

# **Take the Bait**

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By

Captain Dan Brooks

For inshore enthusiasts snook season has opened once again and the lack of severe cold fronts should ensure good populations of linesiders here on the west coast. The water temperature is still relatively low so the best snook action will be in the backwater areas like Bishops Harbor and Cockroach Bay. Palm sized grunts and pinfish or a nice lively shrimp are favored live baits. Artificials like a half-ounce DOA shrimp or a soft plastic paddle tail jig rigged weedless will produce as well. Look for snook and redfish to be holding tight to the mangrove roots on a high tide. Work those jigs nice and slow. Snook are rather lethargic in cold water and won't chase bait too fast or too far.

The trout action in lower Tampa Bay has been outstanding. Since the net ban was established several years ago the sea trout populations have rebounded dramatically. Fish over 20 inches are now quite common and on several inshore trips so far this year my clients have boated 60-100 trout on a half-day outing. It's a great time to take the kids fishing. There's plenty of action to keep them occupied. Presently pilchards and greenbacks are not easy to come by so live shrimp is the bait of choice. Use a 2.0 live bait hook and about 30 inches of 25# fluorocarbon leader attached to a 4-inch cigar float. Tail hook the shrimp to allow for better casting. When a fish bites let the float go under then reel the slack out of your line until you feel slight pressure on the rod tip and then lightly set the hook and keep steady light pressure on the fish. The mouths on sea trout can be easily torn so don't horse them to the boat.

If artificial baits are your only choice, a top water chugger or prop baits used early morning, evening or on cloudy days can produce some real visual action on trout. During daylight hours jig fishing with soft plastics can often out produce live baits, depending on who is holding the rod. Loves lure float and jig and tandem rigged 1/8 ounce silver

glitter curly tail jigs are my favorites. A DOA shrimp ranks high on my must have inshore jig list. We've caught everything from trout to tarpon on both of them for years.

Just about everything I use is available at Gulf to Bay Bait and Tackle at 6920 Gulf Blvd, St. Pete Beach, (727) 367-4756. Terry and the guys can help you with all your angling needs including booking inshore or offshore fishing trips. And please remember fishing is not a matter of life and death, "it's much more important than that."