

# HOME ECONOMICS

## GUIDE



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## Care of Leather Apparel

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Consumers of all ages are realizing that leather apparel is a good investment. Leather garments can be worn in most climates throughout the United States eight to ten months of the year, they act as windbreakers, repel water and wear better than traditional fabric coats. Leather items retail for little more than comparable quality fabric items; yet, they are considered to be more elegant than their fabric counterparts.

When consumers purchase leather apparel, care as well as the cost of this care should be considered. This care is dependent upon the leather type, finish and color.

Leather generally does not need to be cleaned as frequently as textile fabric, but the daily care and use will affect the frequency of professional cleaning. Leather garments are best cleaned by those specializing in cleaning and restoring leather goods.

### Leather Terminology

The leather type, quality, finish and lining influence the type and frequency of care. Pliable leathers such as lambskins, pigskins, kidskins as well as sueded items and shearlings are prone to soiling more than durable, smooth leathers such as calfskins and cowhides.

Leather quality is indicated on the label. The Federal Trade Commission has defined *genuine leather* or *leather* as **top grain**. Top grain leather is obtained from the hair side of the cattle hide. Top grain leathers retain shape and finishes (water repellency and soil resistance) better than split leathers which are the under parts of the hide or skins split into two or more thicknesses. Split leathers should be marked as such and not labeled top grain or leather.

Modern finishing techniques make it impossible for the average consumer to determine top grain from splits by visual examination. Through such finishing techniques as embossing, boarding or sueding, split leathers can be made to resemble top grain leathers. Check for a label which indicates the quality of leather.

Linings serve many purposes in a leather garment. They prevent stretching, preserve the shape, reduce wrinkling, add comfort and a finished appearance. A poorly selected lining can result in more frequent cleaning



as well as replacement. Darkly colored and printed linings need cleaning less frequently than plain, lightly colored linings. Tightly woven fabrics without long floats such as taffetas wear longer.

## Leather Care Label Terms

Permanent care labels have been required on most apparel since 1972, but leather apparel items have been exempt. The Federal Trade Commission has proposed that leather apparel items be care labeled. Rules regarding care labeling for leather apparel should be clarified in the near future.

Most leather garments on the market now cannot be dry cleaned by conventional methods. They must be sent to establishments with special facilities which requires extra expense, additional time and is an inconvenience for the businessman and customer.

The following care terms may be used to label leather and suede apparel and will assist the consumer in determining where to have the garment cleaned.

- **Leather clean** indicates that a specialist in leather care methods is required for suede, leather, and plastic garments.
- **Dry clean or dry clean only** specifies that products can be dry cleaned commercially or in self-service machines with any dry cleaning solvent.
- **Dry clean; tumble cold** indicates items
- **Dry clean; no tumble** should only be
- **Dry clean; pile fabric method** professionally dry cleaned.

## Seasonal Care

A leather coat represents a sizable expenditure. To maintain it certain care procedures will prolong its life, while other practices could be detrimental.

- Have leather garments dry cleaned before they become heavily soiled.
- Send leather garments to a reputable dry cleaner who specializes in handling leather. Ordinary dry cleaning procedures use steam which could streak leather and cause discoloring.
- Store leather garments that have been cleaned in a well ventilated place at normal room temperatures. Mildew can result if the atmosphere is too humid.
- Do not store leather garments or items in tightly closed garment bags or plastic bags. This type of storage is oxygen-proof and gradually causes a gas to form which discolors the leather. Storing items in plastic bags at high temperatures has resulted in plastic melting onto the leather item. In addition, color from the printing on plastic bags has been known to transfer onto garments.
- Remove food stains from suedes as clothes moths are attracted to the food. Moths will consume some of the suede nap in an attempt to obtain the food.
- Do not spray leathers with moth repellent solutions

as the chemical fumes destroy leather colors. Safeguard leather items by periodic cleaning and spot removal.

## Home Spot Cleaning

Water and a mild hand soap will remove light soil from smooth leather. Using a damp cloth and soap, rub gently and dry the leather with a soft, clean cloth.

Cleaning compounds normally used for shoes may not be suitable for garment leathers. Dry cleaning fluids and shoe polish are not intended for garment leather. Use of these cleaning agents could leave rings, marks, or leave a gummy residue. There are several acceptable cleaning lotions, preservatives and conditioners on the market; inquire at the stores dealing with leather apparel.

Suedes present a more difficult problem in spot cleaning. Prevention will reduce spotting. Special suede sprays are available that form a protective shield to prevent spotting and premature soiling. Garments should be treated when new, before soil and spots have accumulated.

Suedes that have not received a coat of protective spray can be spot cleaned with special suede cleaning solutions purchased from leather dealers.

Treat a spot on a suede item as soon as possible, absorbing the excess solvent and brushing the spot as soon as the residue dries. If a spot is brushed too quickly, it may spread. A gum eraser, dry sponge, terry cloth towel or soft bristle brush may be used to remove spots from the surface. Do not use an abrasive to remove stains—it may damage the sueded leather.

## Daily Care

New suede garments have a tendency to shed some of the surface nap. This process is not an indication of poor quality and disappears over time as the garment is used. Excess surface nap can be removed by rubbing with a towel.

Daily care has an accumulative effect. Many of the following suggestions are not difficult to follow and the long-term effects should influence the appearance of the garment.

- Hang leather coats and jackets on padded hangers to prevent the shoulders from losing their shape.
- Use a scarf when wearing leather garments to avoid neckline soil.
- Store leather garments where they will not be crushed and avoid extremes of heat and light.
- Keep leather away from the heat especially if it becomes wet. Leather will harden if dried too quickly and near a source of heat. Rain does not harm smooth leather garments, but they are not intended to be raincoats. Salt spray if not removed will discolor and stiffen leather and suede.

## Occasional Care

Periodically, special care is necessary to maintain gar-

ment appearance and prolong wearability. The frequency of this care depends upon daily use and seasonal care. Suggestions which improve the wear life of leather garments are listed.

- Brush suede garments with a specially treated sponge designed for this purpose or a turkish towel. Do not use a wire brush, as it may mar the suede. Brushing removes dust, loose particles and surface soil.
- Press leather garments as they appear to require treatment. *Use a press cloth or brown paper* between the leather and the iron. *Do not use steam; use the lowest heat setting.* Move the iron constantly to avoid overheating.

## Future Leather Developments

Tanners are working diligently on the development of skins which will be easier to clean. They are cooperating with the dry cleaning industry in order to discover solvents which will facilitate the cleaning process. Currently, there are two processes which will make it easier and more convenient for the consumer to care for leather apparel.

The addition of the chemical glutaraldehyde to the tanning process is one of the leather industry's recent developments. Perspiration and chemical resistance are two important qualities imparted to leather by the addition of glutaraldehyde. It produces leather with outstanding softness, durability, uniformity and feel. Glutaraldehyde can be used on a variety of apparel and accessory leathers such as shearlings, chamois, horsehide, sheepskin, pigskin, and reptile skins.

A second process, PolyRetan, is a new method developed by scientists in the Agricultural Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. Chemicals are united with the leather at the molecular level

which means that the change is an integral, permanent part of the leather. The result is an easy care leather product which has greater strength, stretchability and will not mildew. PolyRetan can be dry cleaned in a coin-operated machine.

Leather and suede garments are durable, comfortable to wear and versatile. Because it is a treated animal skin, special care is required. This care need not be burdensome but attention to daily, occasional and seasonal care will prolong the utility of the item. Future trends indicate that seasonal care may be less costly and handled by the individual.

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