
Working with Leather

Oftentimes it would be convenient if leather came in 12 foot long strips for work on large applications; however, the animals that provide us with our source of leather are not that big, and flaws in the hides further reduce the size of the resulting leather panels. Therefore, it is usually necessary to piece together smaller sections of leather.

Leather cannot be conveniently "seamed" like other fabric because it is too thick. A doubled seam would be awkward and look unsightly. Fortunately, leather is not woven like fabric and can be butted end to end and sewn with a zigzag stitch right down the center. The butted seam will develop about 30 - 40% of the strength of the leather itself which is generally sufficient for normal cosmetic and protective purposes.

Many leather covers are hand sewn because the objects they are secured to cannot be placed under a machine. Hand sewing can be awkward for those with little experience. The spacing between stitches is hard to maintain and pushing the needle through the leather can lead to blisters and cuts. However, a quick solution to both problems is to pass the leather through the sewing machine along all sewn edges before hand sewing. Set the machine to the longest possible straight stitch and remove the thread from the needle. Use the largest needle possible (we sometimes cut the sharp point away to make the hole in the leather even larger). These "pre punched" holes will make hand stitching both easier and more accurate.

Leather also tends to stretch, so covers should be intentionally small. They can be stretched in place as they are sewn, however, leather will shrink a bit when wet. A little slackness in a protective cover will go away with use.

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