Working With Leather

How to Cut Leather

Most leather-working projects require that the leather be cut. Use these suggestions to cut thin or thick leather.

Steps:

1. Lay the leather out on a flat work surface. Protect the surface with a rubber mat made especially for leather working. This mat will also help protect your tools from being blunted or damaged by contact with the surface.

2. Use a pencil and a ruler or yardstick to make the cutting line along the leather's surface. Make very light pencil marks that don't score the leather.

3. Use a French curve or other rounded edge to trace a curved line.

4. Place a straightedge, such as a metal ruler, along the drawn line. A thick straightedge provides stability for the cutting blade.

5. Draw the tip of a razor knife along the straightedge, cutting into the leather as you go. Keep the blade pushed against the straightedge as you cut into the leather.

6. Cut only as deep as you can while still being able to control the blade. Take as many cutting passes as necessary to cut through the leather.

7. Cut curved lines in the same manner. If you draw your curve freehand, position your razor so it's perpendicular to the leather's surface. Make several light passes with the razor along the drawn line until the leather is cut.

8. Use leather shears to cut suede and garment leather.

Tips:

- Change the knife blade as often as needed. One blade should last for the duration of a project.

- Keep the leather damp while you work it. This makes the leather easier to manipulate. Either spray the entire piece lightly with a spray bottle of water or dampen it with a sponge.

- Dampen the piece evenly with water. If a few drops of water spill onto the piece, then wet the entire piece. This will help prevent water spots.

How to Make a Leather Book Cover

Make a leather cover for your favorite book or to give as a gift to someone special. You can

decorate and personalize the cover with tooling and stamping or leave it unadorned.

1. Make a pattern for the book cover by folding a medium- to heavy-weight piece of paper around the existing cover of the closed book.

2. Trim the paper so that   inch extends beyond both the top and bottom of the book. Also trim the vertical edges of the paper so that   inch extends beyond both the front and back covers.

3. Measure the length and the width of the front cover of the book. Use a ruler, pencil and scissors to measure and mark out a rectangle that measures   the width of the cover plus inch and the length of the cover plus   inch. This forms the pattern for the pockets of the cover.

4. Lay the two pattern pieces onto a piece of 4 to 6-oz. leather. See 'eHow to Cut Leather' for instructions on marking and cutting out the pattern pieces from the leather. Make sure to cut out two of the rectangular pieces from Step 3 as well as one piece from Step 2.

5. Lay the larger pattern piece onto a piece of skiver leather. Mark and cut out the pattern from this piece. This will serve as the lining of the cover.

6. See 'eHow to Finish the Edges of a Piece of Leather' for instructions on finishing the edges of the cover and pocket pieces.

7. Place the heavier book cover piece on a flat work surface, right side down. Evenly apply leather cement to the leather with a wooden paint stirring stick. Allow the cement to dry until the shine has disappeared and then affix the lining.

8. Affix the lining beginning at either the left or right edge of the cover and then smooth the lining toward the opposite end. Make sure that the top and bottom edges are lined up evenly. Allow the cement to dry thoroughly.

9. Keep the book cover right side down and cement each pocket piece in place along the left and right edges of the cover. Apply cement to the side and top edges of each piece. Allow these pieces to dry thoroughly, as well.

Tips:

- Use vegetable-tanned leather if you plan on tooling, dying or stamping the leather.

- Do any tooling, dying or decorative stamping before beginning Step 7.

- Use a clean wooden paint stirring stick to smooth the lining of the cover.

How to Make a Leather Dog Collar
Use vegetable-tanned leather to make a collar for your dog. You can make it in any width, length or color you choose.

Steps:

1. Determine the desired length and width of the collar and cut the collar from the leather. See "Cut Leather," under Related eHows, for instructions. Make the length of the collar equal to the dog's neck measurement plus 3 to 4 inches. The width of the collar should be equal to the interior width of the buckle.

2. Decide what shape you want the free collar end to take. You can make it pointed, rounded, square ' whatever shape you like. Mark the collar end and use a razor knife and straight edge to cut it to the desired shape.

3. Fold the uncut edge of the collar back so that a crease is made 1 1/2 inches from the collar end. Place a slot punch on the collar so that the punch's end evenly intersects the crease at the crease's center point.

4. Hold the handle portion of the punch and strike the top with a wood or rawhide mallet. Repeat until the punch has completely punctured the leather.

5. Use a rotary punch or drive punch and mallet to make four rivet holes in the leather for the buckle. The diameter of the rivets and the punched holes should be equal, and the holes should be placed evenly around the slot. The first two holes should be placed 1/4 inch from the collar end, each hole 1/4 inch from the collar's edges.

6. Place the second set of holes on the other side of the slot so that when the collar end is folded back along the crease line, both sets of holes match up evenly.

7. Use an edge beveler to trim all of the collar's edges. Do any tooling or decorative stamping at this time as well.

8. Use leather dye to color the collar if desired. See "Dye Leather," under Related eHows, for instructions. Allow the leather to dry completely and then use a clean, white cloth to rub neat's-foot oil or saddle soap along the length of the collar. Polish and remove the excess oil or soap with newspaper or rag paper.

