

Creepy-Crawly Crockery

Basin, made by a follower of Bernard Palissy
in the late 1500s or early 1600s



Although we don't know who made this strange looking basin, we do know they were inspired by the crockery of a famous potter called Bernard Palissy, who lived in France between 1510 and 1589. Palissy made all sorts of amazing pottery but he is best known for creating this type called rustic ware, which is now also known as Palissy ware after the man himself.

A self-taught potter, Palissy was fascinated with the natural world and loved putting this into his pots – quite literally! To create his signature-style, Palissy gathered real snakes, fish, frogs, crustaceans, plants and shells and put them into wet plaster. When the plaster dried, he removed the real plant or animal to reveal a plaster mould. He would then fill the mould with wet clay to create a cast (an exact copy), which he would incorporate into spectacular dishes like this one.

This basin has been decorated to look like a pond or river, alive with natural aquatic life. The animals are so lifelike that you can almost imagine the fish flapping out onto your table or the frog leaping into your lap. It's possible this strange dish was used for washing hands at the dinner table. Imagine people's surprise when they looked down to see a snake peering back up at them!



Look closely at the wonderful life-like detail of this basin. How many different plants, animals and shells can you see?

Make your own Creepy-Crawly Crockery.

Would you like a dish like this? What about a teacup with a toad in it or perhaps a bowl crawling with crabs? Follow the instructions below to create your own Palissy basin at home using our simple salt dough recipe.

Activity

You will need:

- 250g of flour
- 125g of salt
- 125ml of water
- A large mixing bowl
- Dried peas, lentils or pasta (for decoration)

Salt dough is easy to make using ingredients that can be found in your kitchen.

Step 1.

Preheat your oven to its lowest temperature. Mix the salt and flour together in a large bowl. Add the water one tablespoon at a time and mix together. Bring the dough together into a ball. If your mix is still sticky, add in a little more salt and flour until you reach a firmer texture.



Step 2.

Using your hands and any baking tools, model your salt dough basin onto a sheet of baking parchment. Model as many magnificent creatures as you like and stick them to the basin with a drop of water.



Step 3.

If you have them, use dried peas, lentils or pasta pieces to decorate your dish and add different textures to your animals. Leaves and flowers from the garden work too.



Step 4.

Once you've finished modelling, place your basin on a tray and slowly bake it in the oven for around three hours, or until your creation is completely dry. Thicker or wetter dough will take longer. Be sure to keep checking! Now you're ready to surprise your unsuspecting diners.



Share your creations with us.

We'd love to see your creepy-crawly creations. Why not take a photo and share them with us?

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