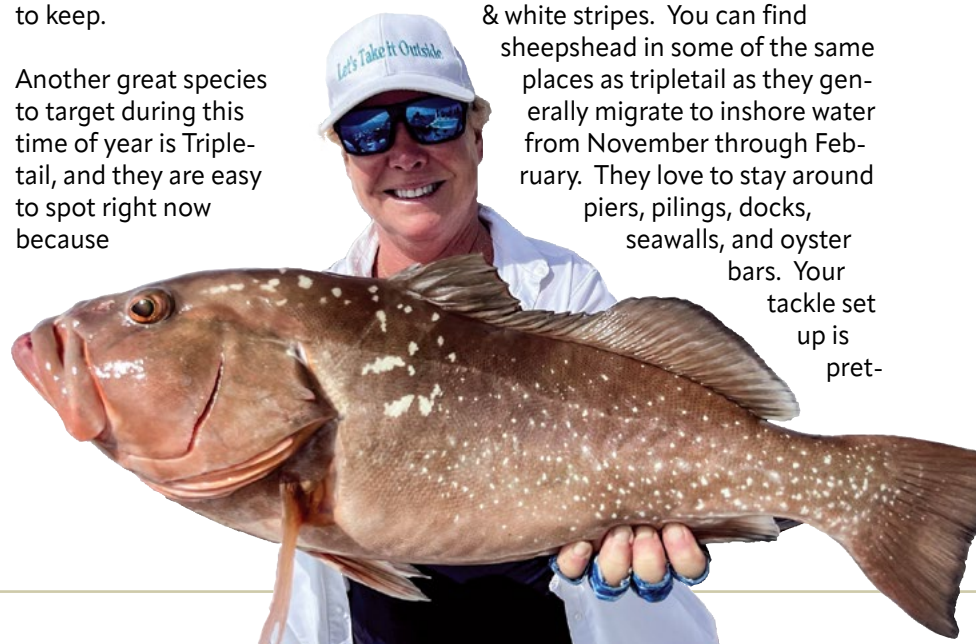
pinfish." Now Red Grouper will eat almost anything once the bite is hot, I have caught plenty of them with squid, live bait and even Publix fried chicken skin they love it. Don't be afraid to put a big pinfish on your hook, but you better be ready because the big Grouper will "hurt your feelings" if you don't reel your hands off right away. **TIP: Don't get broken-off while fishing for Grouper. It will usually shut down the bite.**



Your bag limit on Red Grouper is 2 per person per day in season, and they must be at least 20 inches long to keep. Remember there is a 4 -Grouper per day bag limit aggregate so if you get lucky and catch some keeper Scamp Grouper or Graysby Grouper you're lined up for a pretty great day.

If you want to catch some 'big ole' Red Grouper starting on January 1st when they open, you need to come to Pinellas County and reach out to Capt. Tommy LaRonge with UnReel Fishing Adventures located right in Clearwater, Florida. Do you want to catch big grouper just like the ones you see in this article and on the cover? Capt. Tommy will put you on them just like he did for us. Captain Tommy's motto is "get there faster & fish more! And with a 34' SeaVee with triple 300's on the back...you get there fast. **Tip: When you are done fishing for the day and ready to finally enjoy your Grouper check out some of our local restaurants that offer "hook n' cook" right here on Clearwater Beach and beyond.** Pinellas County is full of exciting, fun and enjoyable ways to "take it outside" so if you are looking for ideas in the outdoors beyond fishing, go to www.visitstpeteclearwater.com Ready to book your Grouper trip go to www.ucatchfish.com and plan the bucket list trip of a lifetime. 🍷

Misty Wells, Producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 374 million on Discovery Channel, Bally Sun Sports, Waypoint TV, World Fishing Network, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV.



FALLING INTO WINTER FISHING

by Captain George Hastick

December fishing is a month that is greatly affected by how much the climate and water temperatures change. If we have a mild December where the water temperatures stay in the mid to high 60s you can expect the fish to be very active between fronts in the shallow waters as they warm from the sun. This holds very true for the snook especially.

The Snook will position themselves near deeper water adjacent to a flat so that they can go there during the night to stay warm and survive. When the shallow water starts to warm up faster due to the dark grass and being shallow the snook will migrate there during the day to feed. They will also start going to the rivers for the warmth and will stack up at the mouths of rivers and work their way further up the river as the days get colder.