9. Insert the buckle prong through the punched slot so that the buckle is correctly positioned. Fold the uncut collar end back so that the rivet holes are lined up, and insert the rivets from the underside of the collar. Place the collar end on a flat work surface and affix the rivet caps to the rivets with a mallet.

10. Determine the placement of the holes through which the buckle's prong will be inserted. Put the collar around the dog's neck. On the back of the collar, mark a hole position that will result in the collar being positioned comfortably but securely around the dog's neck.

11. Mark just one hole or a series of holes that are spaced about 1 inch apart and continue to the collar's free end. Many holes might be a good idea if your dog still has some growing to do.

12. Punch the holes with a rotary punch or a drive punch and mallet. Make sure that the holes are centered.

- Determine the desired length and width of the dog collar before you go to purchase the leather and buckle.

- Adjust the rivet placement if necessary. You may need to adjust their placement depending on how narrow the collar is. Just make sure that the rivets are evenly placed.

- Keep the leather evenly dampened while you work it. This makes the leather easier to manipulate. Either spray the entire piece lightly with a spray bottle of water or dampen with a sponge.

- Look for rivets and punches with a diameter of approximately 1/8 inch.

- Insert a metal or leather loop over the collar end before beginning step 9. The loop should sit between the rivets and the buckle.

- Look for appropriate-size buckle sets that come with a buckle, metal belt loop and metal belt end.

How to Make a Leather Pouch

This leather drawstring pouch is another good beginning leather-work project. Make this pouch any size you like.

◉ **Steps:**

1. Choose a soft, supple type of leather for the pouch. Use leathers such as doeskin, chamois, garment-weight suede or buckskin. Also choose leather lacing or thong for the drawstring closure.

2. Make sure to choose a piece of leather that's large enough to make the pouch in the desired size.

3. Dye the leather if you wish. See "How to Dye Leather," under Related eHows, for instructions.

4. Use a pencil and a ruler to measure out the dimensions of your pouch. Make the pouch as one long rectangle to be folded in half and stitched up the sides, or cut out two equal rectangles to be stitched on all sides.

5. Round out the portion of the pattern pieces that will make up the bottom of the pouch - it will give a rounded rather than square shape to the pouch. This is an option if you cut two pieces for the pouch.

6. Cut out the pouch pieces with leather shears or a sturdy pair of scissors.

7. Use a stitching awl to punch a series of holes in the leather about 1/8 inch from the edge. Leave the top portions of the pouch pieces alone for now.

8. See "How to Use a Stitching Awl in Leather Work" and "How to Sew a Double Needle Stitch on Leather," under Related eHows, for instructions on making the stitching holes and sewing the sides of the pouch together with waxed linen thread.

9. Use a rotary punch to make a series of large holes at the top of the sewn pouch. Make sure the diameter of each hole matches the diameter of the leather lacing or thong.

10. Thread the lacing or thong through the large holes, going in at one hole and out through the next. Repeat until all holes have been laced.

11. Make sure the free ends of the lacing or thong are even, then knot the ends together.

✳ Tips:

- Choose dyed garment-weight leather for the pouch. Many of these types of leather come in a wide variety of colors. This will save you from having to dye the leather yourself.

- Make your pouch from one large circle of leather. Punch holes along the perimeter of the circle, approximately 1/4 inch from the edge, for lacing, and gather the leather into a pouch.

- Use a sewing machine and a wedge-point needle to sew lightweight leathers.

- Use a special lacing needle to pull the lacing or thong through the holes at the top of the pouch, or just cut the tip of the thong to a point and use your fingers to insert the lacing.

How to Preserve Leather

In order to give your purchased or made leather pieces a long life, it is very important to care for and treat them properly.

◉ Steps:

1. Use a finishing product or sealant at the end of your leatherworking project. Make sure that the finishing product you choose is safe for the type of leather and materials you've used. If necessary, use finishes that are meant to be used with leather dyes and paints.

2. Finish projects made with vegetable-tanned leather by working saddle soap or neat's-foot oil into the surface of the piece. Polish and then buff off the excess with newspaper or rag paper.

3. Keep your leather products as clean as possible. Dust, dirt and oils will cause damage (i.e. scratches) to the surface of the leather. Use cleaners made especially for leather, if necessary.

4. Maintain your leather pieces so that professional cleaning is not necessary. Even professional cleaning will alter the color somewhat.

5. Keep all leather products from getting wet. If something is spilled on the leather, blot the area dry with a clean cloth as soon as possible, and allow the area to dry thoroughly.

6. Remove dirt from soiled suede before the dirt has time to set in. Allow the piece to dry completely, if necessary, and then brush thoroughly with a suede brush.

7. Keep leather pieces soft and supple with a conditioner designed specifically for leather. Apply the conditioner with a clean cloth, work it into the leather and then buff the piece until the excess conditioner has been removed.

- Make sure to apply any finishing products as recommended by the manufacturer. Some types of leather need special products.

- Purchase leather finishing and care supplies at a leather supply store.

How to Shape Leather

Some leatherworking projects, such as containers or portfolios, require that the leather be shaped or molded to hold a particular form. Use the following suggestions to help create a formed or molded piece.

Shaped

Steps:

1. Determine the finished dimensions of a leather container and obtain a wooden form that matches these dimensions. For example, for a leather cup with a diameter of 3 inches, you will need a circular wooden form of the same diameter.

