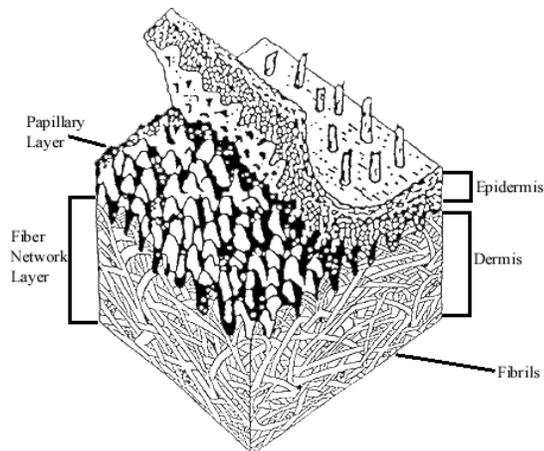




## TAN YOUR HIDE – TYPES OF LEATHER

Leather is an organic material. At one time it was a living, breathing skin. Treat it like your own skin: keep it clean and conditioned and it will last. Leather, like human skin, is subject to wear and tear and deterioration.



Leather is created from the dermal layers of animal skins. The epidermis is usually removed as a part of the tannin process (except for hair-on hides and the scales of reptile leathers). The underlying dermis has two layers. The topmost very thin layer is the papillary layer. This often has a grain pattern from the hair follicles and its surface is smoothed during the tanning process. Under this is the fiber network layer, the reticular layer, which provides the majority of the thickness and strength of a piece of leather.

Unfortunately there are no set industry regulations in the USA or most other countries that standardize terms and definitions for leather. This guide will give you a basic understanding of some terms.

**Aniline Tanned Leather and Chrome Tanned Leather:** Less firm than Veg Tanned leather. Can have a smooth, slick surface or a soft, supple surface depending on the final tannery finish. Often dyed to specific colors during the tanning process. Used for some boots, shoes, garments and other items. Cream wax products and/or conditioning products often used.

**Bonded/Laminated Leather:** A man-made material composed of 90% to 100% leather fibers (often scrap from leather tanneries or leather workshops) bonded together in layers with latex binders to create a look and feel similar to that of genuine leather at a fraction of the cost. Bonded leather is not as durable as other leathers. Often a layer of laminated leather is on top of reconstituted leather.

**Corrected Grain Leather:** Leather with artificial grain embossed into the hide or mechanically smoothed.

**Fat Wrinkles:** Marks or wrinkles in the grain of the leather caused naturally by fat deposits. These "beauty marks" are not visible in corrected grain leather.

**Finishing:** Any treatment or process performed after tanning. Includes antiquing, dyeing, glazing, lacquering, pigmenting, and embossing.

**Full Grain:** Leather in which the natural grain pattern has not been mechanically altered. High quality boots are made from full grain leather. Sometimes incorrectly called Top Grain

**Glazing** (Top Coating): Applying protective transparent resins to the leather. Features a high gloss or matte finish. Can also be called 'Patent' if high glazed.

**Grain:** The natural pattern of pores and wrinkles that creates the texture on a hide.

**Haircell or Hair Cell:** A common referral to the visual appearance of the surface of the leather with evidence of hair holes. The outer surface of the skin, once plucked or sheared, is called the grain. On the grain are the holes of the hair/wool. The holes do go below the grain (top) but are significantly much smaller. The outer surface has natural scars and hair cell patterns if left as uncorrected natural grain. If the surface is burnished (corrected) as part of the tanning process then the hair cells usually do not show. This can also be referred to as Closed Cell

Leather. But to really make things confusing, leather is often 'corrected' and imprinted with a hair cell pattern. (such as Dr Martens 1919 that is described as "dull matte *leather* with a fine *haircell* print".)

**Hand:** Industry term for the feel of leather. For example: "The hand of this cowhide leather is excellent, very soft."

**High Shine:** A bootblack term given to leather boots that require a wax polish, (ie: Jump boots, Dressage boots etc)

**Latigo:** The word latigo isn't even in the dictionary as a type of leather but, rather, as a piece of horse tack. Latigo is pretty much whatever the tanner wants it to be. It is sometimes vegtan leather. It can also be made by coating one side of suede with glue and pressing the hide through rollers, flattening and evening out one side of the material, giving the appearance of full grain.

**Napa leather:** Technically Napa is an extremely soft and supple full grain leather made from kid or lamb and is commonly found in higher quality wallets, gloves and other personal items. The tanning process which produces Napa leather was invented by Emanuel Manasse in 1875 in Napa California.

**Nubuck:** Leather that has had its finish surface-buffed to produce a slight nap or suede-like appearance.

**Oil Tan:** The term 'oil tanned' is a misnomer. What we often call 'oil-tanned' is actually just oil-treated. Special purpose oils are applied on the surface of chrome tanned leather (or even veg tanned leather in special cases) at the end of the tanning process. The oils provide protection as well as a unique look to the surface. These boots will feel slightly waxy or maybe even greasy. Wax is not typically used on these leathers and oiltan boots will not usually polish to a gloss. Often used on motorcycle boots (except shiny patrol boots), engineer boots, loggers etc.

**Patent leather:** Leather that has been given a high gloss finish, usually a plastic or acrylic coating. Old fashioned patent leather is made by coating leather with a linseed oil based mixture and is rare in modern footwear.

**Patina:** The luster or shine that develops on leather surface with age, use and care.

**Reconstituted Leather:** Sometimes called manufactured leather. Sometimes called bonded leather but then that gets confused with laminated leather. Reconstituted leather is made from leather fibers and pieces that are ground up and mixed with adhesives (often rubber based) and then formed into sheets. It is often reinforced with inner webbing and colored or imprinted to give the appearance of genuine topgrain leather or suede leather. Reconstituted leather is not always a bad thing but there are no industry-controlled specifications. Some reconstituted leather can be very high quality. Inexpensive belts and bags, inexpensive shoes and book covers are often made from reconstituted leather. More and more medium to low-end furniture is made from reconstituted leather, hence the low price. If an item is stamped 'Genuine Leather' then it is usually not reconstituted leather but industry controlled standards are a bit lax.

**Retanned Leather:** Veg tan leather that has then been chrome tanned)

**Splits:** The undersides of leather, generally used for suede and lower quality leather furniture. These can be mechanically smoothed and used for lower quality items.

**Suede:** Suede is an interior split of the hide. It is "fuzzy" on both sides. Suede is less durable than top-grain. Suede is cheaper because many pieces of suede can be split from a single thickness of hide, whereas only one piece of top-grain can be made.

**Suede-Out:** Topgrain footwear (or chaps) where the smooth side is inside and the nap side is on the outside. Often used for hiking boots. Current military issue boots are Suede-Out.

**Tanning:** The chemical and mechanical process used to treat hides and eliminate perishability

**Top Grain:** The uppermost layer of a hide that have all of the natural grain sanded off and an artificial grain often applied. Sometimes incorrectly called Full Grain. Top-Grain leather, is fuzzy (like suede) on one side and smooth on the other. The smooth side is the side where the hair and natural grain used to be. Most standard floggers and garments are made from Top Grain hides.

**Vegetable Tanned Leather** (Veg tan): Leathers finished with their grain intact and no additional oils added. Usually it has a smooth, slick and hard surface and light brown in color until dyed. Combat boots, patrol boots and western boots are usually made from veg tanned or veg retanned leather. Boots and other items made of this leather can usually be polished with wax products.