If we have a quicker colder season this will happen sooner rather than later, and the power plant outflows will become a haven for snook and many other spe-

cies of fish. Snook Become lethargic below 60°, start to get into trouble around 55° and lose their equilibrium and start to die around 47°. These temperatures are approximate depending on the speed in which the temperature drops. If we have consecutive harsh cold fronts without warmer days in between and we get a rapid temperature drop, the snook can not acclimate or move to warmer water then they get into trouble. So, watch your water temps and that will dictate where to find the snook.

If we are having a bad winter for Snook, it is better to leave them alone and target fish that acclimate better to the cold like Redfish, Trout, Sheepshead and Flounder. Redfish and Trout can be found on many of the same terrains. Look for them to be on shallow grass flats with plenty of



sand holes and/or oyster beds, that has warmed up from the sun or look to the canals and docks with dark bottom.

Another area that warms up that fish will gravitate to is the metal corrugated sea walls that warm up from the sun. Fish the west sides of the canals first since the sun will be on them first in the morning heating the water sooner. Live shrimp under a "Four Horseman Popping Cork" or a Saltwater Assassin 1/4 ounce jighead with a Lil' P & V in the brown or green grass minnow color will both work great for covering area to find fish. Drift or wade the area while fan casting to find the fish. Look for signs on the water like birds or mullet; both of which will point you in the right direction for a food source for Redfish and Trout.



Depending on the temperatures you will start to see more and more sheepshead and larger ones as it cools even more. Flounder will also start to show up in better quantities. Shrimp and fiddler crabs will work for both but I like the shrimp for the flounder better and I have caught plenty of Sheepshead on shrimp but they will never pass up a fiddler crab (or mud crab). Look for sheepshead around the docks and on the flats but the quantity of larger ones will be on the bridge pilings, reefs and rock piles out in the bay.



Flounder can be found in a variety of places, but you must have a sandy bottom area. This can be inshore on the grass flats with nice sand hole, but it can also be out in the bay or offshore around rock

piles and reefs. The sand around the rocks or dumbed rubble of the reefs will hold flounder once they move in. Inshore use a jighead with a live shrimp or a Lil P & V to slow reel along the sandy bottom areas. Offshore or in deeper water use a larger jig head or weight just enough to keep you on the bottom. When

you think you have a snag slowly lift your rod tip if it moves or even slight pulls back set the hook, you've got a Flounder! 🎣

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Pete has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 years & guiding over 20 years. From novice to professional; Captain George will make you feel as if you have been fishing buddies for years. Contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com or email CaptGeorge@TampaBay.rr.com.

