

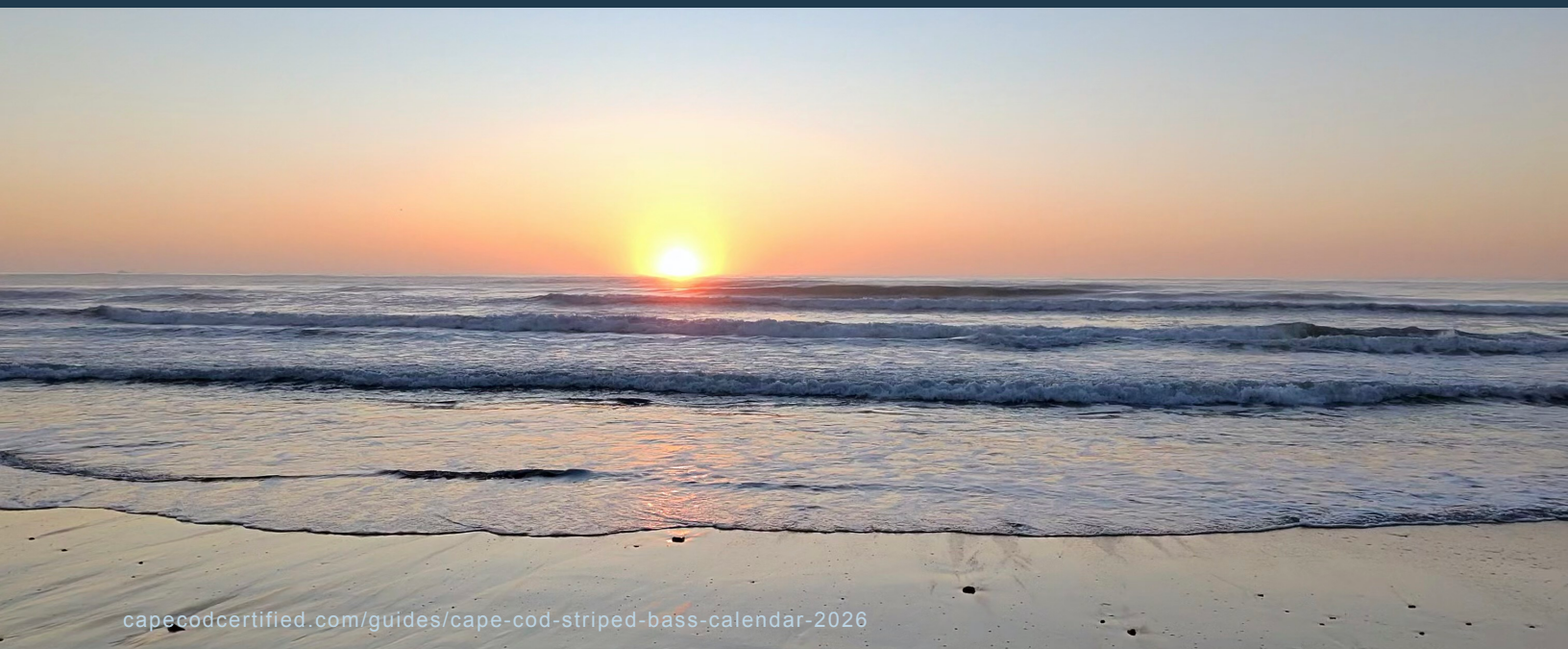


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Cape Cod Striped Bass Calendar 2026: When and Where to Catch Stripers Each Month

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-striped-bass-calendar-2026

If you fish the Cape, you already know stripers don't punch a clock — but they're close. The migration that pushes fish past Buzzards Bay in May and stacks them up in the Cape Cod Canal by June runs on water temperature and tide, and both are predictable enough to plan a season around. This is your month-by-month roadmap for 2026: when the fish show, where to stand, and which tide to bet on.

We're writing this in the thick of it — early June, peak Canal season — so consider this the calendar we'd hand a friend who just bought their first surf rod.

