



De Barnsteen Specialist

What is Amber?

Amber is fossilized resin from conifers. Resin offers the tree protection against insects and fungi. It is a sticky substance in which insects or plant debris easily get entangled or even trapped. The resin can harden as soon as it is cut off from oxygen. This hardening, which takes millions of years, is also called fossilization. After a few thousand years, half fossilized resin is formed. We know this as copal. In contrast to amber, these pieces still contain trapped oils. When the resin is completely hardened and when there are no liquid parts in it anymore it is called amber.



Origin of amber

Most of the resin that later hardened to amber, was produced by conifers in Scandinavia in the Eocene Age (this lasted from 55.8 to 33.9 million years ago). At that time the climate was relatively mild and the Scandinavian area was characterised by extensive coniferous forests. The resin produced by these trees was regularly deposited in the soil, where it was cut off from oxygen. About 35 million years ago the sea level started to rise and the amber eroded from the Scandinavian forest soil. The predecessors of the Baltic rivers took the amber with them and deposited it at the southern estuaries. Later the amber was eroded again and taken back by the river 'Eridanos', the predecessor of the current German rivers 'Weser', 'Ems' and 'Elbe'. Finally, the Scandinavian ice spread the amber over the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Even in the Netherlands, pieces of amber can be washed ashore on the beach.



Amber inclusions

The best thing about amber must be the enclosed flora and fauna. Usually insects, spiders or plant debris ended up in the resin when it was still soft and sticky. The uniqueness of these fossils is the condition in which they have been preserved. In contrast to other fossils, the soft parts are still visible. Despite the fact that the fossils are discoloured, scientists can still extract a lot of information from the stones about the era in which the resin was created. A piece of amber is like a time capsule in which time has stood still for millions of years.



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[View amber with insects](#)

[Amber and children](#)

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