

MAKE IT YOURSELF
LEATHER JOURNAL COVER



*Skill Development:
Leatherworking*

 Lee Valley



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#LVMadeByMe #LVLetsDoSomething

Skill Development: Leatherworking

Leatherworking is a rewarding handicraft; starting with only a few basic skills and a limited investment in time, equipment and materials, you can quickly make useful and attractive items to last a lifetime. This leather journal cover project makes it straightforward for you to develop this skill. You will assemble pieces of vegetable-tanned leather into a practical cover for the Lee Valley Logbook. You will learn how to punch evenly spaced stitch holes in the leather, how to thread the harness needles for leatherworking, and how to sew the seams using the leapfrog saddle-stitch technique with waxed polyester thread. No sewing experience required; the instructions cover the steps from threading your needles to stitching with two needles to finishing the seam.

Skill Level: Beginner to intermediate; 14+

***Tip:** The video and written instructions go hand in hand to both tutor and guide you through the steps. We suggest you watch the video first, especially if you are a visual person, and then read the instructions before you start. At the very least, be sure to read all the product instructions to familiarize yourself with how to use each product. For best results, always follow the product directions and safety notifications.*

Time to Complete: 6 to 8 hours

***Tip:** While the estimated time to complete this project is based on our tests, we encourage you to take your time. We want you to enjoy learning about leatherworking. Since you will be using repetitive movements that might not be familiar to your hands, you may need to take several breaks along the way to give your hands a rest.*

KIT CONTENTS

- Outer leather cover, 44.5 cm × 25 cm (17 1/2" × 9 7/8")
- Left side leather pocket, 15 cm × 25 cm (6" × 9 7/8")
- Right side leather pocket with pen holder, 15 cm × 25 cm (6" × 9 7/8")
- Leather card pocket, 8.5 cm × 9 cm (3 3/8" × 3 1/2")
- Leather lace tie, 1 cm × 107 cm (3/8" × 42")
- Lee Valley logbook, 192 pages
- Masking tape, 1" × 60 yards
- 4 mm Stitching chisel set of 2
- Leather slicker
- 4 Harness needles
- 1 Piece of waxed polyester thread, 120 cm (47 1/4")
- 2 Pieces of waxed polyester thread, each 210 cm (82 5/8")
- Rubber cement, 118 ml (4 U.S. fl oz)
- Small piece of beeswax, about 3 g (0.1 oz)
- 2 Pieces of sandpaper (150x and 220x)
- 3 Leather protective pads
- 3 Butterfly clips
- 3 Pushpins
- 1 Cork
- 1 Scrap piece of wood (backer board)

Note: All the pieces of leather in this kit are sourced from the U.S. and tanned in Mexico using the traditional, time-consuming method of vegetable tanning and dyeing. Tanning transforms animal hides into leather. Of all the tanning methods available, vegetable tanning is one of the oldest and most environmentally friendly. This artisanal process suspends hides for several months in vats of extracts derived from tree bark, leaves and roots that have a high concentration of tannins. This not only preserves and strengthens the hide, it also gives it its rich earth-toned color. Veg-tanned leather will age to a rich, deep patina over time and, with proper care, can last a lifetime. Durable, yet supple, this leather is most suitable for bags, belts, wallets, as well as saddles and harnesses. The grain side is the smooth (skin) side, while the flesh side is the rough (suede) underside.



Other items you should have on hand (not included):

- Hammer with smooth face (or a wooden mallet)
- Small bowl of water and a sponge
- Lighter
- Ruler
- Old plastic cutting board (or self-healing cutting mat)
- Utility knife or scissors

Tip: Feel free to use any other tools you have on hand that you think might be useful.

