

The patterns I've used to catch fish recently remind me of several key factors related to consistency of production. We've been catching good numbers of trout in the 22-25 inch class for this time of year, and a few bigger ones. Best bite early has been on topwaters, with soft plastics drawing the only strikes once the sun gets higher in the sky. Normally, a wind shift or increase in speed or both accompany the onset of bright daylight.

One of the keys to catching has been focusing our efforts in water right about knee-deep. Get much deeper and the bites become few and far between. On the few occasions when we have caught a few fish in deeper water, they have been undersized trout and/or barely-legal keepers.

Another key is to find areas with firm, sandy bottom, and ideally, some grass. The area we're fishing doesn't have abundant grass like some places around here, but scattered grass beds can be found in most of the spots where we're catching.

A light wind blowing "into" or "onto" the key part improves the odds of catching, as compared with fishing leeward banks, where the wind is blowing offshore. Unless, of course, wind speeds ramp up to about 15 mph or more. Then, the leeward banks offer the best choice.

I like to move around frequently, as I've discovered most of the key spots aren't holding numerous fish. Once I've pounded the key stretches in a spot and either caught a couple or a few, or found it impossible to draw a strike, I begin thinking of another spot close by which has similar features, and move over there and start over.

The hunting seasons have taken many people off the bays, so it's possible to fish this way right now, and will continue to be so through January. The patterns will change, in terms of the specifics of the areas the fish will prefer, but the other part will not. Best bet will be to identify and fish as many spots as possible having the "right" features for the moment in a general area, trying to pull a few quality fish off each.

Of course, fishing this way necessitates a high level of specific knowledge about the bottom features, structures, cover and other aspects of the chosen area of the bay. Taking me back to one of my most enduring principles: the angler with the most thorough knowledge of the bay system has the best chance at consistency.