

## Whitetail Tanning (and most North American small game)

I've put this photo tutorial together to help better illustrate the steps involved in deer tanning. All of these steps apply to tanning just about any specimen. What I describe here are the steps I use to tan in my taxidermy studio.

### WE'LL START RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING!



#### Step 1: Skinning

This is the cape skinned from the skull.



#### Step 2: Splitting – Turning

The lips, nostrils, eyes and ears are split / turned. When these areas are adequately split they should lay flat. This is important for fleshing and wheeling. Not to mention it allows the tan to penetrate properly for a thoroughly tanned skin.



#### Step 3: Rough Fleshing

This photo shows the face and ears turned and the heavy meat / flesh removed. Take care around the whisker beds on the muzzle, above and beneath the eyes, and chin area. If the whisker bulb is cut you'll lose the whiskers. A great feature on many whitetails.



#### Step 4: Rough Flesh Neck and Shoulders

With a beam and necker knife remove any heavy meat and fat from the cape. The necker knife shown is dull and designed to safely pull and or scrape off flesh. You may find it useful to have another necker knife sharpened for slicing.



### Step 5: Salting

Rub an even coat of salt on the cape. You can see in the picture I don't use a great deal of salt. A nice even coat rubbed onto the skin is sufficient. Pay attention and be sure to salt out to the edges. Also be sure areas split and turned are fleshed and not "stuck" to each other. i.e. eye skin, lips and nostrils.



### Step 6: Hang to Drain

After about 30 minutes of salting the cape is hung up to drain off the fluids being pulled from the skin.



### Step 7: Rehydrate

After salting 24 hours the cape is re-hydrated **BEFORE** pickling. For this cape about 5 gallons of warm water, 1/4 lb of salt per gallon and 1oz of **Lipa-Solve 55**, per gallon, are mixed together. The cape needs only as much time in this solution as it takes to re-hydrate. When a cape is re-hydrated it should feel limp and relaxed. If hard spots or "tightness" still exist give it more time. The cape must be fully re-hydrated before pickling. This makes a tremendous difference when it comes time to wheel the cape. The longer a cape dries will require more time in the re-hydration bath.



### Step 8: Pickling

We recommend about 2.5 gallons of pickle per cape as a minimum. For this cape 5 gallons of pickle were made. The pickle is made up of 1 pound of salt PER gallon of water, 3 ozs of citric PER gallon OR 1/2 an ounce of **No Harm pickling acid** per gallon. Let's review the 3 ingredients; Water, Acid, and Salt. Note the white container. A container like this is ideal for one or a few capes. It has more surface area than a five gallon bucket. Your local farm supply store will have a good variety of plastic "troughs". Long storage totes from the home stores work well too. You do not have to worry about the cape being fully submerged.

Once your pickle is mixed check the pH with 0-3 papers. Based on the instructions above you should have a pH of 1.5-2.5. Check your pH and stir the pickle periodically. If you skip a day don't lose sleep over it.

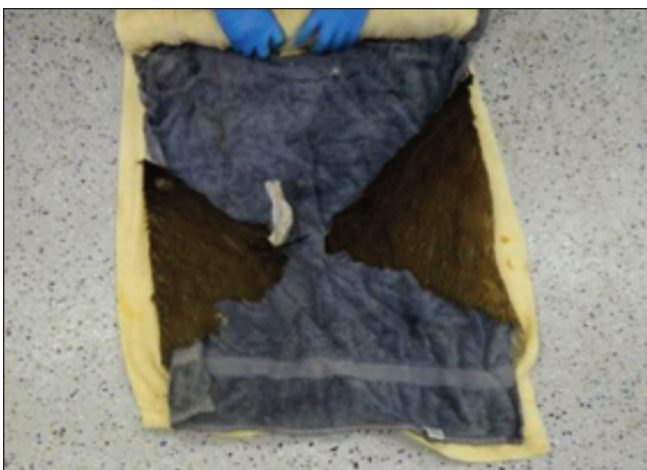


### Step 9: Shaving – Wheeling

After 48 hours in the pickle the cape is ready to be shaved on the wheel aka round knife or fleshing machine. As you can see in the picture the skin of the cape is "plump" and ripe for shaving. Shaving or thinning the cape is very important. It thins the skin allowing for the pickle to reach further into the skin to do it's job, allows the tan penetrate all the way through the cape and gives you the taxidermist a nice even skin for great workability. A well shaved cape allows for more stretch or forgiveness and will behave better when the mount dries. A good rule of thumb is to wheel towards the head.

A couple videos can be found here: <http://trubond-tanning.com/taxidermyvideos>

Once wheeled return the cape to the pickle overnight – 12 hours or so. Or when you can get to it again. Shave a second time as needed.



### Step 10: Neutralize (Sorry no picture.)

Mix 3 or 4 gallons of water with 1 tablespoon of baking soda per gallon of water. You can add 1/4 lb of salt per gallon of water if you wish. I don't. Place the cape in this solution for 30-40 minutes. Agitate the cape occasionally while it's in the neutralizing bath.



**Step 11: “Dry” the cape – remove excess moisture**

In my shop after neutralizing the cape is spun in an old washing machine. If you don't have this or fear divorce if you use your regular washing machine you can simple “squeeze” the excess water from the cape. Once that has been done place the cape between two towels and tightly roll it up starting at the head and rolling toward the shoulders. Let the cape stay in the towels for 15 minutes or so. This will help get even more water out of the cape. The more water you get out of the cape the easier it is for the TruBond 1000 to do its job. You want to make the skin thirsty for the TruBond.



**Step 12: Tanning!**

As seen in the pictures the cape is ready for the tan. Once the tan has been applied you can do a couple of things. Let the cape lay flat for two hours. If your cape is tubed turn it right side out so it's skin to skin. Once the skin has had a couple hours to absorb the tan you can fold it skin to skin put it in a plastic bag and sweat it in a refrigerator overnight. You can then lightly wash the cape in cold water and mount it or freeze it. Once the skins are tanned in my shop I generally let the lay on the floor overnight covered in plastic for the sake of efficiency. In the morning I measure the capes, tag'em and bag'em and into the freezer they go. The forms are ordered and the skin isn't washed until the day it's mounted.

**FINISHED SKIN!**

This is the finished skin. It has been washed with cold water and a bit of Dawn and rinsed. At this point you can roll it between towels to dry it for mounting or tumble it in either corn cob grit or hardwood sawdust. It's now ready for detail fleshing and mounting.

**REMEMBER! YOU can do this and never forget every expert was once a beginner!**



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