



Learn leatherwork can be used as a beautiful art canvas when you cut and/or decorate leather. Learn stamping, carving, or tooling. Discover how leather can be transformed into items for daily use.



Exploring 4-H Visual Arts - Leather

Spark Activity: Leather Bookmark



Gather some leather, leather stamps, a mallet, a punch, and some lacing. You also need some paper and a pencil to sketch your design.

Begin with a piece of leather. You can start with one that is already cut for a bookmark or this is a great project to use up a piece of scrap leather (have an adult help you cut it, if needed).

Trace the shape of your bookmark onto a piece of paper. Sketch your design onto the paper so that you have a pattern to work from. This helps you consider how you will incorporate elements of art and principles of design into your project.

The first step in making your project is to dampen the leather with a sponge as evenly as possible. This softens the leather so that it will take the image of the stamp.

Position the leather stamp onto your leather and strike the head of the tool with the mallet to create a design. Continue around the bookmark to create your design. You may also choose to use letter tools to add interest to your bookmark.

Use a 3/16" drive punch on a cutting board surface to make a hole at the top of your bookmark. Use leather stain or finish to evenly coat your bookmark. Apply the finish in circular motions and buff with a paper towel to rub in the color and remove excess stain. When dry, add the lacing to the top of your bookmark.

4-H Project Levels and Goals

Beginner

- Learn leather craft skills, appreciate the natural beauty and usefulness of leather, and strive for quality in personal craftsmanship
- Learn the principles of good design; create designs by cutting leather or using stamping tools
- Develop a pattern using one or more stamping tools; create balance in design and color

Intermediate

- Become creative and original; use color effectively on cut or stamped patterns
- Excel at producing basic methods of lacing, stitching, and leather finishing
- Create a balanced pattern and stamp creative designs on different articles, including jewelry, coasters, luggage tags, cell phone cases, card cases, belts, or dog collars

Advanced

- Advance your skills in cutting, carving and tooling with conventional or stylized designs, background dyeing, and using antique or two-tone finishes
- Learn inverted leather carving using other stamping tools, including the skiving tool and gouging tool
- Learn the importance of cleaning leather

Put Your Project Into Action

Show Your Skills

- Make a poster on what era interests you (cavemen, middle ages, pioneers) and tell about how they used leather that is different from today
- Create a leather display with common leather sources (cattle, sheep, shark, and elk) and their uses (gloves, saddle, shoes, sporting goods)
- Create a display showing all the tools you use and how to use them to create designs

Service and Leadership

- Make coasters for a retirement home
- Teach your club to create a gift like a key ring
- Make luggage tags for foster care and donate to your local health department
- Clean leather tack at local therapeutic riding farms
- Make bookmarks for the local library
- Teach a workshop to beginners on bracelet making
- Make hanging name tags for your 4-H club officers

Entrepreneurship

- Make items to sell at a craft show
- Make coasters to sell at the local coffee shop
- Make and sell personalized luggage tags
- Make gift tags and package them for Christmas
- Make dated key chains to sell to graduates
- Carve / sell personalized tablet or cell phone holders

Technology Connection

- There are hundreds of possible tannins - fewer are used now than 150 years ago - look into innovative ways to tan the leather
- Design and cut leather jewelry or home decor

Connecting with a Mentor

- Shoe repair store leatherworker
- Art teacher
- Leather store
- Saddle maker
- International Council of Tanners:
<https://leathercouncil.org/>

Events

- Visit an art fair or craft show to see if there are leather items
- Attend an antique market or show to find vintage leather work



Careers Related to Visual Arts - Leather

Artist / Leather Designer Design Engineer - Textiles
Saddle Maker Leather Upholstery
Leather Repair Art Teacher

Start a Conversation

Would you like to design your own decorative leather item?
How do you think leather color was created, and why is leather so smooth?

Why do you think a leather belt is so expensive? Will it last longer than a man-made one?

Want to learn more?

go.illinois.edu/4Hleather

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4-H.extension.illinois.edu



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