Triceratops facts for kids: three horns, its size and how to say it

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Triceratops facts for kids: a plant-eater with three horns, up to 30 feet long, 6 to 12 tons, from the Forest Service's numbers. Drawn to scale, free to read.

Triceratops was a plant-eating dinosaur with three horns on its face, up to 9.1 metres (about 30 feet) long and as heavy as 6 to 12 tons, and it lived about 66 to 68 million years ago in western North America. Those numbers come from the USDA Forest Service's Dakota Prairie Grasslands page on prehistoric animals, and they are scientists' estimates.

Triceratops is one of the twenty animals in the dinosaur wing of Peabody's Animals section. Here is everything its page holds, and where each number came from.

How to say it

It's try-SAIR-uh-tops, and the name means "three-horned face". Two long horns sit above the eyes, and a short one sits on the nose. Behind them is a wide, bony frill. If you want help with other long names, the guide to saying a dinosaur's name goes one syllable at a time.

Triceratops in numbers

- What: Length · Metric: up to 9.1 m · Imperial: about 30 ft · Where it came from: USDA Forest Service, Dakota Prairie Grasslands
- What: Weight · Metric: 5,440 to 10,890 kg · Imperial: 6 to 12 tons (12,000 to 24,000 lb) · Where it came from: same page
- What: Height · Metric: no checked number yet · Imperial: no checked number yet · Where it came from: none found
- What: When it lived · Metric: 66 to 68 million years ago · Imperial: the same · Where it came from: same page

I couldn't find a height for Triceratops on a page I trust, so Peabody says "no checked number yet" rather than guessing.

What it ate, and how

Triceratops ate low, tough plants such as ferns and palm-like cycads. It had a beak like a parrot's for snipping them, and many teeth packed in rows. As old teeth wore down, new ones grew in. Peabody's page also says it walked on four strong legs.

What were the horns for?

Scientists think the horns and the frill may have helped Triceratops show off, recognise its own kind and defend itself. "May" is the honest word. Nobody can watch a Triceratops, so the reasons are best guesses from the fossils.

Triceratops and T. rex

Triceratops lived at the same time and in the same places as T. rex, and the same Forest Service page covers both. If you are curious how they compare in size, Triceratops vs T. rex stands them side by side next to a child. T. rex is the longer one, at 12.2 to 13.1 metres, and I wrote about that in how big was a T. rex compared to a human.

Peabody doesn't stage fights between animals, and it doesn't pretend a dinosaur could be raced. It shows sizes, because sizes are what the sources can tell us.

Triceratops next to animals you know

- White rhino. The US Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Register notice gives 1,500 to 2,400 kilograms (about 3,300 to 5,300 pounds) and a shoulder height of 1.71 to 1.85 metres (about 5.6 to 6.1 feet). Even Triceratops's lowest weight, 6 tons, is more than twice the rhino's top figure. See Triceratops vs white rhino.
- Asian elephant. The Smithsonian's National Zoo gives 2,750 to 5,420 kilograms. Triceratops's lowest estimate is about the same as the heaviest elephant figure, and its highest is about twice that. See Asian elephant vs Triceratops.
- Styracosaurus. Its smaller, spikier cousin, 5.5 metres (about 18 feet) long, from Wikidata, which cites the Natural History Museum's Dino Directory. See Styracosaurus vs Triceratops.

Try tonight

Run through the three wow facts on Triceratops's page together: the name, the parrot-like beak, and the teeth that keep growing in. Then take the dino or not quiz or the when did it live quiz, which ask three big-box questions with no typing.

Questions grown-ups ask

Was Triceratops a meat-eater?

No. It ate plants. Its page says "plants" and names ferns and cycads.

Was Triceratops bigger than an elephant?

By the weight estimates, yes. Even the low end is about the heaviest Asian elephant figure Peabody has. Length is a different story: Peabody has no checked length for an elephant, so the stage lines an elephant up by its shoulder.

Why doesn't the page say how tall Triceratops was?

Because I haven't found a source I trust for a height. I only show a number I can point to, with the page it came from and the day I checked it, 30 October 2026.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026 and has no ads. The library has stories for when the dinosaurs are done, and the dinosaur facts page has more to read.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/triceratops-facts-for-kids