

Instructions for the Rittel's Snakeskin Tanning Kit (Catalog #SSK-10)

RITTEL'S SNAKESKIN TANNING KIT contains all the necessary ingredients to produce a real leather. **Salt and Vinegar are the only two ingredients not included in the kit.** These items are easily bought at a local store. **Do not use Kosher or Rock Salt. Non-iodized Salt is best.** (Ph papers are not included with kit, use pH test papers available locally or you may purchase from us). **For reliable consistent results - Always check the pH level of your solutions! Ph levels are critical - and if not correct, your chemicals will not be effective!**

Unlike other methods that use Alum, Alcohol or Glycerine - RITTEL'S Snakeskin Kit produces a leather suitable for crafts and leatherwork. The leather retains the distinctive markings, plumps, has excellent durability, and strength.

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Fresh or frozen snakeskins tan the best. If you prefer to dry your snakeskins, and tan them later - always avoid heat, and Salt them liberally. After skinning, simply tack them out flat - flesh side up, and liberally rub Salt into the flesh. Leave a layer of Salt on the skin for 2-3 days, then brush it away, and allow the skin to dry thoroughly. Do not expose the skin to heat or direct sunlight while it dries - heat can render snakeskins stiff and untannable. Heat causes the fibers to gelatinize to a glue-like hardness. Such skins are difficult and sometimes impossible to relax and tan. To freeze fresh snakeskins - place them in a plastic trash bag, and use a twist tie to seal it and then freeze them solid. Snakes normally shed their outer layer of skin to grow. This may occur during the tanning process. If it does, remove the outer layer and it should not affect your skin.

SKINNING

For taxidermy purposes, usually an incision is made on the belly midway between the head and the tail. After loosening the skin from the flesh, the skin is pulled off each end, similar to removing a sock. For crafts, or simply to display the skin, the snake is skinned by making a belly incision its whole length and the skin is stripped from the flesh.

FLESHING

Snakeskins normally flesh easily. You can even use a tablespoon with one edge sharpened to scrape the meat from the inside of the skin. Some Tanners give it a serrated edge. Always scrape the meat away working from the tail towards the head to avoid tearing the skin. This is especially important when handling small snakes.

RELAXING

Freshly fleshed snakeskins can be placed directly into the Vinegar and Salt Pickling solution. Dried and frozen skins however require relaxing or thawing before they are pickled. For relaxing dried skins - Use 2 Lb. of Salt to every 1 gallon of Water. Allow the skins to soak in this Salt Brine until they become soft and flexible, then rinse and place them into the Pickling solution. Frozen and Fleshed skins can simply be placed directly into the pickle.

PICKLING

To mix a Vinegar pickling solution - mix 2 Quarts of White Vinegar to 2 Quarts of Water and add 1 Lb. of Salt. Mix enough solution to completely submerge the skins without crowding! The Ph level should read 2.0--2.5 Ph can be checked using Ph papers. Ph papers (not included with kit, test papers are available locally or you may purchase from us). Allow the skins to soak in the Pickle for 2-3 days.

After your skins are thoroughly pickled they can safely be left in the pickling solution for several weeks until you are ready to tan them. The solution should be stirred daily, and not be exposed to temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. When you are ready to tan the skins - remove them briefly from the Pickle and rinse them. Squeeze out the excess water and weigh them. **Record this weight, it will be used to measure the amount of KWIK-TAN tanning agent to use. For reliable results, always check the Ph level of your solutions. Ph levels are critical and if not correct, your chemicals will not be effective.**

TANNING

When ready to tan - and after you have removed the skins from the pickle, add to the pickling solution:

6.5 Oz. (by weight)

OR 5.0 fl. oz. (by volume)

OR 2/3 cup of **RITTELS KWIK-TAN (KT-10)** per 1 Lb. of skin weight.

Stir the solution, and then place the skins back into it. The Ph level of the solution should read 3.5-4.0. If not, adjust it.

Leave the skins in the tanning solution for 12-20 hours. Snakeskins will fully tan within this time. When tanned, remove the skins from the tan, rinse and drain for 20-30 minutes.

DE SCALING

If you are going to use the snakeskin for making craft material, then the scales should be removed. For taxidermy or display purposes, the scales are usually left on the skin. To De scale- after the tan rinse the skins in cold water then crumple the skins in your hands and you will notice that the scales begin to fall away. Use a Brass bristled brush to loosen the more persistent scales. Continue this process until the skins are de scaled.

A Special Note about Tanning Pythons and Constricting Snakeskins

After being tanned and dried, these types of skins may take on a gray color, dulling out the markings. This is due to the material on the individual scales. The scales must be removed on these skins to produce a truly professional looking finish that preserves the beautiful markings. Most Tanners prefer to remove these larger scales once the skin has dried. They either use an Artists Putty Eraser to push back the scale and pull it off (head towards tail)- one at a time- or you can simply press packing tape on the scales in small areas and then peel it off from head to tail, taking the scales with it.

OILING

After Tanning, all skins require oiling. Prepare your Oiling mixture by mixing 1 part **Rittel's ProPlus oil (PP-301)** to 2 Parts Hot Water. Instead of heating the mixture - simply use hot tap water. When warmed - rub or brush the oil and water mixture into the flesh side of the snakeskin.

FINISHING

If you will use the skin for display or crafts, after oiling, tack it out flat and allow the oil to soak into the flesh and dry. Later these tack holes along the edge can be trimmed away. For taxidermy purposes- After Oiling, it's best to let the skin lay flat soaking up the oil for 3-4 hours. Then the skin can be mounted. Or if you prefer to freeze it and mount it later, use a roll of paper towels and put a layer on the flesh, then roll up the skin and freeze. For crafts- When the skin is almost dry - begin to gently work the skin with your hands to soften it. When softened and dry, lightly sand the flesh side to a smooth suede finish. If the skin is to be used for display, after drying, turn the skin over to display the markings. Tack it down using decorative tacks and give it a coating of clear lacquer or a clear sealer to keep the scales from eventually curling.

AVERAGE SNAKESKIN WEIGHTS

This is for reference purposes when determining how much KT-10 you will need.

You need to use 5 fl. oz. of KT-10 for each 1 lb. of wet skin weight. A 4' live Rattlesnake usually weighs about 2-3 Lbs. The skin itself only weighs 6-8 oz. Eastern Rattlesnakes tend to be heavier. You will want to use approximately 2.5 fl. oz. of KT-10. A 15' live male Burmese Python usually will weigh about 100 lbs. and a live female about 130 lbs. The skins will only weigh between 3-4 lbs.- depending on size. For these you will want to use between 15-20 fl. oz. of KT-10.

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Remember, For reliable consistent results - Always check the pH level of your solutions. Ph levels are critical - and if not correct, your chemicals will not be effective!

Fresh snakeskins are extremely sensitive to heat. Never sun dry snakeskins or store them where there is excessive heat. Snakeskins are extremely thin - heat causes the fibers to gelatinize to a glue-like hardness. Such skins are difficult and sometimes impossible to relax and tan. Snakes normally shed their outer layer of skin to grow. This may occur during the tanning process. If it should, remove the outer layer, and it should not affect your skin.

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