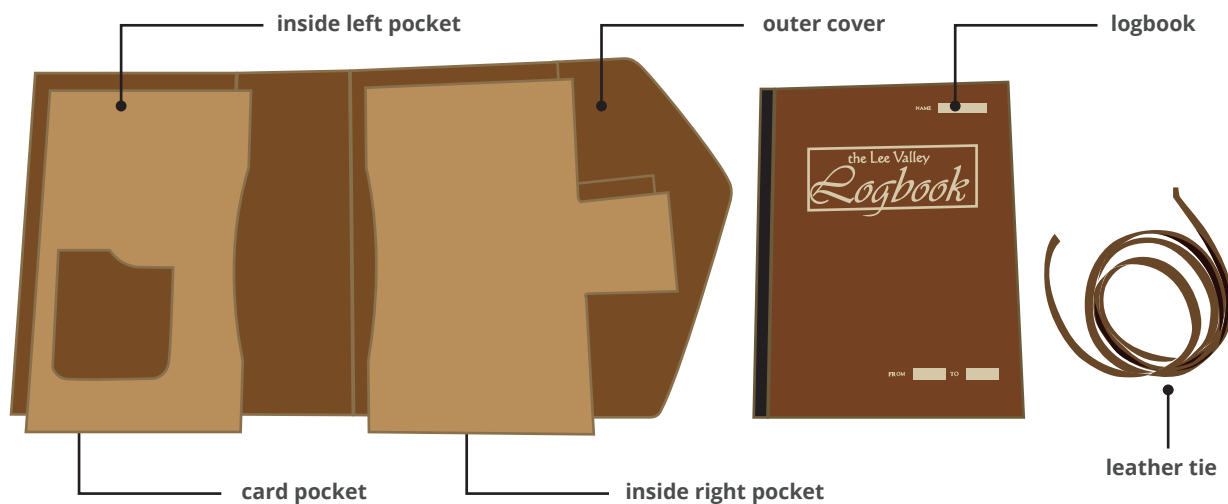


DAY 1: COVERS STEPS 1 TO 7, AND SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 2 TO 3 HOURS TO COMPLETE.

1 SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

- a. Find a comfortable place to sit. Select a clean, open and well-ventilated area.
- b. Remove the contents of the kit from the box and set them aside, but nearby. Unfold the empty box (or use any other box you have on hand) and place it on top of your worksurface to protect it. You can also place a self-healing mat or cutting board on top of the unfolded box.
- c. If you have not done so already, read all the product instructions to familiarize yourself with how to use each product.

Tip: Take a moment to review the different parts of the cover so you are aware of how they will all fit together.



Also, as you unpack the contents, take a moment to mark the grit on the back of each piece of sandpaper (if this is not already marked) so you can easily tell them apart when the time comes to use the sandpaper. The 150x feels rougher than the 220x.

2 BURNISHING THE EDGES OF THE CARD POCKET

Note: A leather slicker seals the cut edges of vegetable-tanned leather, helping to protect against wear and moisture while giving a finished appearance. Rubbing it briskly along an edge (with a medium such as water or beeswax) generates friction and compresses the fibers of the leather. The slicker has concave grooves in widths of 3 mm, 4 mm, 5 mm and 10 mm to match a range of leather thicknesses.

- a. Wet the edges of card pocket with a small wet sponge.
- b. Using the best-fitting groove in the leather slicker, rub the edges back and forth until the edges are smooth. The friction will ease the stiff edges and help all the fibers to lie down.



- c. Let the pocket dry for about 5 minutes.

- d. To create a polished, sealed edge, rub a bit of wax along the edges, then burnish again with the leather slicker so the wax penetrates the fibers. Use short brisk strokes to rub as this will generate heat and help the fibers settle.
- e. Reapply the wax and burnish again for an even smoother finish.



3 MAKING THE STITCH HOLES IN THE CARD POCKET

- a. With the grain (smooth) side of the card pocket facing up, use one of the needles to scribe a stitch line 2 mm in from the edge, on the right, bottom and left edges. (Since the curved top does not require stitching, there is no need to scribe that edge.)



Tip: Measuring 2 mm on a ruler can be difficult. In a pinch, you can use the thickness of two Canadian dimes or one U.S. nickel to gauge the 2 mm inset.

- b. Position the card pocket 25 mm up from the bottom and inset 25 mm from the straight (outer) edge of the left side pocket.
- c. Scribe the sides and bottom of the card pocket's reference lines on the left side pocket.

Note: These marks will not be seen once the pocket is sewn.



