

How to Tan Leather



by eHow Hobbies, Games & Toys Editor

Introduction

While it may be surprising, you can easily tan leather in your own backyard with a few simple tools. While there are a few different ways to tan leather, brain oils are most commonly used and will give you better, longer lasting results than any other method.

Instructions

Difficulty: Moderate

Tan Your Own Leather Hide Using Brain Oils

Steps

1 Step One

Find a leather hide to work with. While you can use leather hides from animals you skin yourself, you can also order cut hides to work with.

2 Step Two

Prepare the hide. Remove any bits of meat or fat by soaking the skin and carefully scraping it with a dull knife. This is called scudding. A sharp knife might make the work faster, but you risk a chance of cutting the hide. You should also remove the hair at this point if you decide that you want a bare hide.

3 Step Three

Lay out the hide using stakes or a frame. You can also use a piece of upright plywood to flatten the hide on. Don't stretch the hide. You just want to keep it from shrinking. The hide should be moist, but not soaking.

4 Step Four

Mash brains and a small amount of water in a blender or by hand. You can use the brains from the animal you skinned or buy canned brains.

5 Step Five

Rub the brains into the hide, skipping the fur side if you are creating a fur hide. Use all of the brains and liquid that you cooked. Let the brains soak into the hide for about 6 to 8 hours.

6 Step Six

Submerge the hide in water overnight or for about 10 hours. The hide should be pliable, ready to tan.

7 Step Seven

Stake the hide again, or lay it out the same way as before. Push a grainer across the hide until all the water is removed. You can use a pool or other hard object.

8 Step Eight

Stretch the hide removing excess water while you do so. You can use rope or cable tied between trees for larger hides or you can stretch it by hand. The idea is to saw it back and forth until it is completely dry. When dry, it should not feel cool at all and should stretch but return back to its shape easily.

9 Step Nine

Try watching instructional videos available from Traditional Tanners for more hints on tanning a hide (see Resources below).

Overall Tips & Warnings

The liquid used to keep hide moist before tanning can determine the color. Salt or brain oils create paler leather, while urine will create a hide that appears almost white. Tallow (animal fat) gives the hide a more natural color.

Tanning gets its name from the tannins, which are used in vegetable tanning. There are three modern ways to tan leather.

Resources

* [Traditional Tanners instructional videos](#)

Overall Things You'll Need

- Leather hide
- Emulsified oils, usually from brains
- Softening cable
- Scraping tool
- Pumice
- Grainer

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