There are tens of thousands of known caves in the United States.

Nature has a way of decorating caves with speleothems like the stalactites and stalagmites you see in this picture. Grow your own speleothem by completing the lab exercise found on the back.
Make Your Own Speleothem

What you need:
- two disposable cups
- 1 Cup of Epsom Salt
- aluminium foil or plastic
- 2 Cups of hot water
- spoon
- cotton twine
- two paper clips

What to do:

Set this experiment up in a place away from drafts and where it will not be disturbed.

Step 1: Put 1/2 Cup of the Epsom salts into each of the disposable cups.

Step 2: Add 1 Cup of hot water to each of the disposable cups.

Step 3: Stir the mixture so that the water becomes saturated with dissolved Epsom Salt. Most of the Epsom salt will not dissolve but remain at the bottom of the cup.

Step 4: Tie a paper clip to each end of the string.

Step 5: Wet the string with tap water and then place the ends of the string into the two cups. You will want to make sure the sting sags in the middle between the cups.

Step 6: Place a piece of aluminium foil or plastic beneath the string where it is sagging.

What do you see:

Write down your observations after 5 minutes:

10 minutes:

and the next day:

What do you see happening both to the string and below the sag?

What’s next:

Use your observations from this experiment to describe the development of speleothems in limestone caves.

What could you do to change the rate of growth?

How is this experiment similar to the way speleothems form in caves?

How is this experiment different from the way speleothems form in caves?