- d. Apply a thin, even coat of rubber cement with the brush, inset 4 mm along the flesh (suede) side of the sides and bottom of the card pocket. Use the glue sparingly. (Be sure to scrape the excess glue from the shaft.)

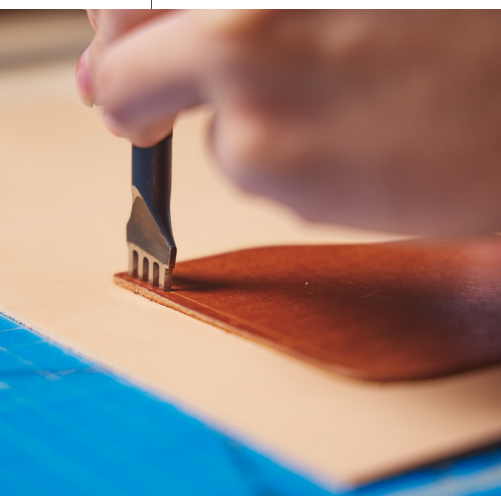
Tip: Solvent-based rubber adhesive is a good choice for temporarily holding leather components together while you punch stitch holes or sew them together. It has a high initial tack and short open time, so it requires little or no clamping. Since the glue has a moderately low bond strength, parts can be separated and repositioned if needed; dried adhesive is reactivated by applying a fresh coating. The glue line is flexible, and any squeeze-out is easily removed.



- e. Place the card pocket on the location marks on the left side pocket while the glue is still wet.
- f. Let the glue dry for about 5 minutes.

Tip: The 4 mm stitching chisels have angled prongs that are diamond shaped in cross section and create 6 1/2 stitches per inch; the 4-point chisel marks stitch lines along straight runs and gentle curves, while the 2-point chisel is for tighter curves.

- g. Position the 4-point stitching chisel 2 mm from the top of the card pocket and on the stitch line. Tap the top of the chisel with a hammer, making sure to tap hard enough for the chisel to go through both the card pocket and left side pocket. Use the scrap piece of wood provided as a backing. (Instead of using the wood backer board, you can use an old plastic cutting board or a self-healing mat.)



- h. When working from the left to the right, place the outer left point of the stitching chisel in the last hole made, and tap the top of the chisel to make the next set of holes. Keep repositioning the outer left point in the last hole made, and continue to follow your marked stitching line. (In fact, you are making three new holes every time you reposition the chisel.) When you approach the radius edge, switch to using the 2-point chisel so that you can follow the curve, then continue the straight lines with the 4-point chisel.

4 PINNING THE CARD POCKET TO THE SIDE POCKET

Tip: Along with the contact cement, you can secure the card pocket in place with pushpins and a piece of cork spaced every few inches between the stitch holes. This will help to keep the holes lined up as you sew. Use a utility knife or scissors to cut the cork into three pieces. Insert the pushpins into a hole on the grain side and anchor it in place with a piece of cork on the flesh side.



- a. Insert a pushpin into the hole in the top left of the card pocket and line it up with the hole in the top left of the left side pocket. Secure the pushpin with a piece of cork on the back of the left side pocket.
- b. Insert a pushpin into the hole in the top right of the card pocket and line it up with the hole in the right hole in the side pocket. Secure the pushpin with a piece of cork.
- c. Insert another pushpin into one of the holes in the bottom of the card pocket and line it up with the hole in the same location on the side pocket. Secure the pushpin with a piece of cork.

