

Introduction to Leatherworking — for Archers

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This handout is from a class in which materials, tools, and patterns are shown, and techniques are demonstrated. The class is intended to introduce archers to the process of making their own leather archery gear. Thus, this handout is intended to serve as an outline of the steps involved and a reminder list of the tools and materials needed.

Choose project.

Choose assembly method.

Different stitching techniques require differing amounts of overlapping of the component pieces, affecting pattern.

Create paper or cardboard pattern.

If lacing with thongs, plan hole spacing on paper pattern.

Plan decoration.

For a plain project, finished/sealed leather may be used. If a tooled or embossed decoration is desired, unsealed vegetable-tanned leather must be used.

Purchase materials.

Leather - bring your pattern pieces with you and lay them out on the leather. Consider the location of blemishes, and use the grain of the leather appropriately for the finished piece. (Example: The long grain of the leather follows the body length of the animal; if you are making a quiver or bracer, the long grain should run the height of the quiver or along the length of the forearm.)

Lacing - for the construction method chosen; thong, artificial sinew or waxed linen thread.

Dye.

Sealer.

Paints.

Hardware - such as D-rings, clasps, rivets or studs.

Purchase or borrow tools.

Sharp utility knife or leather shears.

Metal straight edge.

Punch.

Sponge - make sure this is not chemically treated. (Most grocery store sponges contain soaps.)

Daubers, swabs & rags - for applying dyes and sealers.

Paint brushes.

Tooling or carving tools - swivel knife & sharpener, rawhide mallet, stamping tools, smooth base surface (such as marble or masonite).

Stitching tools - stitching groove cutter, stitching spacer, awl, saddle stitching needles (for thread or sinew) or latigo needle (for thong).

Edge beveler.

Edge polisher/burnisher.

Trace pattern pieces onto leather, remembering to consider blemishes and grain. If tracing the pieces on the top surface of the leather, be very sure of their placement before marking the leather. If tracing onto the rough side of the leather, remember to turn the pieces upside-down.

Cut leather pieces with utility knife or leather shears.

Break sharp edges, top-side and reverse, with edge beveler.

Polish or burnish the edges. (This can also be done while the leather is wet during tooling.)

Prepare stitching or lacing holes.

Lacing - punch holes using the hole placement from your pattern.

Stitching - adjust the stitching groove tool to half the "seam" overlap you planned for; use the tool to cut a channel along the edges to be stitched; roll the stitching spacer tool

along the channel to mark your stitching holes; use the awl and brute force or a mallet to create holes which your needles will fit through snugly; be sure to protect the surface you are pushing the awl into!)

Decorate.

Wet leather using untreated sponge; leather should be evenly moist, not sopping.

Transfer your decorative pattern.

Tool, stamp or emboss the pattern.

Emboss your name or maker's mark to sign your work.

Apply dye to moist leather using dauber; repeat until the leather seems to have absorbed all it can or until the desired tone is achieved.

When the leather is dry, paint the pattern if desired.

When the paint has dried, apply sealer to all surfaces except the raw reverse (so the leather can continue to "breathe").

Assemble the pieces of your project.

Attach hardware, if any.

Important reminders:

Unsealed leather is vulnerable; any moisture will permanently mark it. Therefore, always dampen the entire surface evenly.

Damp leather will take any impression; be careful not to rest your fingernails, rings or tools on the dampened surface while you are working on it.

Plan the sequence of assembling your project pieces so that you can reach the stitching areas. (Example: do not add a cord to divide the body of the quiver before you have sewn on the bottom; the divider would prevent you from getting your arm inside.)

Special considerations:

Bracers - should be made from leather thick enough to truly protect the arm; plan the lacing method so lacing thong and hardware cannot catch the bowstring.

Quiver - build adjustability into your design through the least expensive components (straps, hardware) so changes in garb or body size can be accommodated; components do not need to be made "flat" - moist leather can be shaped, if desired. (Example: a "bellied" or squash-shaped quiver for bolts.)

Sheepskin or fur - is sometimes used as a cuff on quivers; shave or cut the "fuzz" from areas to be sewn through so it will not interfere with the stitching.