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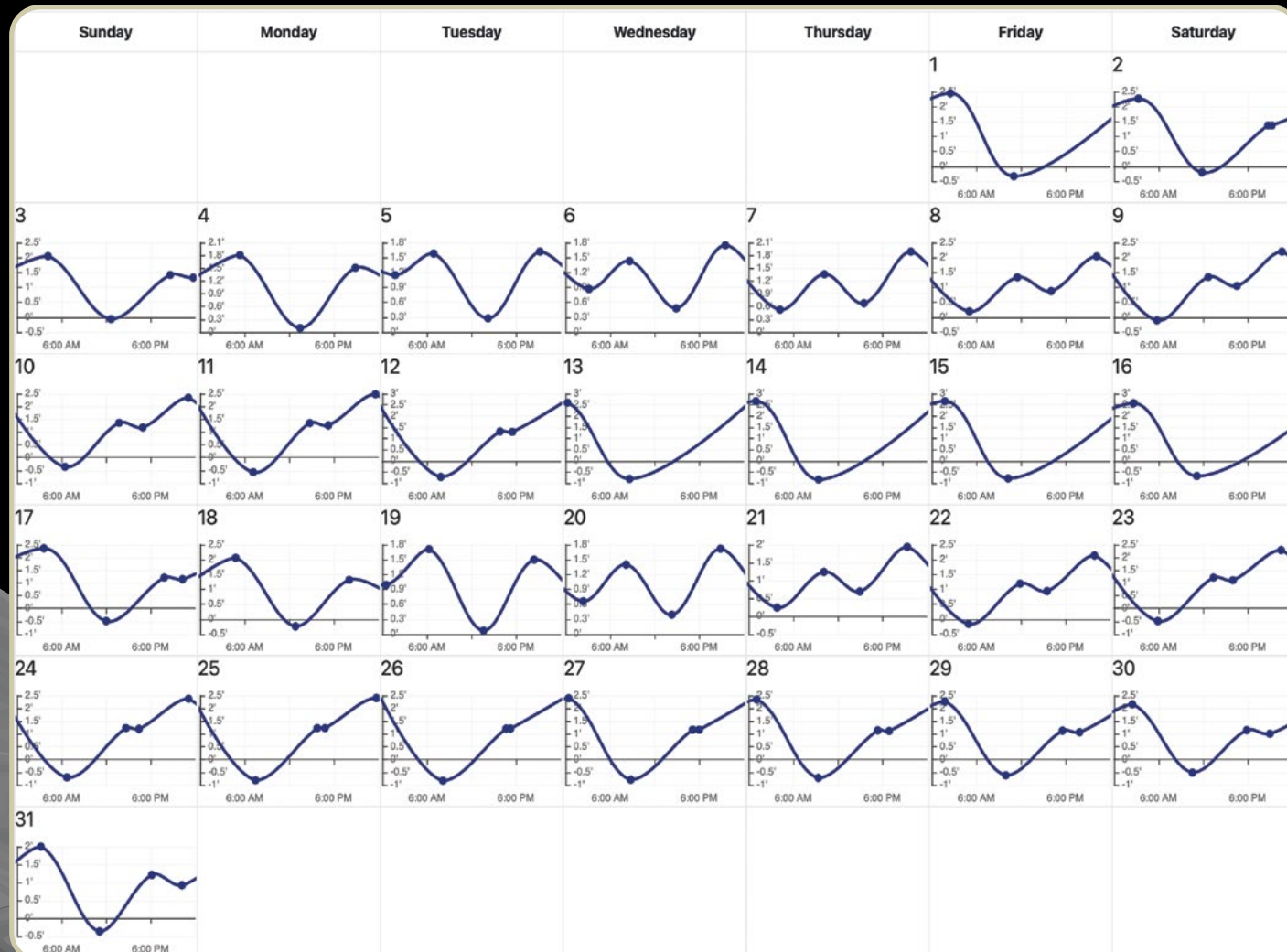
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek

Conversions for St. Marks River Area

High	Low	
+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-1:59	-2:04	Naples
-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River

Conversions for Tampa Bay Area

High	Low	
+0:49	+0:58	Gandy Bridge
+1:38	+1:55	Courtney Campbell Cswy.
+1:38	+1:55	Safety Harbor
+0:20	+0:22	Ballast Point
+0:07	+0:26	Hillsborough Bay
+0:21	+0:29	McKay Bay Entrance
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
-2:27	-2:24	Egmont Key
-2:53	-2:46	Anna Maria, Bradenton Bch
-2:10	-2:19	Anna Maria, City Pier
-1:24	-0:55	Bradenton, Manatee River
-0:30	+0:14	Redfish Pt., Manatee River
-2:22	-1:58	Mullet Key Channel, Skyway
+0:08	+0:17	Shell Point
-0:22	-0:29	Point Pinellas
-1:34	-1:30	Pass-a-Grille Beach
-1:32	-1:05	Gulfport
-1:18	-0:44	St. Pete Beach Causeway
-2:14	-2:04	John's Pass
-1:40	-1:18	Madeira Beach Causeway
-2:00	-1:25	Cortez, Sarasota Bay
-1:38	-0:58	Sarasota Bay
-2:02	-1:38	Venice Inlet
-0:57	-0:40	Englewood, Lemon Bay
-1:27	-0:59	Placida, Gasparilla Sound
+1:38	+1:56	El Jobean, Myakka River
+1:52	+2:30	Shell Point, Peace River
+1:06	+1:27	Punta Gorda, Charlotte Hbr.
-1:12	-1:56	Boca Grande, Charlotte Hbr.
-0:19	+0:26	Pineland, Pine Island
+0:43	+1:28	Matlacha Pass
-0:55	-1:14	Redfish Pass, Captiva Is.
-0:46	-0:20	Captiva, Pine Island Sound
-2:20	-2:28	Captiva, Gulf Side
-0:25	+0:16	Galt Isle, Pine Island Sound
-0:30	-0:44	St. James City, Pine Island
+2:08	+2:44	Fort Myers
+1:15	+2:02	Cape Coral Bridge
+1:08	+1:40	Iona Shores
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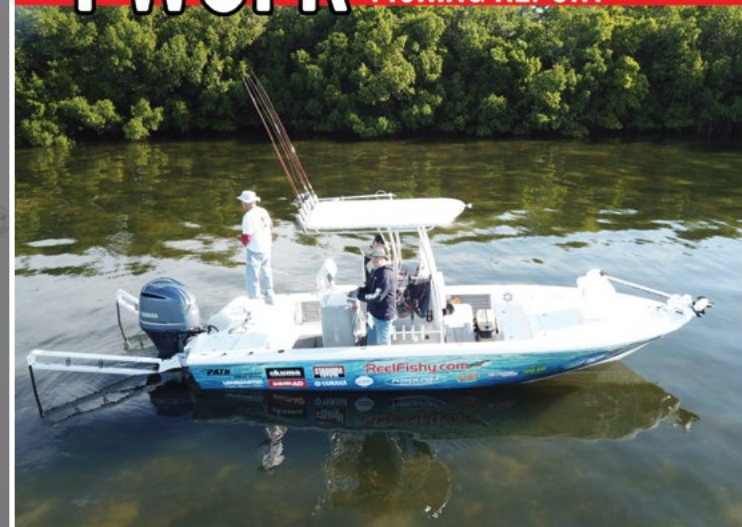
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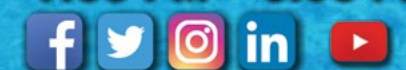
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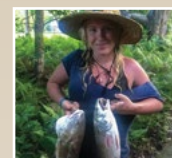
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"FISHMAS" GIFT LIST