2. Make your own wooden forms if there are none available that fit your size requirements. Make sure that the wood has not been stained.

3. Soak the leather completely.

4. Remove the leather from the water and wrap the piece around the wooden form. You may have to pull hard on the leather to get it around the form.

5. Secure the leather to the form with smooth leather straps that have not been dyed or painted. Make sure that the straps are smooth and thick enough as to leave no impression upon the leather.

6. Allow the leather to dry thoroughly. Undo the straps and then remove the leather piece from the form.

Tips:

- Use any form, in lieu of a wooden form, that will not break from the stress of having the leather wrapped around it and will not adversely affect the leather. For example, do not use metal forms that will rust when wet.

- Use a straightedge to keep your fold line straight.

- Rest weights along the folded edge after you have hammered it. A large, heavy book works well for this purpose.

Folded

Steps:

1. Keep leather in a folded shape, such as needed for some book covers or portfolios, by first scoring the intended fold line with an awl or other like tool. This should be done on the wrong side of the piece.

2. Dampen the leather piece with water and a sponge and fold the leather piece, wrong sides together, along the scored fold line.

3. Use a wood or rawhide mallet to hammer along the fold. Allow the piece to dry in this position.

How to Use a Stitching Awl in Leather Work

Use a stitching awl to punch holes in leather along the stitching line. This tool resembles a small ice pick and comes in two parts: the awl (needle) and the haft (handle). Look for sets that include interchangeable awls of various sizes.

Steps:

1. Place the leather on a flat work surface. Use a ruler, a straight or curved edge and a pencil to measure and mark a stitching line.

2. Use an over-stitch spacer to make evenly spaced indentations along the marked stitching line. The over-stitch spacer consists of a small metal wheel attached to a wooden handle. Small, evenly spaced points protrude from the wheel.

3. Press the wheel portion of the over-stitch spacer firmly into the leather and roll it along the stitching line. Keep the pressure on the leather constant. The resulting indentations in the leather are the points to be punctured with the stitching awl.

4. Punch through the leather with the stitching awl. Use a controlled pressing action instead of a stabbing motion to penetrate the leather. You will need to lift the leather from your work surface so that the awl can penetrate the underside of the piece.

5. Withdraw the stitching awl once the point has completely penetrated the leather. Avoid pushing the stitching awl so far through that the handle touches the leather's surface. This will result in a much larger hole.

6. Punch one or two holes at a time and stitch as you go. The awl has a flattened blade that spreads the leather as it punctures it. Left for an indefinite period of time, the leather will begin to contract, and the punched hole will become narrower and more difficult to stitch.

Tips:

Use a sewing machine and a wedge-point needle to stitch most garment-weight leathers.

Keep the stitching line approximately 1/8 inch from the leather's edge.

Use a compass or wing divider to mark a curved stitching line.

- Make sure that the appropriate wheel is attached to the over-stitch spacer. Most spacers come with interchangeable wheels that will produce five, six and seven holes per inch.

- Guide the over-stitch spacer along a metal edge as you mark the stitching line.

- Avoid pressing the stitching awl into the work surface. This will damage the awl's point.

- Rub beeswax every one or two holes when punching through very thick leather. This will ease penetration.

How to Choose Leather

Before you begin any leatherworking project, you'll need to know a little about the types of leather available.

⊙Steps:

1. Purchase leather by the square foot. The measurements of a piece of leather are commonly written on its underside.

2. Choose vegetable-tanned leather for projects requiring the surface to be stamped or tooled. This leather is a natural tan color, and its rigid structure makes it perfect for projects such as belts and book covers.

3. Choose oil-tanned leather for projects that require durability and flexibility. Saddles and tack are often made from an oil-tanned leather called latigo. Oil-tanned leather can be distinguished from other leathers by its waxy surface.

4. Choose chrome-tanned leather for relatively inexpensive leather that comes in a variety of colors. This type of leather is tanned with chemicals and does not breathe very well. It is frequently white on one side and can be any color on the other.

5. Use suede for projects that require soft, pliable leather. Suede is wonderful for garments of any kind and comes in a wide range of colors.

6. Choose garment leather for projects requiring a soft, supple leather. Garment leather has a smooth rather than sueded finish and comes in rich colors.

✳Tips:

- Avoid using oil-tanned leather when stretch or flexibility in the leather might be undesirable. For example, you will not want a dog collar that an animal would be able to stretch enough to allow its escape from the collar.

- Whereas vegetable-tanned leather can be tooled or stamped, leather that has been treated with oil or chemicals will not take impressions..

How to Make a Leather Bracelet

This bracelet is made as a miniature version of a leather belt. Use leather stamps or tooling to personalize it or add studs for decoration.

⦿ Steps:

1. Determine the desired length and width of the bracelet. Measure the wrist and add approximately 2 to 3 inches to this measurement for a close-fitting bracelet.

2. Choose leather and a buckle. Use 6 to 8 oz. vegetable-tanned leather for the bracelet and a buckle that is the same width as the desired bracelet width.

3. Cut the bracelet from the leather. Decide at this point what shape the free end of the bracelet will be, and mark and cut it into the desired shape.

