

Stamping Leather

We can make a wide variety of items from leather. In some cases it is also desirable to “decorate” the leather. There are a number of ways to decorate leather. Leather can be stamped, carved and tooled, branded, stained and dyed and more. In this lesson, we will explore decorating leather by stamping.

Why stamp leather instead of carve and tool?

In general, stamping leather is faster and somewhat easier than carving and tooling. Stamps vary in size and purpose. Some stamps are intended to create a single design. Others are designed to be used to create a pattern. Stamps do not produce the same three dimensional detail that carving and tooling produce, however in cases of thinner leather (such a wallet leather), carving and tooling will not produce much three dimensional detail due to the limitations of the lack of depth of the leather.

How do I stamp?

The first step to stamping leather is to prepare it by casing it. Casing leather is the process of soaking the leather in warm water for at least 1 hour and up to 24 hours. This allows the leather to absorb water all the way through. Leather must be cased in order to make it malleable or able to be shaped and manipulated. Once the leather is fully cased, it is then allowed to partially dry at room temperature for anywhere from 15 minutes to 1 hour, depending on temperature, humidity and thickness of the leather. The surface of the leather should be slightly damp and water should not readily squeeze out of the leather when touched in order for the leather to be ready for working.

Practice stamping first on a piece of cased scrap leather. Pick a stamp you intend to use on your final piece. Place the stamp on the leather and tap the stamp firmly and uniformly with the mallet. Lift the stamp to see your results. If the stamped image is too shallow, you will need to tap harder next time. If the stamped image is too deep, you will need to tap lighter next time. Ideally, the stamped depth should be at least one third but no more than one half the total depth of the leather. Also check the stamped image for uniformity across the image. Tapping too much to the left, right, top or bottom will create an image that is shallower in one area and deeper in another. Practice with the same stamp until the proper depth and uniform image is achieved. Once you have mastered one stamp, try another. It is important to achieve uniformity in your stamping as when you are working on your actual project, it is best not to lift the stamp and place it back on the same image to try to correct problems. It is very difficult to get a stamp in exactly the same location and the results of double stamping are often ghost type images that detract from the appearance of the final project.

Once you have mastered your stamping technique, you may then begin stamping your project. Remember to plan your work before you begin stamping. When you complete your design on your project, allow it to dry completely at room temperature before applying stains or other finishes.

Your Stamping Assignment

You will need the following tools/supplies to complete this assignment:

Leather mallet

Stamps

Marble/granite slab (unless working on a marble or granite countertop)

Practice leather

Stamping project items (leather bracelet, key fob and/or coaster rounds)

Create at least two stamping projects listed above using two stamping techniques - one that uses single design stamp(s) to create a design and one that uses a pattern design stamp to create a pattern design. The two techniques may be combined on a single project or each technique may be used on a single project. Also the two projects may be the same type of item (two bracelets, two key fob or two coaster rounds) or one of each item.

Once the stamped designs are finished on each project, allow to dry at room temperature completely and bring to the next project meeting. These projects will be fully completed at a later project meeting.