

MORICHES BAY SUNSET FLATTIES

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The weather has been good and the fishing even better. You're itching to get out there but the darn job is in the way. You swore to yourself that this year, you would save your sick days for the times that fishing fever struck. Unfortunately, flu season struck instead depleting your hours banked for sick time to a point which makes you even sicker. The weekend is still four days away but what to do. Whether this statement sounds familiar or far fetched, with a little planning, anglers can have a ball catching a few flounder without the hassle of boat traffic as they watch the sunset. Combine these facts, and there's no place I'd rather spend an evening of flounder fishing than Moriches Bay.

Located within an hour's drive for most Nassau and western Suffolk County residents, Moriches Bay offers some fine flounder action from late spring right into the close of the season on June 30. During the late season, flounder fishing in Moriches is tide influenced as fishing the prime tides often results in consistent action. This is good news to the angler who is looking to correspond a PM tide in exchange for a couple of solid hours to put away a decent score and still be back home for a good nights rest.

Made up primarily of shallow water, Moriches Bay is rather small compared to its cousin The Great South Bay. Fed by brackish water to the west at the Forge River and many small creeks that lay along the main land, this bay is loaded with a variety of bait fish that forage this area. One of the most important bait fish that dominate this bay is the grass shrimp which will consistently make up the flounder's diet. During the early spring when flounder are the only game in town, the flounder will usually gorge on the shrimp as an outgoing tide will sweep the shrimp off the marshes and into the hungry mouths of awaiting flounder. As the season progresses and water temperatures rise, the flounder will swim off the shallow waters and into slightly deeper waters toward the inlet. Anglers use this to their advantage as the amount of deep cool water is limited in Moriches Bay and the flounder that were spread along the flats during the early spring will concentrate along the deeper channels and drains just east and west of the inlet. This in turn will make pickings a lot easier by decreasing the amount of time moving and re-anchoring that sometimes is vital to scrape up a decent catch. Moriches flounder season can last well into July even August, but with the season closure on June 30, anglers will have to wait until September 15 to seek them once again.

Even with the scarcity of the flounder fishery, many fishermen find that during the top of the tide, putting together a decent catch isn't as hard as it seems. What helps increase your chances are how closely knit this area is. Most fishing takes place anywhere from Buoy 13 to Buoy 26 and just south of the buoys. At high tide, this entire area is filled with cool ocean waters that not only cool the water but in normal weather conditions, the water is crystal clear. Generally at this time of season, the last two hours of the incoming to the first two hours of the outgoing

tide will be peak time to catch flounder in Moriches as this is when they become most aggressive. Being at the right spot at the right time is the key here. You'll want to fish water depths no less than eight feet deep to about fifteen feet closer up by the inlet. South of Buoy 15 and 17 are most heavily fished, but you can find rather consistent fishing south of the Coast Guard Station by Buoy 26 to 27. The bottom of this area consists of mussel beds which will not only hold flounder but other species as well such as weakfish, stripers, sea bass and blowfish to name a few.

Bait and chumming is also a key factor to success. Blood or sand worms or both are a must along with natural clam and red dyed clam. Mussels can be included in your arsenal; however, as the water warms they seem to bleach out quicker and may not be as effective as the worm and clams. When fishing with worms, try fishing them with a clam combo on the same hook. Most times this has proven very effective. Also try mussel/worm combo. It is best to try different combos until you find the right chemistry that's catching. Two chum pots, either quart size or ½ gallon size should be used. One lowered in front of the boat and the other in the stern. This will cover more ground attracting more fish to the boat. Crushed fresh mussels or frozen clam blocks both work well. I like to make my own chum by purchasing a tin of clam bellies, thaw it out, and then blend it in a blender until it becomes liquid. Then I'll toss in several cans of corn into the mixture, stir it well, then distribute the mixture into cut open ½ gallon milk containers and then freeze them. When called upon, I'll take about six frozen blocks along with me which is sufficient during an late afternoon encounter. As this mixture thaws, it leaves behind nothing but scent. It also eliminates cleaning off the globs of clam belly that always clog the wire mesh.

Light conventional, baitcasting or spinning outfits are recommended here. 5 ½ to 6' rods matched with the appropriate reels along with eight to twelve pound test line will suffice. Rigs can be as plain as a tandem rig to an array of pretty little gizmos that resembles a petite Christmas tree. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a few of these rigs in different colors so you can experiment on what works best. I have always preferred to Snell and tie my own rigs as I have found that different styles of rigs produce differently depending on the condition and circumstances as well as the area I am fishing. Though many anglers choose to fish with standard flounder rigs, it is my opinion through my years of experience that rigs with extremely sharp hooks can be a critical factor towards successful flounder fishing. Since space won't allow the discussion of them all, let's take a look at a rig of my choice that has proved reliable and simple to tie. I will start by snelling several number 4 Eagle Claw short shank baitholder hooks using 15 lb. fluorocarbon leader material approximately twelve inches in length, then apply a dark red tri-bead to it, then proceed to tie several double hook tandem rigs. With its down eye forged offset design and laser sharp finish, the Eagle Claw baitholder hook has superior strength and will easily handle the strain from larger predators such as stripers and bluefish that frequent this time of year. The short shank will help prevent the bait from sagging at the end of the hook which often globs up and can turn the noses of picky flounder. Allowing the bait to stand more natural and a quick penetration due to its laser sharpness, these hooks will help to increase your score. The hooks are available in either black sea guard or a bronzed finish and both are effective. The fluorocarbon will aid in reducing the leaders visibility and the beads seem to draw the attention of curious flounder. Incidentally, there are several shapes and colors of beads that are effective and I suggest that you include them in your arsenal should you decide to tie your own rigs. However; the dark red tri-bead has down right

been a killer at times and will make a difference under the proper conditions. To obtain the material needed to create your rigs, refer to your favorite bait and tackle shop as they will assist in your needs. Sinkers round out the terminal end with as much as five ounces of lead may be needed according to the strength of the current but two or three ounces are the norm.

The best method of using this rig is to keep it moving. Bounce the rig along the bottom with about one foot hops approximately ten times then pausing for a few seconds then allows a slow uplift. More often than not, flounder tend to respond on the uplift. As you feel the excess weight on the rod, set the hook and have some fun. If the wind is not blowing too hard and you're out of chum, drifting the area will produce; however, anchoring and chumming is best here. Like most of Long Island, Moriches doesn't produce flounder at the same caliber it once did, yet with a little patience and effort, you'll be pleasantly rewarded. My advice is not to move around too much. Anchor south of the channels and let the chum find the fish for you. As I mentioned earlier, the flounder are denser in the area this time of year and the swift current will carry the chum. Don't be too concerned whether you are in a good spot or not. Quite often you can fish a spot for nearly an half hour without so much as a tap, then all of the sudden you can have a fast pace flurry to provide all the action you need. This is especially true just before it gets dark. Have patience and they will come.

There are plenty of ramps along Moriches. Some are privately owned and require a launching fee and most of the others are restricted to Brookhaven Town residents with a rather steep fee for nonresidents. However; no one is around after 3 PM to collect or to chase you from any of the town ramps so rest confident that you can enjoy an evening without hassle.

Flounder are fun to catch and make superior table fare. They also need our help. Please be conservation minded by keeping only a few if any. Bragging rights don't go to anglers who fill coolers but rather to those that release any fish unharmed. By doing your part, tomorrow will have a chance. So, if you are feeling a little under the beautiful weather, than clock out a couple hours early and, well, you know the remedy.