4. Fold the unshaped end of the bracelet back so that a crease is made 3/4 inches from the end.

5. Place a slot punch on the bracelet so that the punch's end evenly intersects the crease at the crease's center point. Hold the handle portion of the punch and strike the top with a wood or rawhide mallet. Repeat until the punch has completely punctured the leather.

6. Use a rotary punch or drive punch and mallet to make four rivet holes in the leather. The first two holes should be placed   inch from the slotted bracelet end and   inch from the bracelet's edges.

7. Place the second set of holes on the other side of the slot so that, when the bracelet end is folded back along the crease line, both sets of holes match up evenly.

8. Use an edge beveler to trim all the bracelet's edges. Do any tooling or decorative stamping at this time as well.

9. Insert the buckle prong through the punched slot so that the buckle is correctly positioned. Fold the slotted bracelet end back so that the rivet holes are lined up, and insert the rivets from the underside of the bracelet. Place the collar end on a flat work surface and affix the rivet caps to the rivets with a mallet.

10. Put the bracelet around the wrist. On the back of the bracelet, mark a hole position that will allow the bracelet to fit comfortably around the wrist when buckled. Mark a second hole, if desired to allow for a tighter or looser fit.

11. Punch the holes with a rotary punch or a drive punch and mallet. Make sure that the holes are centered.

✳ Tips:

- Cut the leather 2 or 3 inches longer than the length calculated in Step 1. Fit the strip around the wrist to determine the most comfortable fit and then trim the piece as needed.

- The diameter of the rivets and the punched holes should be equal. Look for rivets and punches that are approximately 1/8 inch in diameter.

- Use leather dye to color the bracelet, if desired. See 'eHow to Dye Leather' for instructions. Allow the leather to dry completely and then use a clean white cloth to rub neat's-foot oil or saddle soap along the length of the bracelet. Polish and remove the excess oil or soap with newspaper or rag paper.

- Insert a narrow leather loop (made from the same leather as the bracelet) over the slotted bracelet end before beginning Step 9. The loop should sit between the rivets and the buckle and will help hold the free end of the bracelet in place.

- Look for appropriately sized buckle sets that come with a buckle, metal belt loop and metal belt end.

How to Make a Leather Game Board

You can make a leather game board for any game you like ' checkers, chess, backgammon or any other favorites. This is a good project for those who have acquired some experience in tooling leather.

⊙**Steps:**

1. Determine the desired dimensions of the board and cut a piece of vegetable-tanned leather to those dimensions. See 'eHow to Cut Leather' for instructions.

2. Draw the design for the game board onto a piece of tracing film that has been cut to the same dimensions as the board.

3. Refer to an existing board that is made for the game for which your board will be made. You can even trace its design onto the tracing film.

4. Consider creating a 1- to 2-inch decorative border around the perimeter of a board with a checkered design.

5. Refer to 'eHow to Tool Leather' for instructions on transferring the board design onto the leather and using a swivel knife to cut the design into the leather.

6. Create a checkerboard design by making evenly spaced horizontal and vertical cuts on the leather. Use a beveling tool and mallet worked along the cut edges of every other resulting square.

7. Use a pear shading tool, camouflage tool or any textured stamps to depress and texture the squares on which the beveling tool has been used. This will produce an alternating series of raised and depressed squares.

8. Use two colors of acrylic paints, if desired, to paint the squares in alternating colors. Or, use just one color of paint for every other square and leave the remaining squares the color of the leather.

9. Dye the leather, if desired. Any dying should be done after the leather is tooled and before it is painted. See 'eHow to Paint Leather' and eHow to Dye Leather' for instructions.

. Look for suitable border designs in leather-tooling pattern books.

. Use any leather scraps to create game pieces for the board.

How to Make a Pair of Moccasins

These moccasins are very comfortable and can be made from a variety of garment-weight leathers. Once you have worn them a few times, a sole will be formed at the bottom of the shoe.

◉ Steps:

1. Stand with one foot on a piece of butcher paper or other medium- to heavyweight paper. Have someone trace around the outline of one of your feet with a pencil. Mark the position of the ankle on each side of the tracing. (You'll need to make a pattern for the other foot as well.)

2. Mark a spot on each side of the tracing that is 2 inches outside the ankle position marks made in Step 1.

3. Have your friend measure the distance from where the widest part of your foot touches the floor to halfway across the top of your foot. Add 3/8 inch to this measurement. Draw a line around the tracing that is equal to this measurement (plus the 3/8-inch). Mark only around the toe portion of the tracing, connecting the two marks made in Step 2.

4. Measure out 1 inches from the heel on both sides of the tracing and draw a straight line that extends to the left and right of the tracing.

5. Measure from the floor to the anklebone and add 6 inches to this measurement. Add a seam allowance to the side of the pattern, between the front seam allowance to the heel allowance. The seam allowances surrounding the tracing should form a 'T' shape.

6. Cut the pattern out along the traced lines and place the pattern on the wrong side of the leather. Trace around the pattern with a pencil or felt-tip pen. Use leather shears to cut the pattern out from the leather.

7. Fold the leather in half, right sides together, so that all the edges line up evenly. Use an awl to punch holes through both layers of leather, along the seam line, 3/8 inch from the edges. Make holes only at the back seam of the shoe and at the seam that will cover the top of the foot.