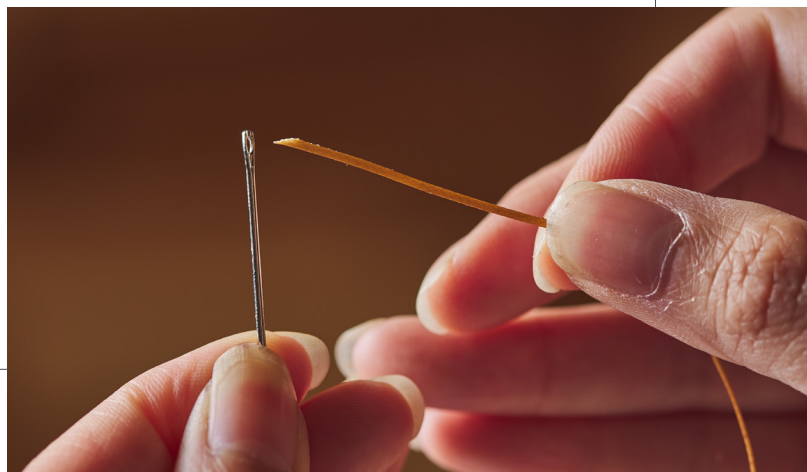
5 THREADING THE NEEDLES

Note: With the strength and rigidity needed for stitching leather, the harness needles have blunted tips for use with pre-punched holes made by a stitching chisel. They are made of nickel-plated steel to resist corrosion.

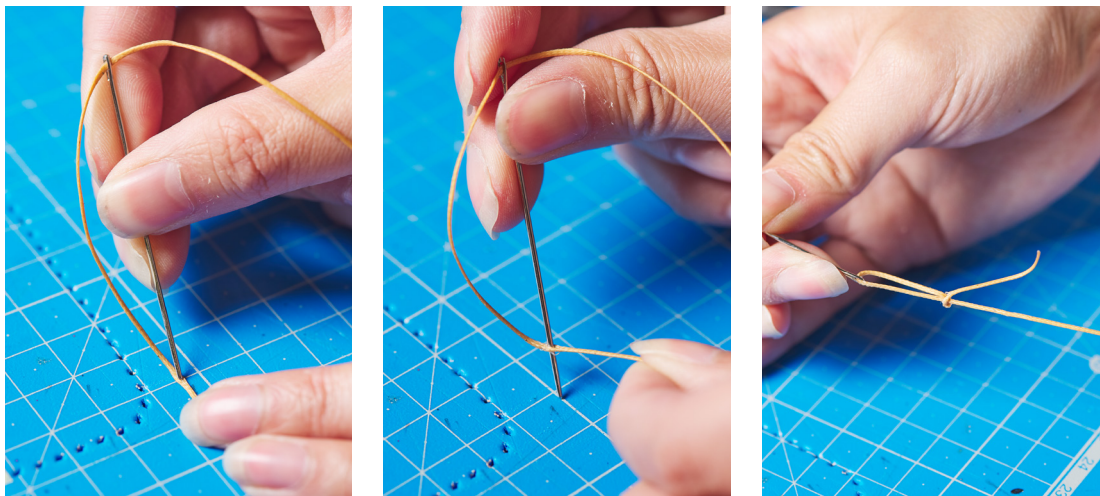
The polyester thread has the strength and stiffness needed for leatherworking. The light wax coating helps prevent fraying and reduces friction when drawing two threads past each other. Each piece is precut to the correct length to ensure you have sufficient thread to complete the stitching with one continuous piece. The shorter thread is for the card pocket and the two longer pieces are for the outer pockets.

These instructions will show you how to stitch seams with two needles at the same time; no sewing experience is needed. For this method, you will secure a needle on each end of the length of thread in preparation for sewing leather. This is one approach to ensure your seams are both neat and strong.

- a. Trim the end of the shortest piece of thread (120 cm long) at an angle and insert it through the eye of one needle.



- b. Pull about 3" of thread through the eye. Invert the needle such that the point is parallel to the thread, and then pierce the pointed end of the needle through the center of the strand of thread.



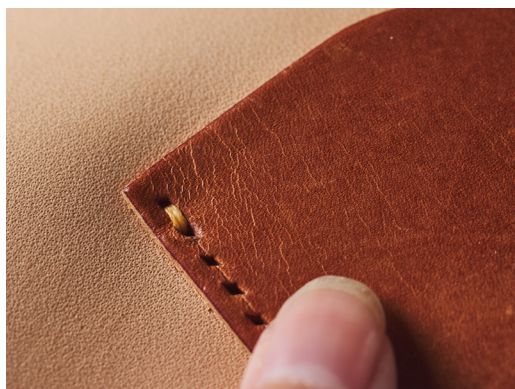
- c. Slide the pierced strand along the shaft and over the eye to create a small loop. This will lock the thread in place to ensure the needle and thread are secure as you pull tight stitches without fear of the needle slipping off the waxed thread.
- d. Repeat the threading process on the other end of the thread with another needle.



