

BIG HAIRY CAUTIONS:

If the item you wish to clean states that it should be cleaned **only by a professional, consider seeking professional advice before** embarking on any home remedy. Suede presents a special problem because the nap is difficult to re-vamp once it has been wet. Also, **suede is usually treated with special chemical dirt repellents because it is so difficult for consumers to clean themselves. The most important thing to do is to follow the manufacturer's care instructions.**

Some other things that you can do to take care of leather goods are:

EQUESTRIAN:

Horse sweat, manure and urine are very aggressive on leather soles. The simple act of constant dampening and drying out, combined with exposure to ammonia from horse 'by-products' makes leather very brittle, permanently damaging it and shortening the soles' lifespan considerably. *The solution:* adding full-length, thin rubber protective soles to the existing leather soles to protect stitching and prolong sole life. When the rubber sole eventually wears out, we can simply replace it with a fresh one. Each rubber sole lasts about as long as the original leather sole but costs 66% less to replace. Plus, the rubber sole is waterproof and does not absorb manure smells as easily as leather. Using cedar boot or shoe trees helps boots keep their shape and adds years of use.

SPECIAL DUTY:

Never dry your wet boots near any source of high heat. Drying leather goods too fast will split and crack and warp your gear so much that it can cause major damage. Soaked leather should be dried slowly, avoiding direct heat. One solution is to leave damp wet leather goods in a dry location out of direct sunlight. Be sure there is good air flow to avoid mildew.

GENERAL LEATHER CARE AT HOME:

Be cautious using off the shelf oil or conditioner on leather items. Use a little, in moderation between professional cleaning and conditioning. Oil (like cod, or neat's-foot) softens leather by changing the direction of the fibers. If applied too often, it weakens leather making it likely to stretch or break. If too much is applied it can make leather gummy and sticky.

Beware of products that contain petroleum or mineral oils; they will damage your leather goods over time. Waxes and many silicon-based products can also clog leather's pores, causing permanent damage. (You should always test out a new product on a small, less visible area.) Also, keep in mind that using mink oil or animal fats may darken leather.

Try to avoid using cleaners that leave grease or residue. Residue can make leather vulnerable to bacteria, which will tarnish the leather and eventually break down the stitching. To remove excess cleaner, use a slightly dampened cloth or a small brush around the stitching.

For cleaning and conditioning, try this mixture:

1 part white vinegar

2 parts neat's-foot oil OR raw or food grade linseed oil

Use a white lint free cloth to swirl on VERY LIGHTLY, leave overnight and then buff for maximum shine.

Shoes and belts are usually made of harder finished leather and may be harder to clean. For general cleaning use:

White vinegar

Follow up with cold pressed nut oil, olive oil or pure beeswax

Smear VERY LIGHTLY onto the shoes or belt, leave long enough to absorb well and then buff for shine. Be sure to use a lint free clean cloth or chamois.

Removing Road Salt:

Sometimes, especially during the winter, salt from the road soaks into shoe leather. To remove road salt, try this simple household mixture:

1 part white vinegar

1 part water

Lightly dampen a lint free white cloth and wipe away the salt. (Follow up with cleaning and conditioning as salt can be very damaging to leather.) This solution also works on leather jackets worn by motorcycle riders.

Cleaning Smelly Items:

Leather clothing can absorb odors, especially smoke odors. To freshen leather clothes between professional cleanings, try leaving them hanging in a steamy bathroom for 10-15 minutes (adding citrus freshener in the tub to help mask any residual strong odors). Keep leather away from direct contact with water.

OTHER HANDY LEATHER CARE TIPS:

Always store your leather items in cool, dry places. Avoid exposing your leather to direct sunlight for prolonged periods of time.

Never use metal hangers. Stuff empty leather handbags with paper and use boot/shoe trees when storing leather shoes and boots to keep their shape. Custom boot trees and shoe trees help them stay shape-fitted to YOUR feet.

When storing leather, cover it with a breathable cloth like cotton sheets, or place it in a breathable container. Plastic will cause leather to dry out.

Get a Nubuck cloth; it's a great tool for cleaning and maintaining leather.

If your leather becomes scuffed or scratched, scuff marks and scratches on leather can be disguised by applying a shoe polish/leather dye or marker pen. Test on inside first to make sure shade isn't too dark/light, or bring it to a professional for dyeing.