

How to Tan a Deer Hide In Your Bathtub

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No garage? No problem. Tan your next deer hide for less than 30 bucks in your own bathroom. If I can do it inside a fifth-floor Manhattan matchbox apartment, it can be done anywhere. Gather a knife, a spoon, some plywood, your bottle of tanner, and a laundry rack. Oh, and don't plan on taking a shower for a few days.

Remove the Meat

Start with a fresh skin. As soon as I peel the skin off a deer, I flesh it with a sharp knife and the dull edge of a large serving spoon. Draw the spoon laterally, across the spine, until the reddish meat is gone. Use the knife to scrape any hang-ups or if the hide is dry and the spoon's not cutting it.

Save for Later

Proper storage is a must if you're not tanning immediately. The freezer works great if you have the space; wrap the hide in two heavy black trash bags. If you're not freezing, salt the hide thoroughly. Figure on a pound of salt for every pound of skin. Store the hide in a 5-gallon bucket with a tight-fitting lid. (The hide will last indefinitely, though you risk losing hair the longer it sits.)

Check the hide every other day for the first two weeks and drain any liquid that's collected in the bottom. And another thing: I hate ticks, so I spray Raid into the bucket or in the freezer bag and trust the critters will die a slow death. If I'm tanning right away, I spray the hair side.

Just Add Salt

If the hide was in your freezer, let it thaw first. If the hide is coming out of salty storage instead, just scrape off the old salt—and salt it again. Rub it into every inch of skin. Fold the salted hide onto itself, flesh to flesh, and wait 24 hours. Then do it all over again.

Soak it Up

After 48 hours of salt rub, it's time for a salt bath. Put a large plastic bin in the bathtub, fill it with hot water, and add a pound of salt per gallon of water. Soak the hide for 24 hours.

Lather & Rinse

Wash the flesh side with Dawn dish detergent, which I've found works best. Hanging the hide on a laundry rack and rinsing it off under the shower is the easiest way to do it. Let the hide dry on the rack.

Time to Stretch

When it's moist and still pliable, stand up a piece of plywood in the shower. Tack the hide—flesh-side up—to the plywood, stretching it out as much as possible.

Secret Agent

Prep your tanning agent. (Check that it can be used indoors.) I use [Deer Hunter's & Trapper's Hide Tanning Formula](#) (\$15), which thankfully smells like hard apple cider. Apply the agent to the hide with a paintbrush. I do three coats, letting each one dry 24 hours.

Take a Break

Your dry hide will be as stiff as the board it just came off. You can break it by hand by rolling and twisting it. You may lose some hair here, so take it easy. If you're making a rug or wall piece, stiffness won't hurt.