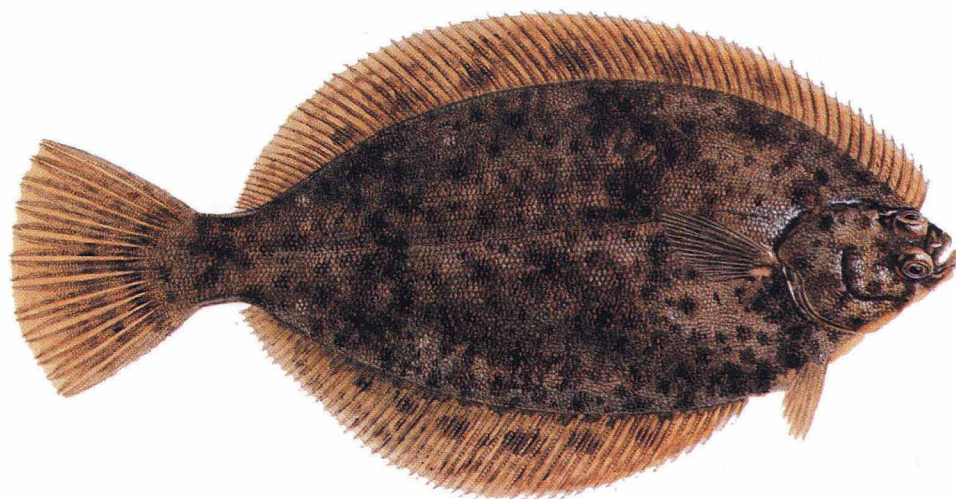


Winter Flounder



Pleuronectes americanus

(Drawing reprinted with permission from National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institute. Illustrated by Charles B. Hudson, 1896)

The Facts

This is another popular flatfish in the recreational fishery, and its abundance makes it an excellent species to jump-start the fishing season (or the career of a beginner). These fish have both eyes on one side of the head and are bottom dwelling; winter flounder is “right-handed”; this means that when you hold the fish with its dorsal fin up and the tail is pointing towards you, the pigmented side will be on the right. Larval fish are symmetrical, resembling any normal fish. However, they undergo a remarkable transformation where the left eye moves to the other side of the body. Although coloration varies depending on the substrate, they are easily distinguished from their cousin by the (almost) straight lateral line and toothless mouth. They change color to match the substrate, and they will often bury themselves when they are on soft substrate, and wait to prey on invertebrates for food. Local names used include “blueback”, “blackback”, and “flounder”; “sea flounder” and “snowshoe” are names used to distinguish larger fish (approximately 5 lb) from the smaller bay fish.



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Migration

This species occurs along the coast from Labrador to Georgia and they are usually associated with shallow bays or estuaries that feature a sandy or silty bottom. They are not generally found below depths of 180 ft and they form small local groups that display limited seasonal migration. There is a distinct movement from deeper water towards shallow water during the fall, with offshore movement in the spring. Both males and females reach sexual maturity by age 3 and they are believed to live approximately 12 years.

New York Sea Grant Extension Program provides Equal Program and Employment Opportunities in association with Cornell Cooperative Extension, U.S. Department of Commerce, and County Cooperative Extension Associations.

Winter Flounder

Related Fish Profile Sheets

- › Blackfish
- › Bluefish
- › Porgy
- › Striped Bass
- › Summer Flounder
- › Weakfish
- › **Winter Flounder**

Fishing Season

Unlike its popular cousin, winter flounders have two fishing seasons — a spring and a winter run. The spring run is usually the better of the two, and it lasts from February through May; fish is active again in late September with good catches between October and December. Conservation measures are being implemented for this fish and you should contact New York State Department of Environmental Conservation or call 1-800-REGS-DEC for update information on fishing regulations.

Angling

These fish prefer inshore waters especially bays, harbors, estuaries, river mouths and tidal creeks, but anglers must become familiar with the locality and develop an understanding of the tidal patterns. The best places to fish for winter flounders are in areas where the tide changes, as well as in running currents. Party boat fishing is also a very good choice for catching these fish. Flounders put up a decent fight when hooked, and they fight harder than a fluke (summer flounder) of comparable size. It is rare when they manage to either break a line or toss a hook, and light tackle rig provides the most enjoyment for catching this species. Many anglers use 10-15 lb test monofilament line on a medium action-spinning rod, although heavier equipment is necessary in areas with strong current; a sinker should be used to keep the bait on the bottom. Different types of bait are used during the season, with blue mussels being deployed early in season and bloodworms and sandworms being the preferred bait as fish become more active.

Contact your local bait & tackle store for advice about fishing with artificial lures.

Visit our website at www.seagrantsunysb.edu/Fishery/ResourceCenter.htm for additional information.



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This information sheet was prepared by the Fishery Resource Center to address the needs in angling and charter boat communities.