

Leather

People have been making leather from the dried hides of animals since prehistoric times. Early humans used leather to make clothing and shelter. Each civilization developed its own ways to soften and preserve leather, a process called *tanning*. Before tanning, every bit of meat and fat was removed from the hide by scraping. Sometimes the hair was scraped off a dry hide, but sometimes it was wet-scraped. , Animal grease and sometimes animal brains were rubbed into the hide. Then the tanner might stretch the leather hide over a smoldering fire to make the leather waterproof. Later cultures discovered how to tan leather using the bark of trees. This is called vegetable tanning. In the 19th century, the discovery of chrome tanning using chemicals streamlined the tanning process.

Although some modern leather artists process their own leather, most purchase leather. Many, however, prefer to use leather that is vegetable tanned instead chrome tanned. Vegetable tanning is more environmentally friendly.

There are many techniques for working leather, including carving, stamping, shaping, painting, gilding, and dyeing. Leather workers make clothing, footwear, accessories, saddles, jewelry, journals, cases for tools and knives, and fine art.

