

DIY DINO DIG



Paleontologists excavate, or remove, dinosaur fossils from rocks. When they discover a big or delicate fossil, they encase it with plaster before completely digging it out of the ground. Then the plaster-wrapped fossil and the rock around it are brought to a lab, where they use small tools to carefully uncover each fossilized bone from the rock.

In this activity, you'll practice excavating a dinosaur figurine from a plaster-like material. But first you'll have to let the mixture harden for a day or two. Excavating fossils takes patience!



Myria Perez prepares dinosaur fossils and ancient artifacts at the Perot Museum in Dallas, Texas

YOU WILL NEED : (Safety first! Always ask an adult for permission and help)

- 1 cup cornstarch
- 1/2 cup of water
- small plastic container
- dinosaur figurine
- parchment paper
- 'excavation tools' (like a toothbrush)
- safety goggles



1 Pour cornstarch and water into a small plastic container. Stir.



2 Press one or two figurines inside the mixture.



3 Place outside in sun to dry for 24-48 hours.

4



Place parchment paper on an outside surface. (This might get messy!) Put on safety goggles.

5



Use tools like brushes and picks to uncover the figurine.

6



Sweep leftovers into the trash, not the sink. Cornstarch and water can clog pipes.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Excavating a fossil can take months--or years! A fossilized Brachiosaurus femur (arm) bone that was discovered in Utah in 2019 was 6 feet 6 inches long. It was taller than the paleontologists who discovered it!

Would you have the patience to search for, excavate, and then prepare a fossilized bone like this? Paleontologists know how to uncover fossilized dinosaur skeletons, but they also need to know how to identify each bone as well as which species it came from. What would it be like to uncover the fossilized skeleton of a new species of dinosaur? What would you name it? Here's some inspiration: In 2004, a dinosaur fossil uncovered in South Dakota was named *Dracorex hogwartsia* because it looked like a dragon from the Harry Potter series!



FUN FACT!

A fossil is evidence of a plant or animal that lived at least 10,000 yrs ago.