

# Making Fossils

**Overview:** Most fossils can be found in the most common type of rock on earth: sedimentary rock. Fossils are usually found in shale, sandstone, and limestone and are actually more common than most people think. Although some sedimentary rocks will have absolutely no fossils whatsoever, sometimes you'll find nothing but fossils in a certain area of limestone. Once in a while, you'll find fossils embedded in amber.

**What to Learn:** Today you get to make your own glob of earth that holds an embedded fossil. If you close the dough over the top of the fossil, you can hammer it apart after it's had two days to dry.

## Materials

- ½ cup dirt
- ½ cup flour
- ½ water
- ½ cup salt
- shallow pan
- oil
- shell or other object to make a fossil impression of

## Experiment

1. Mix the dry ingredients together (dirt, flour, and salt) with your hands (or with a spoon).
2. Add the water and mix together well. Discard any pebbles or gravel from the dirt. You want a gloppy, clay-like mixture that holds together. Add more dry ingredients if needed.
3. Press the dough ball into the pan, making it ½- to 1-inch thick with ragged edges (fossils aren't perfect).
4. Let dry overnight, or at least for a few hours if you're in a hurry.
5. Coat the shell or object with oil and press it gently into the dough.
6. Let it dry thoroughly until it's hardened. Remove your object and admire!

## Reading

There are lots of collecting sites listed in geology field guides and books. Even if sites are popular, new fossils are exposed each spring after the winter's weather. Another great resource is local fossil clubs, geologic societies, and local museums, especially those that participate in field trips. It's a lot of fun to go collecting with a group, and many colleges and universities provide unique hands-on opportunities to students interested in earth science classes. Always make sure you're allowed to collect before you go out with your tools ... many local areas require permits.