8. Use lacing thong and a lacing needle to whipstitch the pieces together through the punched holes. Prepare to whipstitch by first inserting and securing one tip of the lacing into the hollow end of the lacing needle.

9. Do a whipstitch by bringing the threaded lacing needle through the first set of holes from back to front. Pull the lacing all the way through until approximately 2 inches of the free end is left at the back. Bring the lacing needle over the edges of the leather to the back, then through the next hole. Repeat until the entire seam is sewn.

10. Position the free end of the lacing so that it is held under the first few stitches. Secure the end of the lacing in this way as well.

11. Turn the shoe right side out.

12. Place the shoe on your foot and arrange the ankle flap so that it is in the desired position. Make a small pencil mark on the shoe underneath the flap at the back, just above the top of the heel.

13. Attach a piece of lacing to the back of the shoe at the pencil mark made in Step 9. Use lacing whose length is approximately three times the circumference of your ankle. Attach the lacing at its center and use this to secure the ankle flap.

14. Repeat Steps 1-13 for the opposite foot.

✳ Tips:
- Use a piece of paper large enough so that several inches of paper are left on each side of the tracing.

- Make a mock-up of the pattern from some inexpensive scrap fabric. Make any adjustments and then cut the pattern from the leather.

- Use a 3-4 oz. calfskin, buckskin, doeskin or suede for your moccasins.

- Space holes about 1/4 to 1/8 inch apart. Make sure that the spaces between the holes are uniform.

- Use lacing thong that is the same width as the punched holes.

- Cut fringe along the ankle flap and/or decorate the flap with beads.

⚠ Warnings:
- The pattern for the heel portion of the moccasin will not conform to the contour of the traced heel line.

How to Sew a Double Needle Stitch on Leather
The double needle stitch is used to securely join two pieces of leather. Also called a saddler's stitch, it is one of the strongest used in leather work.

◉ Steps:
1. See "How to Use a Stitching Awl in Leather Work" for information on marking and making holes for the stitches.

2. Make sure that the holes in the two pieces of leather line up evenly.

3. Thread one leather-stitching needle or harness needle with either waxed linen thread or artificial sinew. Do not knot the thread end.

4. Pass the threaded needle through the first two corresponding stitching holes from either right to left or left to right. Draw the threaded needle through far enough so that an equal length of thread protrudes from each hole.

5. Thread the free end of the thread with a second needle.

6. Insert the left needle from left to right all the way through the next pair of holes to be stitched.

7. Insert the right needle from right to left all the way through the same pair of holes. Pull both threads taut.

8. Repeat for each consecutive set of holes to be stitched.

9. Take two or three stitches backward as you near the end of your stitching. Move forward again and continue stitching until you reach the end of your stitching line.

10. Tie off the work with one or two overhand knots. See "How to Make an Overhand Knot" in the Related eHows for instructions.

✳ Tips:

- Use a sewing machine and a wedge-point needle to stitch most garment-weight leathers.

- Use artificial sinew on rigid leathers. This type of thread is very strong and may cut through softer pieces.

- Punch a set of stitching holes, stitch through them and then punch the next set. If you punch all of the stitching holes at once, the leather will contract over time, and a hole may end up narrower than it was when you punched it.

- Finish a thread end midway through your work by following steps 9 and 10. Tie the knot so that it rests in a hole.

How to Tool Leather

A tooled leather piece is created by first cutting a design into a piece of leather. Various tools are then used to create depressions in the leather to give various design elements a raised appearance. Add a tooled design to any leatherwork project that uses vegetable-tanned leather.

⊙ Steps:

1. Tool the design before any dye or paint is applied to the leather.

2. Decide on a design and draw it onto tracing film.

3. Dampen the leather with a sponge and water, and position the tracing film onto the right side of the leather. Trace over the pattern with a ballpoint stylus or empty ballpoint pen. Press firmly. Trace all the lines.

4. Remove the film. The design should be replicated on the surface of the leather.

5. Trace over the outline with a swivel knife. Hold the knife so that your index finger rests in the U-shaped portion at the top of the handle and the body is held between your thumb and the inside of your middle finger.

6. Turn the knife by rotating its body between your thumb and your middle and ring fingers.

7. Keep the knife upright - at a 90-degree angle to the leather - as you cut. Cut with the corner of the knife toward you and cut only once.

8. Make sure to cut only deep enough to penetrate the grain of the leather.

9. Place the leather on the work surface and use a wood or rawhide mallet and a beveler, pear shader, and camouflage tool - the basics - to add texture to the piece and create depressions in the leather.

10. Place the wide edge of the beveler into the cut made by the swivel knife and strike the end of the tool with a mallet. Continue along the outside of the design in order to give the design a raised appearance.

11. Make sure to place the beveler along the design so that ridge lines are not formed each time you strike the tool with the mallet. This applies to the use of all the other tools as well.

12. Use the pear shader and camouflage tool to add texture to the design and background.

✳ Tips:

- Look for suitable designs on the Internet and in books on leatherwork and leather tooling.

- Start with a simple design and then move to more complex designs and projects.

- Practice using a swivel knife on small scraps of leather to begin with. Make sure that you can cut both straight and curved lines before you begin to tool your project.

- Do your stamping on a very hard work surface. Many leather toolers use a marble slab.

