

# Making Fossils

A fossil is the preserved remains or the imprint of a plant or animal in the Earth. Fossils are often found in hard sedimentary rocks or coal. Sometimes the shape of a plant or animal has turned to rock—like in petrified wood or dinosaur bones. Other times the outline of a plant or animal has been preserved in the rock. This experiment shows how the outlines of plants and animals turned into fossils.

**Things you will need:**

- Paper plates
- Plaster of paris
- Objects to make impressions (shells, leaves, twigs, plastic dinosaur, plastic insects, etc.)
- Paint and brushes or felt markers



**1.**

Mix the plaster according to the directions.



**2.**

Pour the plaster mixture into a paper plate.



**3.**

Wait a few minutes. Then press objects into the soft material. Remove the objects as the plaster gets hard. Some items may have to be removed before the plaster sets all the way to get the best results.



**4.**

Look at the impressions when the plaster gets hard. Can you tell what made each shape?



**5.**

Color the impressions with a marker or paints to make them stand out.



This experiment shows how scientists believe many fossils were formed in the earth. In ancient times, just like today, there were wet places. Fossil impressions were caused when plants and animals left shapes in the soft earth. The mud or sand dried leaving the impressions in them. Over time, the shapes were cov-

ered over by mud and sand. The once-soft earth was pressed harder by the layers on top. This great weight of the material above caused the earth to harden and become sedimentary rock. Your experiment speeds up the process. The plaster hardens in a short time while fossils in the earth formed over a much longer time.