



Instructions for use

INITIAL WASH

Clean all blood and body fluids off the fresh skin by hosing down with fresh water and allow to drain prior to salting

SALTING:

Take the skin and trim off hooves, ears and any other unwanted appendages. Lay the skin on the ground or table, flesh side up and give a liberal covering of common salt. Cooking salt is best as the fine grain is even and quick in its action upon the hide. The affect of the salt is to "cure" the skin. It prevents deterioration of the hide and makes it ready for fleshing. Ensure the salt reaches every corner of the skin and right to the edges. Once the skin is well salted fold it flesh sides together and place it on a palette or other raised surface from which any fluid that may drain from the skin can run clear. The skins should be stored in an open airy shed or outbuilding sheltered from the weather. Leave salted skins to stand for 2/3 days for small skins. 3/6 days for larger skins, at which time the skins are ready for fleshing.

FLESHING:

The object of fleshing is to remove all fat, flesh and membrane, which adheres to and is part of the actual skin which is to be made into leather. It is essential that all this material is removed from the hide if a good tanning job is to be done. The salting will make the work a lot easier in that it will have removed most of the natural greasy nature of the fat. The fleshing is done over a beam, Fig 1. The beam is made from a board or pipe or other smooth piece of timber/plastic placed over a trestle or similar support. The beam should be adjusted to waist height. The end upon which the fleshing is done is better to work on if slightly curved. The knife should be sharp and long enough to use with two hands, one hand holding the handle and the other pressing the blade end. The action of the knife is to place it at right angles to the surface of the skin and push away from you (Fig. 4) The skin should always be placed on the beam, tail end to your waist, head end furthest from you, trapping the tail end between the beam and your abdomen, always flesh the skin from tail to head to avoid tearing. Continue to scrape with the knife in the one place until the flesh and the membrane begin to move. Once this happens it will be found simple to extend the area. Occasionally it may be found easier to pull the flesh and membrane away with the hands. Take time and have patience with this stage of the work. It is very necessary to do this job well and you will become quite an expert with just a little practise. The essential thing is to keep a very sharp edge on the knife with a Blade-Tech Knife Sharpener (www.bladetech.co.uk) and keep clearing the edges of the blade when it becomes clogged.

WASHING:

Ideally a large tub, barrel, polythene bin or similar container of 20/30 gallons capacity is useful for this work, together with an old table to throw the wet skins on to soap, particularly wool skins which are heavy when wet.

After fleshing take the skin and soak by sloshing first in COLD water. This will remove blood or other stains which should be thoroughly washed out at this stage of the cleaning. The secondary object is also to remove the salt remaining on the skin. Remove the skins and allow to drain whilst the tub is emptied and refilled with HOT water and the appropriate amount of Detergent or washing powder (standard washing powder used in a domestic washing machine) the water should not be any hotter that the hand can be held in comfortably. Allow the skin and wool to absorb the water by plunging up and down a few times in the tub. Throw the drenched skin onto the table and sprinkle detergent powder onto the wool/hair side, rub in well, re-dip the skin quickly once into the hot water, throw on the table and it will then lather well. Ensure all stains are removed at this stage. It is advisable to wear rubber gloves and an apron when washing the skins as many have small thorns etc. hidden in the hair and wool. Sheep skins need plenty of soaping both sides as they tend to be of a greasy nature. Ensure that the soap is well rinsed out of the skins with clear warm water. Again, rinsing well is vital to the performance of the tan. This part of the process should not be under done or skipped. Rinse until no soap suds are visible and the rinsing water runs clear. Allow the skins to drain until all surplus water stops running off, maybe an hour or so while the pickle is being prepared.

PICKLE:

The object of the pickle is to prepare the skin for tannage. Wearing an apron, a pair of rubber gloves and a face mask, mix contents of **pickle powder (bag with Red tab), into two pints (1.14 Litres) of hot water**, stir until dissolved. Lay the skin flesh uppermost on a flat table and brush the solution into the flesh side of the skin, make sure it contacts all parts of the skin. Fold flesh sides together and pile away on a palette for 24 hours, lying flat. After 24 hours the skins are pickled and will feel "sharper" to the touch.

TANNING:

Wearing an apron, a pair of rubber gloves, and a face mask mix contents of **Tanning powder (bag with Blue tab) into four pints (2.28 Litres) of hot water**. Stir well until all the powder is dissolved. Apply as before with a brush to the flesh side of the skin. Cover the whole hide with a nice coat, don't skimp on the tanning. Fold flesh sides together and pile for 2 hours. Give a second coat after this time, fold again and pile for 24 hours. In normal weather this is sufficient for average skins to tan thoroughly but on heavier hides, Red Deer, Calf etc. a third and fourth coat for a further 24 hours will be found beneficial in very cold weather conditions. To visually test the penetration of the tannage make a cut in the edge of the thick part of the neck skin. The Blue/Green colour will have penetrated to the hair roots when thoroughly tanned. If it has not done so subsequent coats of the solution should be applied at 24 hourly intervals until further visual tests show that penetration is complete. After this time the skins should be thoroughly rinsed in cold water and allowed to drain. You will notice a transformation has occurred in the nature of the skin which is now becoming leather. In order to finish the tannage however, it is necessary to apply a third solution.