- Look for other tools that will give you the desired effect. For example, a veiner will create the veining on a leaf design and a seed tool will create a seedpod in the middle of a flower.

How to Sew a Tunnel Stitch on Leather

The tunnel stitch - a slightly different version of the double needle stitch - is used to join two adjacent pieces of leather. From the right side of the piece, it appears that the two edges are merely laid side by side. The stitching is visible only from the back.

⊙Steps:

1. See "How to Use a Stitching Awl in Leatherwork," under Related eHows, for instructions on marking the placement of the stitching line. The marks should be made on the back of the leather.

2. Push the stitching awl down into the leather at one of the hole markings. Stop when the awl point has pierced half the thickness of the leather.

3. Keep the awl inserted into the leather and push the awl tip out toward the edge of the leather. The awl tip should be perpendicular to the edge as it emerges from the leather. Withdraw the awl and repeat this procedure for each hole marking.

4. Lay the two pieces of leather side by side with the right sides down on a flat work surface. The punched edges should be next to each other and lined up evenly.

5. Thread one leather-stitching needle or harness needle with either waxed linen thread or artificial sinew. Do not knot the thread end.

6. Pass the threaded needle through the first stitching hole. The needle will pass through one hole, out through the leather edge, and in and out through the corresponding edge and stitching hole.

7. Draw the threaded needle out the corresponding hole far enough so that an equal amount of thread protrudes from each piece of leather.

8. Thread the free end of the sinew or thread with a second needle and work the remainder of the holes as you would a double needle stitch. See "How to Sew a Double Needle Stitch in Leatherwork" for instructions.

✳Tips:

- Choose needles and thread that are matched in diameter to the diameter of the stitching hole.

- Use artificial sinew on rigid leathers only. This type of thread is very strong and may cut through softer leathers.

- Set your stitching line approximately 1/8 inch from the leather edge.

- Punch a set of stitching holes, stitch through them, and then punch the next set. If you punch all of the stitching holes at once, the leather will contract over time and the hole may end up being narrower than it was when you punched it.

- Practice this stitch on scrap leather before using it on your project.

- Rub the awl with beeswax to ease its penetration of thicker leathers.

How to Paint Leather

Paint a large surface area of leather or simply use paints to add decoration to a small portion of your project.

Steps:

1. Clean the leather thoroughly before applying paint to the surface. Add 1 oz. leather bleach to a pint of water to make a gentle leather cleanser. Apply the cleanser with a soft-bristled brush or wool dauber.

2. Use acrylics to paint on leather. Make sure that the label of the acrylic paint container states that the paint is safe for use with leather.

3. Apply paint over a large area or use it to embellish only small portions of the leather project.

4. Cover a large surface area with paint by first applying a solution of paint and water to the leather's surface. This will prepare the leather's surface for the application of undiluted paint.

5. Mix a solution of one part water to one part paint and use a wool dauber to apply the solution to the leather's surface. Apply with long, even strokes.

6. Add more water to the solution if you see that it is not being absorbed into the leather's surface. Add more paint if you see that the solution is not adding much color to the surface.

7. Apply one or two coats of the solution, allowing the paint to be completely absorbed into the leather between coats. The leather should remain slightly damp, not dry.

8. Apply the undiluted acrylic paint with a large paintbrush or wool dauber. Make sure that the coats of paint are applied evenly. Use long, even strokes.

9. Embellish small areas on the leather's surface by applying undiluted acrylic paint with a small paintbrush.

10. Flex the leather several times during the drying process. This will help prevent the paint from cracking when the piece is completely dry. Flex the leather in between coats of paint as well.

Tips:

- Follow the instructions given on the leather bleach container.

- Consider using leather dye rather than paint to cover large areas.

- Test the paint/water solution on a piece of scrap leather before applying it to your project.

- Lightly sponge the surface of the leather with water before you paint it. This will help the color to be absorbed evenly into the leather.

- Use vegetable-tanned leather if you are going to paint the entire surface of your project. The tanning processes that other types of leather go through prohibit paint or dye from adequately penetrating the surface.

How to Make a Leather Keychain Fob

Keychain fobs are easy, inexpensive gifts to make. All you need are some basic tools and a small piece of scrap leather.

1. Determine the desired dimensions and shape of the keychain fob. An average fob is approximately 3 to 4 inches in length and 1   to 2 inches in width. Add 1   inches to the desired length to allow for the tab that will be looped around the key ring.

2. Obtain a piece of leather large enough to accommodate the desired dimensions. A good weight for a leather fob is 4 to 6 ounces. You will also need a rivet for holding the looped tab in place.

3. Refer to 'eHow to Cut Leather' and 'eHow to Finish the Edges of a Piece of Leather' for instructions on marking the shape of the fob onto the leather, cutting out the shape and finishing the edges. Make sure to include a 1   -inch-long by   -inch-wide tab at the top of the fob shape.

4. Do any dying, painting or tooling of the leather piece.

5. Use a pencil to mark the rivet holes on the back of the fob, along the tab. Make one mark   inch from the end of the tab and make the second mark   inch from the first. Make sure that both marks are centered along the tab.

6. Use a rotary punch or drive punch and mallet to make holes in the leather at the marked rivet holes. The rivet diameter and the diameter of each punched hole should be equal.

