

Tanning

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Maybe you're just too cheap to pay for anyone else to do the job (local shops can ask up to \$200 to tan a coyote hide). Use this method for rabbit hides, deer hides, moose skin, or coyote pelts, just to name a few.

Skinning and Storing

After hunting or processing livestock for the table, it's a shame to toss out a nice pelt. Use this low cost tanning method for mammal pelts to leave fur on the skin. It will result in a soft and workable hide which can be used as is or cut up for sewing projects.

Cool fresh hides immediately. Trim the flesh and visible fat from the hide and lay the skin flat and fur side down in the shade, preferably on a cold concrete or rock surface. When the skin is cool to the touch, immediately cover the fleshy completely with plain, uniodized salt. You will require three to five pounds for a sheep or deer skin. If the hides aren't salted within a few hours of when you removed the flesh they will decompose and lose their hair during processing.

Transport the skin flat and store the pelt out of reach of animals, who will gnaw the hides. Don't stretch the skin, but make sure it has no curled edges. Add more salt as some will have fallen off during the transportation, and fill low spots where liquids will pool.

Allow the skin to dry until it is crispy, which may take between a few days and a couple of weeks. When completely dry, the skin is very stable and won't change or deteriorate appreciably.

Ingredients

When you're ready to tan the skins, or you're getting ready to go out and find some, assemble the following:

7 gallons water 2 pounds (16 cups) bran flakes 16 cups plain or pickling salt (not iodized) 2 large plastic trash cans (30 gallon) and one lid 4 foot wooden stirring stick 3 1/2 cups battery acid (from auto parts store) 2 boxes baking soda wood rack or stretcher neat's-foot oil nails wire bristle brush

This recipe makes enough tanning solution to tan four large animal skins; or ten rabbit skins; or about six mediumsized pelts such as groundhog. (Cut the recipe in half for fewer skins).

Mixing

Soak the dried skins in clear, fresh water until flexible for a few hours before you tan. Boil three gallons of water and pour over the bran flakes. Let this sit for an hour, then strain the bran flakes out, saving the brownish water solution.

Bring the remaining four gallons of water to a boil. Put the 16 cups of salt in a plastic trash can. Pour the water over the salt and use the stirring stick to mix until the salt dissolves. Add the brown bran liquid and stir.

When this solution is lukewarm, you are ready to add the battery acid. Read the warning label and first aid advice on the battery acid container. While wearing gloves and an old, long-sleeved shirt, very carefully pour the battery acid down the inside of the trash can into the solution and mix thoroughly. don't let it splash.

At this point, you can peel the dried inner skin. If you have fresh skins, use as is. Add the skins to the solution and stir, pressing the skins down carefully under the liquid until fully saturated. Leave them to soak for 40 minutes, stirring from time to time to make sure all parts of the hides are exposed to the solution. During the soak, fill your other trash can with clear, lukewarm water. After 40 minutes, soaking is complete.

Use the stirring stick and carefully move the skins one by one into the other trash can. This is the rinsing process, which removes the excess salt from the skins. Stir and slosh the skins for about five minutes, changing the water when it looks dirty.

You may want to add a box of baking soda to the rinse water at this point. Adding baking soda will neutralize some of the acid in the skin - this is good because there will be less possibility of residual acid in the fur that will affect sensitive people. This also may cause the preserving effects of the acid to be neutralized. If skin or fur will spend a lot of time in contact with human skin use baking soda, but skip it if the pelt will be used as a rug or wall hanging.

Final Preparation

Remove the hides from rinse water. They will be very heavy. Hang them over a board or the back of a firm surface to drain. Now, using a sponge, rag or paint brush, swab the still-damp skin side of the hide with an ounce of neat's-foot oil. It should be absorbed quickly, leaving only a slight oily residue. Tack the hide to your "stretcher." We use salvaged wood pallets. Gently pull the hide as you tack it so there's some tension in the skin. No need to exert excess pressure or overstretch. Set the hide in a shady place to dry.

Your acidic tanning solution can be neutralized for disposal by adding a couple boxes of baking soda. It will froth and bubble vigorously and release a potentially toxic gas, so give it plenty of ventilation and get away from the bucket while this is happening. Do not pour it down your drain.

Check the hide every day. When the skin side feels dry to the touch in the center, but still flexible and somewhat soft, take it down from the rack. Lay the fur side down and go over the skin with a wire bristle brush. This softens the skin and lightens the color. Don't brush heavily or excessively in one spot, just enough to give a suede-like appearance. After this, set the skin where it can fully dry for a day or so longer.

Doing Business

Once your friends know you can tan hides, be prepared for them to bring around their hunting trophies and livestock skins for treatment. Don't do it for free. Commercial tanners get \$25 to \$45 to tan a hide, and you should price your work accordingly. Otherwise you'll find yourself swamped with every skin in the region and no spare time.

In exchange, give your friends a professional, quality job and an upfront understanding about what might go wrong. People get very sensitive about their skins and this precaution will prevent potential misunderstandings and keep your friendship.

Steal This Wiki

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