MY FAMILIES "TOP-5 FISHMAS GIFTS"

Sitting around the Thanksgiving table this year I surveyed my family and asked them what is the #1 fishing gift they want for Christmas and here is what they came up with...



1: Hudson Wells: Tackle Box or Bag with plenty of fishing tackle and lures

I am going to start with my daughter Hudson, she recently just finished her tour in the US Navy and is starting to have a lot more time for fishing. I am happy she is fishing more, but the problem is she is fishing with my rods and reels and my tackle box.



2: Cousin Donnie: Fly Fishing Rod & Reel with some tackle

Cousin Donnie from Georgia is a great bass angler and he holds his own in saltwater as well, so he is a little bit harder to buy for like a lot of anglers. Donnie announced this Thanksgiving he is ready up his fishing game and start fly fishing.



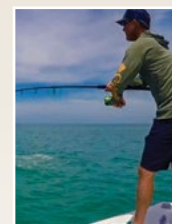
3: Cousin Nate: Lures, Lures & more Lures!

I am excited to introduce you all to my cousin Nate, he just married into our crazy family, and he fits right in. Nate served our country in the Marines and is now a proud husband and father of 4 amazing kids and a new puppy. Nate reminded me you can't have too many lures, every time you are fishing you lose a few or more and they need to be replaced. "For every lure you lose, you have to buy two more".



4: Brennan Wells: 24 Skeeter flats boat with a 300 Mercury & Power Poles

My son Brennan, he has some high hopes this Fishmas and usually has something expensive on his wish list, I did remind him it is a wish list. True to form this year he has added to his wish-list a boat, but not just any boat one of the most expensive flats boats out there.



5: Captain Tommy: An unlimited supply of clean, unstained fishing shirts

Captain Tommy, my husband, is obsessed with anything fishing or hunting and like all fishing guides and most anglers..."we can never have too much". Captain Tommy takes hundreds of trips each year, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Caribbean and one thing that he needs more of all the time is fishing attire. Hey, I understand, when you are catching and cleaning hundreds of pounds of fish every trip, your shirt is not going to make it.

As you can see from this short list, there are all kinds of ideas for Fishmas, some are low-cost items all the way up to some real high dollar. Keep in mind that no matter what you buy for your angler they most likely "don't have too many, needed a new one and will love anything fishing for Fishmas". Make sure to check out your local shops like FISHT in St. Pete "your one-stop fishing shop" and across the bridge in Tampa at T.A. Mahoney's, "if they ain't got it quit looking".