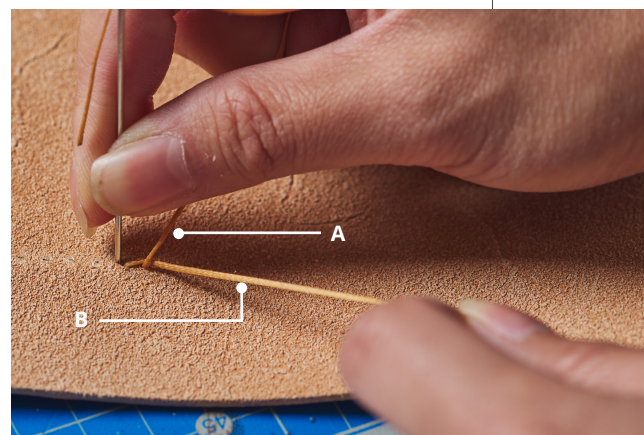
6 SEWING THE CARD POCKET

Note: The stitch used to sew the card pocket to the side pocket is called the leapfrog saddle stitch. It is one way to sew leather by hand. To keep the stitches neat and even, sew one stitch at a time. Start each stitch with your dominant hand (right-hand demonstrated). If you are right-handed, you will be stitching from the left to the right. If you are left-handed, you will be stitching from the right to the left.

- a. Remove the cork and pushpin only when your stitching reaches that spot.
- b. Starting on the grain (smooth/skin) side, insert a needle (we will call this one needle A) through the first hole and the second needle (needle B) through the second hole on the same side. Pull the thread through both layers, making sure to even up the thread so you end up with the same amount of thread on both needles.



- c. Working from the flesh side, hold thread B with your left index to create tension. Place thread A over thread B, and insert needle A through the same hole as thread B. Keep the tension on thread B and pull thread A taut. Pull the threads snugly. Too tight, and the stitching will make the leather pucker; too loose and the stitching will not last or hold cleanly.



Tip: If you find it hard to insert the needle from the back, you can use the needle on the front just to ease the opening. This may then make it easier to insert the needle from the back.

- d. Working on the grain side, insert needle A into the next hole, and pull it through and downward with a bit of tension to the flesh side. Transfer thread A to your left and hold it down with your left index. Pick up thread B and place it on top of thread A. Insert needle B into the same hole as thread A on the flesh side, making sure not to inadvertently pierce the thread, and pull through and into the next hole on the grain side.

Tip: All of this keeping track of which needle and thread you are using will be confusing at first. We have used the references of needle/thread A and B just to get you going, so there is no need to mark which needle is which. You will quickly get the knack of working this repetitive leapfrog stitching technique and find your rhythm. Keep in mind that when stitching from the grain (smooth/skin) side, you will be inserting the needle into a new hole. When stitching from the flesh (rough/suede) side, you will be inserting the needle into a hole that already has a strand of thread. The thread inserted through to the flesh side goes under and to the left, and held with the left index. The next thread goes over the previous thread and into the same hole. The stitching should look good on both sides.



- e. Repeat stitching this way until you reach the end of the stitch line, while trying to keep the stitching as consistent as possible. Remove the pushpin and cork as you go.

7 FINISHING THE SEAM

- a. When you reach the last hole in the card pocket, lock the stitching in place by making two or three backstitches, pulling taut after each stitch, and finishing with both threads on the flesh side of the left side pocket.



