

Taking Care of Your Leather Goods

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Brogans, belts, boxes, soles, brims, pouches, scabbards- what do they have in common? Well if you've paid attention, they are all usually made of leather. What is leather? Leather is the epidermis of a living creature which is treated and cured to attain a certain stability as to not decompose. Webster's Dictionary defines it as "n; animal skin dressed for use." So, what do I care, you ask? Well, you use it, you have spent hard earned money on it and I'm sure you would like to see as much use from it as possible. How do you do this? Cleaning, oiling, and periodical maintenance will generally do the trick.

Here's how.

First we'll deal with brogans since they require the most attention. These coverings get the most use and abuse and generally wear out faster than anything else.

1) Start out getting the necessary supplies together- water, saddle soap, a stiff brush, a soft cloth or three or five, mink oil or neatsfoot oil and a little time.

2) Start by taking out the laces. The tongue is so much easier to clean without a piece of leather string in your way. When all supplies are in the same place, sit down and get out the saddle soap, water (a bowl works well), and the stiff brush and start working the hell out of the leather.

3) Scrub the leather and work up a good lather. Try to get as much of the dirt out of the pores as possible. This may take a little while, but the better the job you do at this stage, the better the end result will be. Remember, this used to be the skin of a cow and, like human skin, it holds dirt, moisture, and oils. You have to keep the oils and a little moisture in or else the leather will start to dry out, crack, and wear out.

4) Once you have thoroughly scrubbed both brogans- uppers AND soles (soles are leather, too,) wipe them with a cloth to get off the left over dirt and soap. When you wipe them, it might also be a good idea to dampen the rag as some of the soap might have started drying.

5) Once you have wiped them off, let them sit for a little bit to let them get somewhat dry. If they have gotten reasonably dry from wiping them, you either had some clean boots or you didn't scrub them well enough.

6) Now, it is time to oil them. I personally use KIWI brand mink oil, but any good quality shoe oil will suffice. Some people prefer to use neatsfoot oil due to the ease of application, but I feel that a good hand rubbing helps to get the oil down into the pores better. Use one of the rags rolled up tight. Get a generous amount of oil on your rag and use a firm circular motion to get the oil into the leather. Remember to also oil the tongue and sole. I can't stress enough the importance of oiling the soles, folks. Once you have put a good coating on both brogans, go back and put a second coat. this just reinforces the first and it makes sure the leather isn't going to dry out.

7) If you use leather laces, it is a good idea to oil them, too. Again, they are leather and you probably don't want stiff laces that are always breaking. Let your brogans sit for a couple of days before putting the laces back in and putting them back in the closet. I promise, if you do this on a regular basis, your shoes will last you for years and they will wear on your feet better. For the rest of your leather, the same procedure applies- it's just that you don't have to do it as often. I'd think that once every 6 months would do- as opposed to after each use for the brogans.

I hope this sheds the light on this subject. I don't know everything, but this might help get you pointed in the right direction. Having a good coat of oil is also a natural water repellent. So keep your feet and powder dry and I'll see you in the field.