

1965

EC65-443 Leather

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Petersen, Gerda, "EC65-443 Leather" (1965). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 3730.
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E.C. 65-443

LEATHER

By Gerda Petersen
Clothing Specialist

Leather garments are elegant and luxurious. They can be made by the home sewer who is willing to take time and sew carefully.

Deer hunters need not waste the hides of their trophies. A commercial tannery can convert them into a soft, pliable leather that may be made into many articles such as jackets, gloves, purses, and mocassins.

Choosing a Pattern

1. Choose a simple pattern that is suitable for a heavy fabric.
2. Choose one with few seams, darts, and details and no eased seam. Kimono and raglan sleeves are good.

Purchasing Skins

Leather and suede are sold as individual skins. Select skins that are uniform in weight and color. If pattern is purchased first the pieces may be used to determine the number of skins needed.

Laying and Cutting the Pattern

1. Fit the pattern. Make a trial garment of muslin or an old sheet so no refitting will need to be done in the leather.
2. Cut a complete paper pattern for both front and back. Eliminate center back seam if skin is large enough.
3. Lay complete pattern on a single layer of skin to plan how and where to cut. Don't fold skins and avoid cutting two thicknesses at a time.
4. Place all pattern pieces lengthwise on the right side of the skin. The top of the pattern pieces point to the neck of the skin. The grain of the leather runs with the backbone of the animal and a coat should be cut so this runs parallel to a person's backbone.
5. Use weights or gummed tape to hold pattern in place. Pins leave holes in the leather. If they are used, pin only in outer seam allowance.
6. Mark construction details with chalk on the wrong side.
7. Cut with sharp scissors or razor blade.
8. Cut facings from skins or line the edge.
9. Extend front interfacing to armhole for support. Interfacings are important for shape retention.
10. Cut corners slightly rounded instead of square.

Extension Service

University of Nebraska College of Agriculture and Home Economics
and U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating
E. F. Frolik, Dean J. L. Adams, Director

Construction Techniques

1. Silk thread is preferred because of its strength. If it is not available use a heavy duty mercerized cotton.
2. Test the machine stitch on a scrap of leather. Use a new, medium sized needle. Try 8 to 10 stitches per inch - shorter stitches may look nicer for top stitching. Use a balanced tension that is slightly loose. The pressure should be light to keep from marring the leather.
3. Lightweight paper placed between leather and feed dogs of machine prevents scuffing the leather.
4. Stitch with care to avoid ripping. Stitching errors will show. Stitch from top to bottom being careful not to stretch the leather. Don't back stitch but leave enough thread to tie the ends and take a few hand stitches.
5. Stitch darts from the widest part to the point. Slash and press open. Glue sides down. (Use fabric glue or rubber cement.)
6. Reinforce seams with preshrunk tape at points of strain. Snip edge of tape to prevent puckering.
7. Glue seams flat or topstitch on each side of the seam line.
8. Cut out small "v's" before finishing curved seams.
9. Test buttonhole method on a scrap of leather:
 - a. Bound buttonholes. Make front of buttonhole, pull through the binding strips and glue to the wrong side of the front. When facing is attached, slit facing for the buttonhole and overcast edges of the slit by hand. A very little cement will hold the facing side of the buttonhole to the front.
 - b. Regular machine buttonhole. Or stitch rectangle close to slash marking; then stitch again just inside the first row and slash.
10. Face waistband with preshrunk ribbon.
11. Use double stitching on patch pocket seams. Start the seam at the bottom and middle of the pocket to avoid ending threads at the corners.
12. Make hems 1" to 2" wide. Don't hand sew but glue hem and hammer lightly in place.
13. Have only one seam in the belt if possible. Place that seam in the middle on the back side of the belt. Sew ends in separate seams. Turn belt and sew up the opening (that you left for turning) by hand.

Pressing

1. Use a warm (low setting) iron and no steam. Use brown paper for a press cloth.
2. After pressing seams, facings and style lines, flatten by tapping with a wooden mallet.
3. Suede has a tendency to crock (color rubs off) so cover ironing board with brown paper.

CARE OF LEATHER

1. Brush suede after each wearing with a rubber suede brush. Small soiled areas may be cleaned by rubbing with a rubber sponge or art gum.
2. Shiny spots on suede may also be renewed by using a very fine sandpaper.
3. Special suede dressing or "renewer" may be used to brighten the appearance.

4. Spots and stains may be removed from leather in the same manner as other fabrics. Act promptly and handle it carefully. It is more difficult to clean oil and grease from suede. It is better to combine an absorbent, such as fuller's earth or sawdust with a solvent such as carbon tetrachloride. It is less likely to leave a ring. Solvents sometimes remove color so this should be used cautiously.
5. Cleaning by a reliable dry cleaner is recommended but it is possible to wash most leathers. Suedes cannot generally be cleaned successfully with water. These suggestions may help you in washing leathers:
 - a. Use a mild soap and lukewarm water. Don't squeeze or wring.
 - b. Lay the wet leather on unprinted absorbent paper with newspapers underneath. Press out water by rolling with a smooth glass jar. Place on fresh paper to dry.
 - c. Work the leather between the hands or pull gently before it is completely dry.
 - d. Press only when leather is dry.