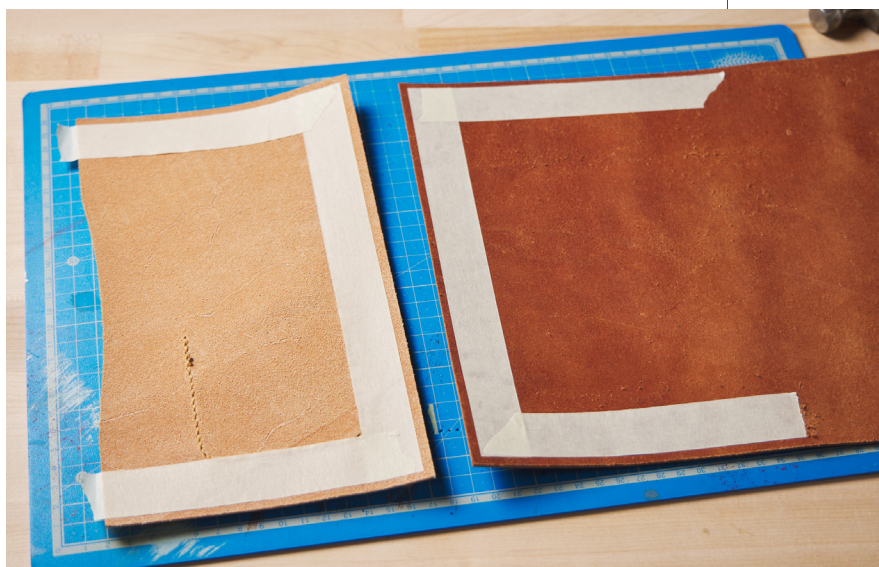
- b. Trim each thread to 3 mm and singe them with indirect heat from a lighter. Wave the flame back and forth, close to the loose threads until they melt, being careful not to actually light them. Use the body of the lighter to press on the melted thread. This will form a small plug on the end of the thread, preventing it from unravelling. (**Caution:** Do not use your finger for this process; you will get a painful burn.)

END OF DAY 1

DAY 2: COVERS STEPS 8 TO 13, AND SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 3 TO 4 HOURS TO COMPLETE.

8 GLUING THE LEFT SIDE POCKET

Tip: Use masking tape to mask a line 3 mm to 4 mm inset from edges to be glued on the flesh (suede) side of both the left side pocket and the left side of the outer cover. This will help to keep a neat line as you apply the rubber cement glue onto the flesh sides.



- a. Brush rubber cement onto the three straight outer edges of the left side pocket and the left side of the cover, using the masking tape as your guide, making sure to keep the raw edges as free from glue as possible. (The glue should not overhang the edges, but just be nearing the edge; sloppy gluing will make more work later.)



- b. Gently remove the tape, and then leave the glue on both pieces to dry for about 5 minutes.
- c. Line up the edges flush, starting from long side and paying close attention to lining up your corners. Place the glued edges on a smooth surface and gently hammer the glued seam to set it.



9 MAKING THE STITCH HOLES IN THE LEFT SIDE POCKET

Tip: To indicate where to stop scribing the stitch line when you reach the outer cover's spine, make a small pinhole through both layers, inset approximately 2 mm from the top and side edges of the pocket.



- a. With the darker-colored side facing up, use one of the needles to scribe a stitch line 2 mm in from the edge, on the side, top and bottom edges.
- b. To ensure the stitch holes are evenly spaced, start from one of the outer corners. Position the 4-point stitching chisel 2 mm from the top of the outer cover and on the stitch line. Tap the top of the chisel with a hammer, making sure to tap hard enough for the chisel to go through both the outer cover and the left side pocket. Use the scrap piece of wood provided as a backing.



- c. As when perforating the card pocket, place the outer left point of the stitching chisel in the last hole made, and tap the top of the chisel to make the next set of holes. Keep repositioning the outer left point in the last hole made, and continue to follow your marked stitch line. Switch to the 2-point chisel as needed when you approach the pin mark near the end of the stitch line. Be sure to follow the stitch line as closely as possible.



10 SEWING THE LEFT SIDE POCKET

- a. Thread two needles as before, this time using one of the two remaining pieces of thread.

Tip: *Leather pads and butterfly clips are provided to serve as clamps. Wrap a leather pad around the raw edges to be stitched, and use a clip to hold the layers securely in place. The clips are handy to use in the event the rubber cement comes apart while working along a stitch line. If your gluing is clean and consistent, you may skip using them altogether. An extra bit of holding is sometimes required. Alternatively, you can use the pushpin/cork as before to keep the holes aligned.*



- b. Starting on the darker-colored side, insert needle A through the first hole on the top edge and needle B through the second hole on the same side. Pull the thread through both layers, making sure to even up the thread so you end up with the same amount of thread on both needles.