First, the 2026 Rules (Read This Before You Cast)

Massachusetts manages striped bass tightly, and the regulations have shifted nearly every year recently. For 2026, the recreational rules are:

- **One fish per angler, per day.**
- **Slot limit: 28 inches to less than 31 inches.** A fish must measure at least 28" and under 31" to keep. Everything else goes back.
- **Inline circle hooks are required when fishing with natural bait** (live or chunk). This dramatically improves release survival and it's the law, not a suggestion.
- **MA saltwater fishing permit:** roughly \$10 for the year. It's **free if you're 60 or older**, and **not required if you're under 16**. You also don't need your own permit when fishing aboard a licensed for-hire charter — the boat covers you.

Regulations like the slot and bag limit can change between seasons (and sometimes mid-season via emergency action). **Verify current MA regulations at [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) before your trip.** It takes two minutes and can save you a citation.

How the 2026 Run Works (The Big Picture)

Striped bass are migratory. They winter south of us and ride the warming water north each spring, then reverse the trip in fall. On Cape Cod that creates two distinct windows of great fishing — a spring/early-summer build to a June peak, and a hard-charging fall migration in September and October. The dog days of high summer are the quiet stretch in between.

Month-by-Month

April — Pre-Season Scouting

Water's still cold. Holdover schoolies turn up in warmer back estuaries and the heads of bays, but this is mostly a "tune your gear and watch the reports" month. Don't expect the big push yet.

May — The Build Begins

The first real fish arrive, usually pushing into **Buzzards Bay** first since it warms earliest. Expect schoolies and the front edge of keeper-class fish. This is prime time to fish the southwest-facing shores and the warmer south side before the crowds arrive.

June — Peak Canal Season

This is the month. The **Cape Cod Canal** turns on, and it can be the best land-based striped fishing on the East Coast. The magic words are **breaking tides** — the strong, fast-moving water that coincides with the days around the **new and full moons**. When big bass herd bait against the current, they push fish to the surface and you'll see the water "breaking." Fish the moving water, especially the early-morning west tide. Throw a pencil popper or a jig and hold on.

2026 moon planning note: *Target the days bracketing each new and full moon for the strongest Canal current. Check a current 2026 lunar/tide table for exact dates before you commit a pre-dawn drive.*

July — Hot Days, Early Mornings, Outer Beaches

Canal action stays decent on strong tides but thins as water warms. The fishing shifts outward and toward low light. **Nauset Beach** (Orleans) and the outer beaches come into their own — fish the dawn and dusk windows. Boat anglers do well around **Race Point** off Provincetown, where cooler, bait-rich water holds fish.

August — The Summer Doldrums

The honest month. Warm water makes bass lethargic and nocturnal. Your best shot is night tides and the very first light of day. Live-lining (with your circle hooks) around structure and rips outproduces blind casting. Plenty of anglers simply scale back and wait for September.

September — The Fall Run Ignites

The second peak, and many locals' favorite. Cooling water triggers the southbound migration, and fish feed aggressively to fuel the trip. **Race Point** and the **outer Cape beaches** can produce blitzes — birds working, bass and bluefish slashing bait on top. Bring a topwater and a metal you can cast a mile.

October — Catch the Tail End

The run continues strong into **mid-October**, then tapers as the bulk of the fish move south. Early in the month can rival September. By late October you're chasing stragglers. Layer up, watch the bird reports, and squeeze out the last good days.

November–March — Off-Season

The fish are gone. This is rod-maintenance, knot-practice, and trip-planning season — and a great time to lock in a 2026 charter date before the calendar fills.

Shore vs. Boat: A Quick Word

You do **not** need a boat to catch a trophy on Cape Cod — the Canal proves that every June. Shore anglers should prioritize the Canal in June, Nauset and the outer beaches in summer and fall, and always fish moving water in low light. Boat anglers gain access to Race Point, the rips, and the ability to chase blitzes, which is a real edge during the fall run.

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