

Make Your Own Fossils Activity

Fossils are the remains of long-dead organisms that have, over time been preserved and turned to stone. All kinds of organisms can become fossilized – animals, plants, even bacteria. Usually when a plant or animal dies it decays or is eaten by scavengers, but sometimes the remains are buried before they can be destroyed, and if the conditions are just right, the remains are preserved as fossils.

How are fossils made?

- An animal or plant dies, or a creature leaves a trace like footprints
- The remains are buried under layers of sediment
- Over thousands of years these layers become rock

Make your own fossils!

- Place clay on a sheet of foil or in a container. Make the top flat and smooth. This clay is like the mud that the once-living organism fell on to.
- Press your shell, leaf, bug, or other item into the clay firmly. You can also make a handprint or footprint! Remove the item carefully. You may need to use a toothpick.
- Mix the plaster of paris according to the package directions. Pour the plaster over your clay in a thin layer, and let it harden for about an hour.
- Carefully remove the clay and hard plaster. Scrape the clay off of the plaster, and you'll find a backwards impression of your fossil.
- To make your fossil look more real, you can paint your fossils to look like real ones.



This bee fly is one of up to 1,500 different kinds of fossil insects found in the Florissant Fossil Beds in central CO.



Visit these dinosaur footprints at Dinosaur Ridge near Morrison, CO

Make your own Fossils Supply List

- Modeling clay: a reusable, non-hardening type
- Foil or containers to place clay on or in
- Items to “fossilize:” plastic or rubber bugs, butterflies, dinosaurs, etc.; leaves with nice patterns; twigs; shells; nuts; seeds; etc.
- Toothpicks to remove items from clay
- Old container and large spoon or paint mixer to get messy to mix the plaster of paris
- Plaster of paris
- Water (2 parts plaster of paris to 1 part water)

Alternate coffee ground method from Education.com:

- 1 cup used coffee grounds
- ½ cup cold coffee
- 1 ½ cups flour
- ½ cup salt
- Mixing bowl
- Wooden spoon
- Small objects such as shells and plastic play animals

What You Do:

- Help your child measure the ingredients and begin mixing them together in a bowl. Start with only 1 cup of the flour and add more if the dough is too sticky to work with.
- Have him knead the dough together with his hands, then roll small circles, about 3 inches in diameter.
- Now, have him flatten the rounds using the palm of his hand. Then, encourage him to find an item to press into the fossil dough. Things like leaves, the side of a shell, or feet of plastic play animals leave interesting fossil impressions.
- Allow the dough to dry overnight, and you have your very own set of fossils!