Happy Holidays, Misty

Growing up in Dunedin, Florida, I was lucky to have great fishing just minutes from my front door. St. Joseph Sound is the area that runs from Clearwater in the south to Fred Howard park in the north. This area is known for lush grass flats and pristine white beaches, but St. Josephs Sound is also littered with spoil islands throughout its entire length.



These small man-made spoil islands are made of rock and sand that was dumped when they dredged the channel. The islands are now covered with trees, bushes, and birds, but these islands also offer some great fishing. Fishing the spoil islands is fairly easy. Everybody has easy access to them with just about any type of floating vessel. Depending upon the season, these islands hold lots of trout, redfish, snook, sheepshead, flounder, and other species.

During the colder months, these sandy, rocky islands heat up and can generate a hot bite. Due to the fact that these islands are mostly made of shell, rock, mud, and sand, they heat up fairly quickly after the sun rises. This warmth draws the fish in. These shelly, rocky islands also hold baitfish and lots of crustaceans in all their cracks and crevasses. During colder months, these spoil islands and the grass flats in-between the islands are well known as the home of many Spotted Seatrout locally know as the Speckled Trout.

When targeting trout, both live bait and artificial lures work well. When using shrimp, I like to fish either free line or lightly weighted with a small split shot. I use a 1/0 circle hook on a 20 lb. fluorocarbon leader a few feet long. If I am going to use artificial lures, I like to use jigs. A soft plastic shad tail or jerk bait will get the job done. Combine either of these soft plastic baits with a lead jig head in the 1/8-1/4 oz. size. Fly anglers will want to use a sinking line with closer minnow.

There are two basic methods used when trout fishing in the Sound; anchoring or drifting. When fishing the islands, anchoring is the most common approach, and when working the flats, drifting is preferred. When drifting, a drift sock can help slow down your drift so that you can fish more effectively.

If you plan to keep some trout for the dinner table, make sure you know the regulations first. Trout season here in the southwest part of the region is open all year and the bag limit is 4 per person. The size limit is 15-20", with one trout of the limit over 20". I personally don't like keeping any trout over 20" as these are the breeding stock. If you aren't going to keep any trout for the dinner table, make sure you have pliers and a de-hooker on board. Wet your hands before touching any fish that you plan on releasing. 🐟

If you're looking to get out & do some trout fishing in St. Joseph Sound, call me, Capt. Jared Simonetti. I can be reached at 727-831-0111. I am a Tampa Bay Native and I have been fishing St. Joseph Sound my entire life. I am a fully U.S.C.G. licensed and insured charter captain offering charters and trips throughout the Tampa Bay area with Light tackle, fly, bait, & artificial lures. Novice to Expert! Night and Day 365. My website is www.CaptJared.com. Photos courtesy of Nick Pecori.

TALES FROM "THE OLD GUY"

by Dave Mallory

Last month we had a fun encounter with a playful, but aggressive dolphin. This month, we will journey back in time to 1965 to Palm Beach, Florida for Atlantic Sailfish fishing.

When I was in the third grade in 1951, before my voice changed, I sang soprano in my Vermont church choir. In back of me were a bunch of "old" high school guys singing bass. I got to know some of them: Ray, Connie, Tom and Fred. Tom became my friend until he went to college and two years in the Army artillery.

When Tom returned to Vermont, he joined the auxiliary police with my father and we reestablished our friendship. Tom eventually left his family business and moved to Florida where he became a chauffeur for King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. He went on to become a private secretary to Nina Dodge, the heiress to the Maxwell House Coffee fortune. She had three boys and two girls. Tom called and asked me to come down during my time off from school (all expenses paid) to help him with the three boys. One of my "chores" was to take boys fishing. And now, my friends, the point of this tale.

My winter vacation started with driving a car to Palm Beach for Henry, a friend of my grandfather. He gave me \$100 for gas, motel and food. My Mom made sandwiches and I drove right through so the only stops I made were for bathroom and gas, so most of the money went into my pocket. Gas prices were about \$.30/gal (compared to about \$3.28 today). The three boys I had to entertain were Hank, age 11, Tony, age 9 and Jeff, age 7. I told them we could go fishing for sailfish if they wanted. That sounded great to them.

Tom told me there were some charter fishing boats at Riviera Beach. I found one called LAZY DAY fishing charters. We drove down and met Captain Phil. I told him there were four of us and he agreed to take us out on a four hour trip in two days. So, we booked him! The boat was a new 38 foot Bertram. It looked beautiful to us.