7. Insert the tab through the key ring and fold the tab back, wrong sides together, so that the rivet holes line up.

8. Insert the rivet from the underside of the fob. Place the fob on a flat work surface and affix the rivet cap to the rivet with a mallet.

Tips:

- Use vegetable-tanned leather if the leather will be dyed or tooled.

- Use a rivet and punch that are each approximately 1/8 inch in diameter.

- Place two rivets instead of one to affix the tab to the fob.

How to Make a Leather Checkbook Cover

This plain suede checkbook cover can be easily cut out and sewn with standard sewing equipment.

Steps:

1. Choose any color garment suede (2-3 oz.) for the cover. For a standard checkbook, you will need a piece of suede that measures 6   inches wide X 12   inches long.

2. Lay the suede out onto a flat work surface, right side down. Use a pencil, ruler and heavy-duty scissors or leather shears to measure, mark and cut out the suede to the dimensions given in Step 1.

3. Leave the suede piece with the right side down and position it in front of you so that the long edges are to your left and right.

4. Fold the top edge down 2 inches toward the center of the piece. Instead of pinning the folded down portion, use small pieces of double-sided tape to hold it into place. Pins will create permanent holes in the suede.

5. Repeat Step 4 for the bottom edge of the suede.

6. Insert a size 14 wedge-point needle into your sewing machine and stitch all around the edges of the cover. Keep your stitches 1/8 inch from the cover's edges.

7. Use all-purpose thread in a color that matches the suede. If you cannot find an exact match, choose a thread color that is a shade darker than the suede.

8. Secure the thread ends with knots rather than machine backstitching.

9. Remove the tape after your sewing is completed.

✳**Tips:**
• Go slowly when sewing so close to the edge and make sure that the free edges are evenly lined up. Practice on some scrap suede before you sew your first cover.

How to Make a Leather Belt
Belts make a great gift for anyone and are among the simplest of leather-working projects.

◉ **Steps:**
1. Choose leather and a buckle for your belt. Vegetable-tanned leather is most commonly used in the production of belts, as it can be easily tooled and dyed.

2. Cut your belt from the leather. See "How to Cut Leather," under Related eHows, for instructions. The belt should be 1 foot longer than the waist measurement and equal in width to the interior width of the chosen buckle.

3. Decide what shape you want the free belt end to take. You can make it pointed, rounded, square - whatever shape you like. Look at a variety of existing belts to get ideas. Mark the belt end and use a razor knife and straightedge to cut it to the desired shape.

4. Fold the uncut end of the belt back so that a crease is made 1 1/2 inches from the belt end. Place a slot punch on the belt so that the punch's end evenly intersects the crease at the crease's center point.

5. Hold the handle portion of the punch and strike the top with a wood or rawhide mallet. Repeat until the punch has completely punctured the leather.

6. Use a rotary punch or a drive punch and mallet to make four rivet holes in the leather. The diameter of the rivets and the punched holes should be equal, and the holes should be placed evenly around the slot. The first two holes should be placed 1/4 inch from the belt end, and each hole should be 1/4 inch from the belt's edges.

7. Place the second set of holes on the other side of the slot so that when the belt end is folded back along the crease line, both sets of holes match up evenly.

8. Use an edge beveler to trim all of the belt edges. Do any tooling or decorative stamping at this time as well.

9. Use leather dye to color the belt. See "How to Dye Leather," under Related eHows, for instructions. Allow the belt to dry completely, then use a clean white cloth to rub neat's-foot oil or saddle soap along the length of the belt. Polish and remove the excess oil or soap with newspaper or rag paper.

10. Insert the buckle prong through the punched slot so that the buckle is correctly positioned. Fold the uncut belt end back so that the rivet holes are lined up, and insert the rivets from the underside of the belt. Place the belt end on a flat work surface and affix the rivet caps to the rivets with a mallet.

11. Determine the placement of the holes that the buckle's prong will be inserted through. Put the belt around the waist of the wearer so that the buckle is at the center of the waist. On the underside of the belt, mark a hole position that will give the wearer a snug belt fit.

12. Mark a series of holes 1 inch apart from the point determined in the previous step to the belt's free end. Punch the holes with a rotary punch or a drive punch and mallet. Make sure the holes are centered.

Tips:

- Consider purchasing a precut belt blank, especially if you plan on making just one belt. This is a cost-effective alternative to purchasing an entire piece of vegetable-tanned leather. Just make sure the belt blank is wide enough for the chosen buckle.

- Invest in a strap cutter if you plan on making many belts. This tool allows you to easily and quickly cut leather into straps of various sizes.

- Keep the leather evenly dampened while you work it. This makes the leather easier to manipulate. Either spray the entire piece lightly with a spray bottle of water or dampen it with a sponge.

- Look for rivets and punches with a diameter of approximately 1/8 inch.

- The rivet holes should be placed around the slot hole so that if a line were to be drawn connecting the holes, a square or rectangle would be formed around the slot.

How to Make a Braided Leather Belt

The ends of this belt are left alone while the center portion of the belt is cut into strips and braided. The look seems almost impossible to achieve, but once you know how the braid is done, you'll realize what a simple leatherworking project this is.

Steps:

1. Refer to 'eHow to Make a Leather Belt' and 'eHow to cut Leather' for instructions on measuring for and cutting out a leather belt.

