

Tanning Rabbit Hides

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I've been tanning rabbit hides for about 15 years and have tried nearly every method. Most produced very stiff, unsatisfactory hides and involved a great deal of effort. However, the method I use now produces a very soft hide with little work involved. It does require the use of a potentially dangerous chemical (acid) so ****I don't recommend that kids use this method.****

1. After dressing the rabbit, toss the raw hide (split down the belly, not cased) into a ziploc bag and put into the freezer. **DO NOT SALT** or **DRY OUT**, don't even try to flesh them out either! When you have 4 or more, you'll have enough to make it worth your while to tan.
2. Thaw out the frozen hides, run under warm water to remove ice. **DO NOT** put hides in hot water as this will ruin them.
3. Wash hides with a mild dish detergent to remove blood & dirt. Rinse well and squeeze out excess water - **DO NOT WRING THEM!**
4. You will need: 1 plastic 5 gallon bucket
2 lbs. rock salt (or any cheap salt)
8 oz. battery acid (from auto-supply store)
stick or wooden spoon for stirring
a scrubbed brick or rock
5. Run 1 gallon of hot water into the bucket, add salt and stir to dissolve. Add 1 gallon of cool water (not cold). Water temp. should be about 70 degrees.
6. Slowly add acid by tipping the bucket toward you and allowing the acid to dribble down the inside into the water. Be careful not to splash liquid and stir carefully with a non-metallic spoon or stick till blended. You may want to wear rubber gloves for this.
7. Lower the completely thawed hides one at a time into the bucket. Submerge in liquid with the stick and slide brick or rock down the inside of the bucket while tipping the bucket toward you. Set the bucket upright and allow the rock or brick to settle on top to the hides. At this stage the acid is not strong enough to do any real damage to your skin but you **DO NOT** want to splash it into your eyes!
8. Put a piece of plywood on top of the bucket and stash away in the garage or a closet where no one will disturb it or get into it. Make sure that wherever you put it, it will stay at approx. 70 degrees. Too hot and the hides will be damaged, too cold and the tanning process will be delayed.

9. Leave the bucket alone for 1 week. Put your rubber gloves on then gently remove hides from the acid solution with the stick. Allow them to drip to over bucket then squeeze to remove excess liquid. DO NOT throw out the acid mixture!! Toss the hides into a dish pan and take to the sink. Run under cool water and add dish detergent to remove remaining acid mixture. Rinse and squeeze out.

10. At this point the flesh on the under side of the hide should be thickened and somewhat separated from the hide. Grasp a piece on the edge and you should be able to simply peel the flesh off, often all in one piece. Be very careful with junior hides as they tend to be very thin and easy to tear. If the flesh is very tight on the hide, it isn't "prime" yet and should be returned to the acid solution for a few more days.

11. After fleshing, return the hides to the acid solution and leave for another week (can be safely left for up to a year, if you haven't got the time to fool with them).

12. After at least a week, remove the pelts and wash as described earlier. Squeeze as much water out as possible. Now lay pelts over the porch railing, back step, wherever to dry. At the first sign of drying (white patches on the flesh side), work the hides gently over the back of a chair, pulling the pelt back and forth and then pull gently till the flesh side turns white all over. Pelts can be thrown in a very cool clothes dryer and tumbled for a while to help the drying/softening process.

13. Once the hides are worked till soft and completely dry - you're done! If you have allowed the pelts to dry stiff without working them, toss them in a pan of water to soften and then start over with the drying/working process. It doesn't take more than a few minutes each to work the hides to a nice suede like softness. Rub the fur side over the back of a chair also to make the fur soft and natural looking. Good luck!!!