The day arrived and we were all ready to go. After a quick breakfast, we headed to the pier. The Captain wanted us there at 6:30 AM. We arrived on time, parked the car and jumped on the boat. The two engines sounded beautiful. We had drawn cards for the order of who got the bites. It took about 20 minutes to get to the spot we wanted to try. The mate put out two down-riggers with a ballyhoo on each one. I had never seen a down-rigger before. They are just a heavy pole mounted to the gunnel with a metal cable and a ten pound lead ball on the end. A clip was attached to the cable with the line and the bait hooked to the clip. They dropped them down 12 and 15 feet and we were fishing! Tony had drawn the first bite. We had him sit in the fighting chair. We put out two out-riggers next. They are 15 foot metal poles with a clip on the heavy line with the fishing line and the ballyhoo. They let the out-riggers out, which got the lines away from the boat.

While we were letting the lines out, we got a bite! The mate grabbed the pole, hooked the fish and handed it to Tony. After a fun fight, with some help from the mate, Tony caught an 11 pound dolphin. Now it was my turn. I sat in the fighting chair

and waited. All of a sudden, a big sailfish came flying out of the water and threw my hook!! I was really down, but just a few minutes later, we had another bite. This one also jumped and the hook stayed on. We fought for about 20 minutes while he jumped about 8 times before we got him to the boat and wow, what a beautiful fish.



Hank was next and caught a nice Bonita, a member of the tuna family. Hank got out of the chair and as soon as little Jeff sat down, we had another bite. Jeff needed some help, but he and the mate brought in a 13 pound Bonita. We all had a fish, but we still had some time left. Hank went back to the chair and we did have another bite, but no hook-up.

It was time to head back. We all caught a fish but we threw them all back except the sailfish. It weighed 59 pounds and was a little over six feet long. The boy's mother had it mounted and gave it to me. After a fun week, I was put on a train and sent back to Vermont for school.

Sadly, all three boys have passed away, but I do have good memories of times spent together and great fish tales! 🍷

Dave Mallory can be reached by email at: David_Mallory@msn.com

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CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE MANATEE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Discover How Conservation Efforts in the Crystal River Area Impact Fish, Wildlife and More!
by Josh Johnson

As the Manatee Capital of the World, Crystal River takes great pride in being at the forefront of manatee and local ecosystem conservation. These continued efforts help ensure these gentle giants have adequate food sources and a safe refuge yearly from November to early April.

Healthy ecosystems in the Crystal River area greatly benefit us all. Here are two ways you can help take part.



Practice Responsible Boating

A recent study by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission shows that only 4% of observed adult manatees show no sign of watercraft-related scars. As you can tell by this staggering statistic, boats pose one of the single largest dangers to manatees' health and safety.



When posted regulations and signage are not followed, this can physically harm both manatees and their feeding grounds. For these reasons, it's essential to follow all posted signs and listed regulations and ensure responsible boating is practiced at all times.

Other responsible boating practices include wearing polarized sunglasses during boat operations and observing all manatee speed zones and caution areas.

So whether you're enjoying a sunny day on the water or hunting for your next catch before the sun rises, please remember to practice your manatee manners!

Catch and Release

Unsustainable fishing practices threaten local ecosystems and their resiliency in a few ways. Primarily this happens through overfishing and, in turn, habitat de-

struction. Habitat destruction not only impacts the quality of fishing but also directly impacts manatees and their ability to thrive here.

Groups in the Crystal River area, like Save Crystal River, have spent time and resources breathing new life into the local ecosystem by planting fresh eelgrass and combating harmful invasive species. And because of this, habitats in the area continue to grow and thrive! Now it's up to all of us to keep them that way.

Besides curbing potential habitat destruction, catch-and-release fishing also improves native fish populations. How? Because it ensures that more fish remain and reproduce in the ecosystem. This practice allows anglers to enjoy the bounty of fish in the Crystal River area while increasing their chances of successfully catching fish.

Practicing catch and release of native fish also ensures that the opportunity to enjoy this national pastime and recreational opportunity will be around for many years!

Conservation in the Crystal River Area

As you can see, there are many ways for you to engage in conservation efforts. If you're interested in discovering more about the continued progress being made by conservationists and eco-tourists alike, we have created a Conservation Hub filled with more information. Topics include how to be involved, from the comfort of your home to a deep dive into the invasive aquatic species that threaten the local ecosystem. There's a wealth of knowledge ready for you! ■

Learn more at DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com/Manatee-Conservation.



