

Molding Leather Armor

In order to mould leather armor, soak it in water until it becomes pliable and soft. Then place it in the mould until it dries and hardens.

Cuir Bouilli

The application of heat will make the leather harder. If you were making a cover for a shield, for example, or other pieces of leather armour, the leather would be dipped quickly in boiling water before being moulded. This is called 'cuir bouilli', a process employed in making leather armor.

Using vegetable tanned leather with at least a weight of 8 ounces, soak the piece in cold water. This will ensure a uniform absorption when the leather armor is placed in the boiling water.

Heat a pot of water to 180 degrees Fahrenheit, then immerse the wet leather for approximately thirty seconds to a minute, until it darkens and begins to curl. Remove the leather from the water and stretch it around the mould you have prepared, tacking it in place. Allow for shrinkage if you are cutting the leather armor from a pattern. Of course you can water-harden a larger piece of leather, flatten it under a cutting board, and then cut out the individual pieces of leather armor you want, and then mould them to the desired shape. At this stage it will be very stretchy.

The boiling process makes the leather armor thicker and harder, with a degree of shrinkage dependent upon the leather itself and the amount of immersion time. The longer it remains in the water, the more pronounced the effects.

A twenty second immersion can result in a shrinkage of 7/8s, with a thickening of 25%, while a forty second immersion results in a 2/3rds shrinkage and a doubling of the thickness. As in any aspect of leather working, it is best to experiment with scrap pieces of leather first to get the effect you want.

Types of Moulds / Single Mould
Moulds can consist of one or more pieces. Folding the leather around the actual object for which a cover is being made, where the mould is the object, is an option when making a case for a gun, an arm guard in archery, a sheaf for a knife or eye-caps for binoculars. Use tacks to hold it in place while it dries. A

Two-piece Mould
A two-piece mould acts like two slices of bread, with the leather being the sandwich filling. In this way, leather armor shields were made. The leather armor is left in the mould until it dries.

A Three-piece Mould
A three-piece mould allows the creation of items like bags and eyeglass cases without using a gusset. The leather is sewn on three sides. Two pieces of the mould are inserted on either side of the interior of the wet leather, and then a wedge is driven between the middle. The forms are left until the leather is dried.

Tools to Use
* Wooden mould * Brass or steel tacks
* Make a mould to form the leather to the desired shape * Wet the leather * One piece mould: fit the wet leather armor over the mould * Two piece mould: sandwich the leather between the mould * Three piece mould: fit the pieces inside the leather * Leave the leather armor to dry before removing

About The Author:
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