Sarasota Fishing Cheat Sheet

Sarasota County — FishSonar.com

Top Species: Snook / Redfish / Tarpon | Best Months: Year-Round | Water: Flats, Passes, Gulf Nearshore

Common Snook

Centropomus undecimalis

Oct – May | Slot 28–33" | C&R Summer



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Mangrove shorelines in Sarasota Bay on falling tides
- Big Pass and New Pass mouths during mullet run
- Siesta Key flats — grass edges and sandy potholes
- Casey Key bridges and dock lights at night
- Venice Inlet channel edges in spring

BEST TIMES

Fall mullet run (Oct–Nov) stacks snook at Big Pass and New Pass. Spring (Apr–May) is excellent before the summer closure. Harvest closed June 1–Aug 31 on Gulf side.

REGULATIONS

Slot: 28"–33" total length. Limit: 1/day. Season closed June 1–Aug 31 (Gulf side). Saltwater license + snook permit required.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Live pilchards or threadfin herring at pass mouths
- DOA Shrimp 3" under a popping cork on flats
- Rapala Skitter Walk topwater at dawn and dusk
- Live pinfish free-lined near dock structure

TACKLE SETUP

Medium-heavy spinning, 20–30lb braid, 30lb fluoro leader. Circle hooks 3/0–5/0 for live bait.

Red Drum (Redfish)

Sciaenops ocellatus

Year-Round | Slot 18–27"



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Shallow grass flats in Little Sarasota Bay
- Oyster bars on low tide — look for tailing fish
- Siesta Key flats and sandy pot holes
- Roberts Bay and Blackburn Bay grass edges
- Casey Key and Osprey flats on incoming tide

BEST TIMES

Year-round in Sarasota waters. Fall and winter offer the most consistent action — reds school on shallow flats 1–2ft deep. Low tide exposes tailing fish on oyster bars.

REGULATIONS

Slot: 18"–27" total length. Limit: 1/day per angler. Saltwater license required.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Gold weedless spoon over grass — classic choice
- DOA Shrimp free-lined or under a popping cork
- Live blue crab on oyster bars and shallow flats
- Cut mullet for bull reds near passes

TACKLE SETUP

Medium spinning, 20lb braid, 20–25lb fluoro leader. 1/0–2/0 weedless hook or 1/4oz jig head.

Spotted Seatrout

Cynoscion nebulosus

Oct – Apr Best | 15" Minimum



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Sarasota Bay grass flats, 2–4ft depth
- Little Sarasota Bay sand-grass transition zones
- Siesta Key flats and nearby channels
- Roberts Bay near seagrass edges
- Venice area flats on incoming tide

BEST TIMES

Late fall through spring is peak. Trout most active when water is 60–72°F. Cold fronts push them deeper — work the channel edges. Best bites at first light on shallow grass flats.

REGULATIONS

Minimum: 15" total length. Limit: 3/day. Enhanced size limits may apply — verify at myfwc.com.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Gulp! Alive Shrimp 3" under popping cork
- MirrOlure 52MR suspended plug over grass
- Live shrimp on 1/8oz jig head, free-lined
- DOA Shrimp paddle tail on grass flat edges

TACKLE SETUP

Light-medium spinning, 10–15lb braid, 20lb fluoro leader. 1/8oz jig head or small circle hook.

Spanish Mackerel

Scomberomorus maculatus

Spring & Fall | 12" Minimum



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Gulf nearshore off Siesta Key and Lido Beach
- Big Pass and New Pass mouths when bait is running
- Venice Inlet and Venice Beach nearshore
- Casey Key Gulf-side beaches in spring
- Anywhere baitfish schools break the surface

BEST TIMES

Spring migration (March–May) and fall return (Oct–Nov). Schools follow baitfish — watch for birds working the water. Morning blitzes are common. Follow the birds.

REGULATIONS

Minimum: 12" fork length. Bag limit: 15/day. Wire or heavy fluoro leader required — Spanish mackerel slice through mono instantly.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Clark spoon (silver or gold) trolled at 6–7 knots
- Gotcha plug cast into breaking schools
- Live sardines or pilchards free-lined
- Small white or silver bucktail jig, fast retrieve

TACKLE SETUP

Light spinning or trolling rod. 15–20lb braid. 20lb single-strand wire leader 12"–18". Fast retrieve is essential.

Tarpon

Megalops atlanticus

Apr – Jul Peak | C&R Only



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Venice Inlet — premier Sarasota tarpon spot
- Big Pass and New Pass on incoming tide
- Sarasota Bay flats — rolling fish April through June
- Casey Key Gulf beach — daisy-chaining schools
- Siesta Key bridges and channels at night

BEST TIMES

April through July is peak season. Tarpon follow mullet and thread herring into passes. June and July produce massive fish rolling on the flats. Night fishing at lit bridges works well.

REGULATIONS

Catch-and-release only in Florida unless you pay for a $50 tarpon tag. No harvest required — protect this fishery. Handle quickly and revive before release.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Live crabs drifted into pass mouths
- Live mullet or pinfish under a float
- Offshore Angler swim shad or large paddle tail
- Tarpon-size MirrOlure or large topwater plug

TACKLE SETUP

Heavy spinning or conventional, 50–80lb braid, 60–80lb fluoro leader 6–8ft. Circle hook 5/0–8/0. Drag preset at 15–20lb.

Tides & Timing — Sarasota

Falling Tide — Best for Snook

Snook and reds stage at mangrove points and pass mouths as bait washes off the flats. Work the last two hours of outgoing tide at Big Pass and New Pass with live pilchards or swimbaits.

Rising Tide — Best for Redfish

Reds move onto Siesta Key and Little Sarasota Bay flats as water rises. Look for tailing fish on shallow flat edges. First 2 hours of incoming is prime — use a weedless gold spoon.

Slack Tide — Trout Time

Spotted seatrout are less tide-dependent and hold on Sarasota Bay grass flat edges during slack. Work subsurface plugs slowly along the sand-grass transition when bites slow elsewhere.

Tarpon & Pass Fishing

Tarpon are most active moving through Big Pass and Venice Inlet on strong incoming tides in May–July. Position upcurrent and let live baits drift naturally into the path of rolling fish.

Top Gear for Sarasota (Amazon)

Clark Spoon

Go-to trolling spoon for Spanish mackerel nearshore

~$5

Buy on Amazon

Gulp! Alive Shrimp 3"

Deadliest seatrout and snook bait on Sarasota flats

~$15

Buy on Amazon

DOA Shrimp 3"

Proven redfish and trout producer on local flats

~$6

Buy on Amazon

Seaguar Blue Label 30lb Fluoro

Clear Sarasota water demands invisible leaders

~$23

Buy on Amazon

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