2. Use a pencil to make two vertical lines along the length of the belt. Space the lines so that the belt is divided vertically into three equal portions.

3. Cut the leather along these two lines to form three strips. Leave approximately 3 inches of each belt end uncut.

4. Lay the belt vertically in front of you and begin to braid the interior leather strips from bottom to top.

5. Place the left strip over the center strip. Place the right strip over the strip that is now in center position. Place the left-most strip so that it is in the center.

6. Bring the bottom belt end up and insert it between the left-most strip and the strip that is at the center. Pass the belt end under the center and right-most strips. Pass the belt end through as far as it will go and then pull down toward the bottom.

7. Bring the right-most strip to the center, then do the same with the strip that is to your left. Place the strip that is now to your right into center position.

8. Bring the bottom belt end up again as in Step 6. This time, however, pass the belt end through the right and center strips and under the center and left-most strips. Pass all the way through, as in Step 6, and pull down.

9. Repeat Steps 5-8 until the entire length is braided. After braiding is complete, arrange the strips so that they are evenly braided from top to bottom.

10. Continue with the belt-making process as described in 'eHow to Make a Leather Belt."

Tips:

- Do any dyeing of the belt prior to cutting the braiding strips.

- Leave enough of each belt end uncut as is needed for the buckle.

How to Dye Leather

Leather dye is a wonderful alternative to paint, especially if you need to color large surface areas.

Steps:

1. Choose a leather dye appropriate to your piece of leather. Vegetable-tanned leather takes dye very well, and many leather dyes can be used only with it.

2. Choose a leather dye based on the dyed leather samples provided at the place of purchase. As with many dyes, the applied dye color can look radically different than it does when in the bottle.

3. Clean the surface of the leather. Mix a solution of 1 oz. leather bleach to 1 pint water and apply the cleanser with a soft-bristle brush or wool dauber.

4. Dampen the leather with a spray bottle of water or a sponge. Spray or sponge evenly across the surface.

5. Apply the leather dye in long, even strokes across the surface of the leather. Make sure that the color remains even. Apply coats of dye until you achieve the desired shade.

6. Let the first coat of dye dry until the leather's surface no longer has a wet look to it. The average drying time between coats is 1 to 2 hours. The exact time will depend on the leather.

7. Flex the leather several times during the drying process. This will keep the leather's fibers loose and will help keep the leather from becoming too stiff.

8. Allow the leather to dry thoroughly, and then buff it with a clean, soft cloth to remove any excess dye and to give the leather a polished look.

9. Apply a coat of leather finish to the leather's surface. Finishes come in both spray cans and bottles. Spray evenly over the entire surface of leather or apply it from the bottle with a wool dauber.

✳Tips:

- Apply a leather deglazer to remove waxy or oily residues from the surface of the leather. Follow the directions on the product label.

- Keep the leather damp. If water drops are spilled on one portion of the leather, dampen the leather until the surface is uniformly damp. This will help prevent water spots on the leather.

- Check the instructions on the leather dye for recommended time between coats.

- Mix a leather dye solvent with the leather dye to thin the dye and create a lighter shade. Use according to the directions on the product's label.

- Use oil-based dyes for a richer color and use water-based dyes for a more even application.

How to Choose Leather-Working Tools
Basic leather craft projects don't require a lot of tools. Here are some of the items you'll need to work just about any project, from simple to complex.

⊙Steps:

1. Make sure that you have a flat, stable surface on which to work. A rubber mat placed under your work will prevent the surface from being scarred and will also protect the blades of your

cutting tools.

2. Measure out lines and curves onto leather with items such as a sturdy ruler and a French curve. Choose metal measuring tools, as these can also be used as straightedges against which leather can be cut. Mark lines along the leather's surface with pencils and felt-tip pens.

3. Use items like leather bleach and leather deglazer to clean dirt, oil and residue from the surface of the leather before any work is begun.

4. Color your leather with leather dyes and paints. These items can be found at any leather-craft store, as can paint and dye applicators such as wool daubers and paintbrushes.

5. Cut out leather pieces with a razor knife and use paring tools such as edge bevelers and skives to remove thin layers from a piece of leather. Leather shears can be used to cut thinner pieces of leather.

6. Tool a piece of leather with a swivel knife, wood or rawhide mallet, and a variety of leather stamps. Decorative cuts are made with a swivel knife and then the mallet and stamps are used to create textures and depressed surfaces around those cuts. Stamps come in a variety of patterns.

7. Make perforations in your leather with an awl, a stitching awl (for holes that will be stitched through) and/or leather hole punches of various sizes. Use a rotary hole punch for easy, even hole placement.

8. Sew leather with leather-craft sewing needles, waxed linen thread and artificial sinew. Use the waxed linen thread on softer, thinner pieces of leather and use the artificial sinew on harder pieces. The artificial sinew does not stretch and may cut into the stitching holes in soft pieces of leather.

✳Tips:

- Use acrylic paints instead of leather paints. Make sure, however, that the paint you use is safe for leather.

- Run a piece of beeswax along the length of any unwaxed thread before stitching.

- Affix leather pieces to one another without stitching by using leather glue.

- Keep a plastic spray bottle of water and a sponge in your work area. Use these to dampen the leather while you work it.