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Captain Sergio Atanes

Big sheepshead are moving in after the first few cold fronts so look for them around rock jetties and deep-water rock piles.

Live Shrimp or Saltwater Assassin P & V Brown Glass Minnow with some Pro-Cure Shrimp Scent works great.

Gator trout start making their move into the pot-holes around the grass flats and on the edges of channels water temperature plays a big role in both species.

ABOUT THE CAPTAINS

Captain Sergio and Captain George Hastick fish the Florida waters, specializing in and around the West Coast of Florida and Tampa Bay. Their show, Fishing Adventures Florida, is about two captains sharing their knowledge and experience of the local waters. Encouraging others to share in their love of what the outdoors has to offer. Their goal is to educate, entertain and share the experience of fishing opportunities the state has to offer.



Captain George Hastick

If the water temperature drops fast this will usually attract cobia to the power plants to the warm water outflows and the flats adjacent to it, instead of migrating and following

the warmer water south. If we get a normal steady drop in water temperature look for your snook to migrate to the back waters, rivers, deep canals, and docks where the water temperature will be a little warmer. Trout will be a good bet on the flats and look for sheepshead to start moving into the piers, bridges, docks, reefs and rockpiles.

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The caster is made from High-Tech Nylon material and weighs in at around 1.5lbs. The caster is robust, durable and octagonal in shape with a high pistol grip handle for stability. The octagonal pyramid at the centre disperses the weight into 8 individual pockets around the perimeter for even weight distribution, while the sides of the octagonal caster slope outwards for easy dispersal of the net when thrown.



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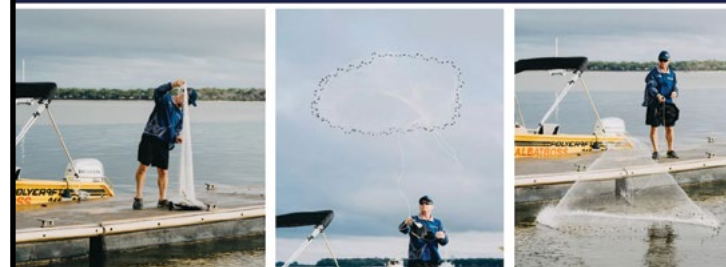
- Load your net into the caster on a flat surface making sure the net weights are dispersed evenly around the base.
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St. Petersburg, Florida - Boat Bitch Apparel, a leading provider of high-quality, female-focused styles for boating enthusiasts and outdoor adventurers, is excited to introduce its Women's Outdoor Apparel. Tara and Jaclyn, the brand's founders, started the clothing line with the goal of providing comfortable and stylish clothing and accessories that enhance the boat day experience. The chic, stylish clothing, hats, and accessories that pair well with sunshine are available online and at a growing number of retailers.

"We are thrilled to introduce Boat Bitch Apparel to women who are passionate about boating and the outdoors," stated Tara, co-founder of Boat Bitch Apparel. "Our aim is to create a brand that caters to women in the boating community, offering comfortable and confidence-boosting attire for a seamless and enjoyable boat life, both on and off the water. We believe in embracing simplicity, having fun, and living your best boat life."



Boat Bitch Apparel offers a range of high-quality, stylish pieces perfect for a day on the water. Each item combines functionality and aesthetics, from tops, bottoms, and jackets to accessories. Crafted with lightweight, breathable fabrics, their exclusive collection ensures all-day comfort, and most items feature UPF 50+ sun protection.

Boat Bitch Apparel is proud of its cheeky and playful name, which perfectly reflects the founders' attitude toward life. With a deep passion for boating and a keen eye for fashion, Tara and Jaclyn recognized a gap in the market for female-focused outdoor and boating apparel. Determined to fill this void, they set out to create a brand that caters to the needs and desires of women who embrace the outdoor lifestyle.

The team at Boat Bitch Apparel welcomes women to explore their online store and discover fashionable, female-focused boating attire.

About Boat Bitch Apparel: Boat Bitch Apparel is a rising brand known for its high-quality, sun-protective fabrics and feminine silhouettes in women's outdoor apparel. Designed by women for women, the brand embraces the boating lifestyle with stylish and functional clothing. Committed to enhancing the outdoor experience, Boat Bitch Apparel makes every boat day better.

