

# DIY Rock Tumbling vs. Professional Service

A realistic look at time, money, equipment, and results — and why many rockhounds choose TumbleRocks

## Important Size Recommendation

For **best results**, rocks should be **no larger than 1.5–2 inches** in diameter. Larger rocks can be processed but need special handling, longer cycles, and often polish less consistently. Smaller stones tumble more evenly and get a higher rate of mirror-like shine.

## The Stages of Rock Tumbling (Realistic Timeline)

**Stage 1 (Coarse) is often repeated many times.** Hard or porous material such as petrified wood can take weeks or months of coarse grinding before it is smooth enough to move on. One petrified-wood batch took about **10 months** of repeated Stage 1 cycles to get fully smooth.

| Stage                          | Equipment & Grit                        | What It Does                                                           | Typical Time                          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 – Coarse<br>(often repeated) | Rotary tumbler<br>60/90 Silicon Carbide | Shapes, rounds, and removes deep pits/scratches. May need many cycles. | Weeks to months<br>(repeat as needed) |
| 2 – Medium                     | Raytech Vibe 5<br>120/220 grit          | Smooths the surface after coarse grinding                              | Several days                          |
| 3 – Pre-Polish                 | Raytech Vibe 5<br>500/600 grit          | Creates a satin-smooth finish ready for final polish                   | Several days                          |
| 4 – Polish                     | Raytech Vibe 5<br>Aluminum Oxide polish | Produces the final high-gloss, mirror shine                            | Several days                          |

**Critical cleaning step:** Between every stage, rocks and media must be cleaned thoroughly. That usually means **5–7 cycles of 30 minutes each** in a large ultrasonic cleaner. Skipping this contaminates the next stage and ruins the polish.

## Realistic Equipment Costs (Current Approximate Retail)

| Item                                         | Approx. Cost              | Notes                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Harbor Freight 6 lb Dual-Drum Rotary Tumbler | \$79                      | Entry-level rotary for Stage 1 coarse grinding                   |
| Raytech Tumble-Vibe 5 Vibratory Tumbler      | \$150 – \$170             | Stages 2, 3, and 4 — faster and more efficient than rotary       |
| Harbor Freight 6 Liter Ultrasonic Cleaner    | ~\$170                    | Needed for 5–7 × 30-min cleanings between stages                 |
| Grit & Polish (ongoing)                      | \$20 – \$40+ per full set | Silicon carbide stages + aluminum oxide polish; must be replaced |
| Ceramic media / plastic pellets              | \$10 – \$25               | Cushions rocks and carries grit                                  |

## DIY vs. TumbleRocks

|              | Doing it yourself                                           | Send it to TumbleRocks                                        |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Startup gear | About \$430–\$485 before the first finished batch           | No machines, grit, or ultrasonic to buy                       |
| Time         | Weeks to months; Stage 1 can run 10 months on hard material | You hunt and cut; we run the long, messy stages               |
| Risk         | One skipped cleaning can ruin the polish                    | Rotary + vibe sequence with ultrasonic cleaning between grits |

Questions or a batch to send? Email [sales@tumblerocks.com](mailto:sales@tumblerocks.com).