

Making Fossil "Biscuits" to be Excavated by Students

Materials Needed:

small fossils like sharks teeth, crinoid stems, snails, etc.

sawdust

sand

plaster of Paris

silicon mini-muffin pan (silicon is easiest to use!)

spoon

plastic tub for mixing

(DO NOT DISCARD ANY MIXTURE DOWN YOUR SINK - IT WILL CLOG PIPES!!!)

Recipe:

1 cup sawdust

1 cup plaster of Paris

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sand

1 cup water

(this makes about 24 mini-muffin-sized "biscuits")

Instructions:

1. Mix dry ingredients thoroughly, then add water.

2. Mix well.

3. Mixture should be about as thick as oatmeal or cake mix batter.

4. Put one spoonful of mixture in each hole of the muffin pan.

5. Tap the pan on the counter to level the mixture in each hole & to expel air bubbles.

6. Quickly add a small fossil to each hole full of mixture.

7. Leave a small part of the fossil showing.

8. Allow to set up overnight.

9. To remove "biscuits" from muffin pan, turn it upside down over a towel on a hard surface.

Gently press the "biscuits" out of the silicon pan. Store the biscuits in a shoe box or a plastic bag.

10. The longer the biscuits are allowed to dry before the fossils are "excavated," the harder the matrix around the fossil becomes.

11. If the biscuits are stored while still too wet, they may grow mold over a long period of time.

To remove mold, give the biscuits a bath in water with a little bleach added. Scrub with an old toothbrush. Rinse thoroughly and let dry.

*12. If biscuits are very dry and hard, drip water on the area where the fossil is as kids are "excavating" them. The water will soften the matrix enough to make the work easier.