

WARNING!

Always get a grown-up to help you when working with plaster of Paris.

Make plaster cast fossils

Preserve your precious artefacts using plaster of Paris.

What you need

- A large lump of Plasticine (or Blu Tack)
- Objects to preserve, such as fossils, shells, dinosaur toys, Lego or flowers
- Strips of paper (about 5cm wide x 20cm long)
- Sticky tape
- Plaster of Paris
- Water
- Paper cup
- Spoon
- Paints
- Paintbrushes

How does it work?

Fossils are traces of ancient life that have been preserved by a natural process. They can be anything from dinosaur skeletons to tiny sea shells. In this experiment, you are creating a cast. This type of fossil is an impression left when a living thing dies and is buried in sediment. As the sediment hardens into rock, the organism's body decays and dissolves, leaving a hollow behind. This mould is later filled by hard minerals, preserving the shape of the original object. Many famous fossils and precious ancient artefacts have been recreated using plaster of Paris casts. This allows people to see objects in museums without risking damage to the originals.



Dippy gets a touch-up at a Glasgow museum.



1 Flatten the Plasticine until it is about a finger's width thick. If it is cold or hasn't been used for a while, it might be quite hard to squish flat, so warm it up by rolling it around in your hands.



2 Carefully push the object you want to preserve into the Plasticine. Gently move it from side to side to make sure you get a good, detailed imprint. Then slowly remove it. You have made the mould.



3 Create an edge around the mould using the paper strips. Tape the strips together and seal any gaps by pressing the edges of the Plasticine against the paper.



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4 Ask a grown-up to help you make the plaster. Mix two parts of plaster of Paris with one part water in a paper cup. Pour the plaster on to your imprint until it is completely covered.



5 Leave the plaster to dry completely – this could take a few hours. Then, carefully, remove the paper strip and peel the Plasticine from your plaster fossils.



6 You should have a plaster cast of your object. Paint the cast fossils to make them look more realistic. You can make plaster casts of any natural treasures you find on your travels.