To learn more about Boat Bitch Apparel, please contact us.

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MY CHRISTMAS WISH

by Captain Sergio Atanes

I remember the year 1952 when my Uncle Manuel, age 19 arrived from Cuba to live with us until he could go out on his own. This is when my life turned around at the age of 5. He lived with us for about a year until Uncle Sam sent him an invention to join the Army (the draft), but during that short period he taught me how to fish. Coming from a poor family, both of my parents worked to make ends meet and pay the bills. There was just enough left over each week for me to go the Ritz Theatre on Saturday and not much more, so fishing became my big outlet.



My uncle took me under his wing and started to teach me the basics of fishing he had learned in Cuba, and I caught on quick. Buying a fishing rod and reel with

tackle was not in the budget. We took a yoyo (Cuban hand reel) and wrapped kite string around it. Then we used a D size battery as a lead weight and punched a hole through the top of the battery with an ice pick, and tied it to the string with a hook at the end. It wasn't much, but to a 5 year old it was the best outfit around and I caught fish. In fact, I remember my first fish was a puffer from the shore of the Courtney Campbell Causeway.

That December a friend of ours took us to Clearwater to visit Howard the Trader, a closeout marine store. I still remember we paid nine (9) cents for a box of 100 Eagle Claw hooks. There were hundreds of boxes scattered on a big table and we bought at least 4 boxes of different sizes.

Christmas was coming and I could hardly wait, and all I could think about was getting a real fishing rod and reel. I knew deep inside this could not happen, but it didn't stop me from wishing. I prayed to God please bless my family for Christmas and make sure Santa

read my letter I had sent him.



Well, Christmas Day arrived and low and behold, I got a fishing rod! And, not just any rod, it was hand-made for me

from my Uncle Manuel. He made it from a broom stick that he taped one end, sanded it and put guides from an old rod someone had thrown away. To me it was the most beautiful rod I had ever seen. He used a multi colored thread on the guides, and the butt was wrapped in nylon twine and covered with clear varnish with clamps for a reel seat. The reel was a used Ocean City my uncle traded for some mechanical work on a neighbor's car. One last

thing my parents had bought me was the fishing line, a box of hooks, some real lead sinkers and my own small tackle box. I did not know it, but my parents had given some money to my uncle when we visited "Howard the Trader" earlier in the month to purchase these items.

This might not sound terrific, but for a 5-year-old boy from Ybor City it was my best Christmas gift ever.

DECEMBER FISHING REPORT

Fishing gets a little tricky in December. It all depends on the weather; if cold and water temperatures dip into mid 60s or lower, the Sheepshead action goes crazy with the "big mamas" moving in from the gulf into the deepwater rocks and jetties of Tampa Bay. A live, medium-sized Shrimp is your best bait.

The Speckled Trout action turns on hot and heavy on the deepwater flats and potholes around the mangrove edges artificial baits are your best bait for them the use of Pro-Cure Shrimp Scent just a drop or two will increase your catch. Using my favorite method, I call the "Deadly Due", the Four Horsemen float leader



should be just long enough to keep the artificial just above the grass. My favorite artificials to use are the Saltwater Assassin Little P & V Green, Brown Glass Minnow color and on bright days, the OP.NT. Glow/Lime tail. ☑

Capt. Sergio Atanes, Host

of Fishing Adventures Florida TV show airing on YouTube, Waypoint TV, Carbon TV, Outdoor Action, and Angling TV. Owner of Reelfishy.com Charter business covering the west coast of Florida with over 135 captains on staff. For information, contact Capt. Sergio at (813) 973-7132 or atanes@msn.com.

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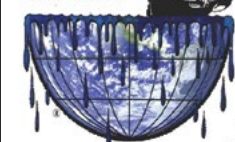
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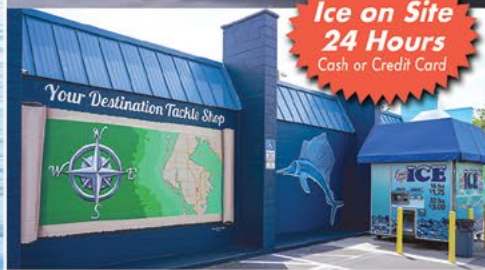
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