Tip: To ensure that your finished threads end up on the bottom edge of the leather cover, start sewing from the top edge.



- c. Working from the lighter-colored side, hold thread B with your left index to create tension. Place thread A over thread B, and insert needle A through the same hole as thread B. Keep the tension on thread B and pull thread A taut. Pull the threads snugly.



- d. Sew the top, side and bottom of the left side pocket to the cover using the leapfrog saddle stitch that was used for the card pocket, only this time, the threads “leap” on the lighter-colored side.
- e. Finish the seam in the same manner as with the card pocket.

11 GLUING THE RIGHT SIDE POCKET

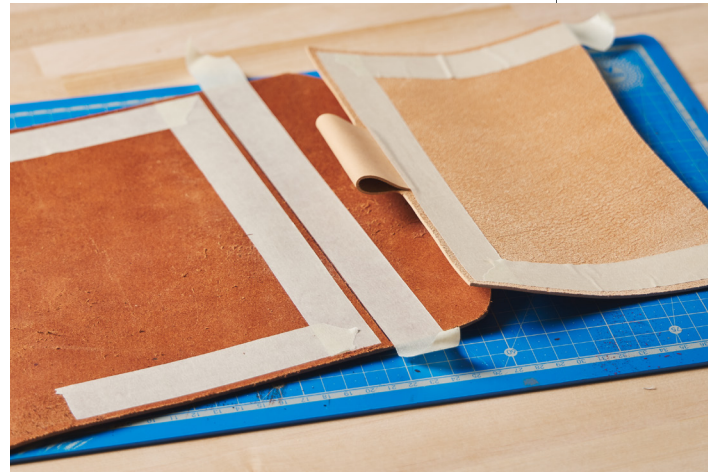
- a. Apply a thin, even coat of rubber cement with the brush, inset 3 mm along the flesh side edge of the protruding tab, as well as on the right side of the marked lines. Use the glue sparingly.



- b. Let the glue dry for about 5 minutes.
- c. Fold the tab over to the left so the edge lines up with the lines.
- d. Place the glued edges on a smooth surface and gently hammer the glued seam to set it.



Tip: As with the left side pocket, use masking tape to mask a line 3 mm to 4 mm inset from edges to be glued on the flesh (suede) side of both the right side pocket and the right side of the outer cover. This will help to keep a neat line as you apply the rubber cement glue onto the flesh sides. This side will be a bit trickier in that there is a flap on the right side edge. Use the line markers as guides.



- e. With the flesh side facing up, brush rubber cement onto the three outer edges of the right side pocket and the cover, using the masking tape as your guide, making sure to keep the raw edges as free from glue as possible.
- f. Gently remove the tape, and then leave the glue on both pieces to dry for about 5 minutes.
- g. Line up the top and bottom edges of the right side pocket flush with the outer cover, as well as the right edge of the pocket with the lines marked on the cover. Place the glued edges on a smooth surface and gently hammer the glued seam to set it.



12 MAKING THE STITCH HOLES IN THE RIGHT SIDE POCKET

Tip: To indicate where to stop scribing the stitch line when you reach the outer cover's spine, make a small pinhole through both layers, inset approximately 2 mm from the top and side edges of the pocket.

- a. With the light-colored side facing you, check that the stitch line will go over the pen loop tab. If it does not, pull the pieces apart and reglue the pen loop tab so that the stitch holes will go through all three layers of leather.
- b. Flip the cover over and mark the stitch lines on the darker-colored side.
- c. To ensure the stitch holes are evenly spaced, start from one of the inside corners. Position the 4-point stitching chisel 2 mm from the top of the outer cover and on the stitch line. Continue making holes in the same manner as for the left side pocket, all the while following the stitch line as closely as possible.

13 SEWING THE RIGHT SIDE POCKET

Tip: To ensure that your finished threads end up on the bottom edge, start sewing from the top edge.

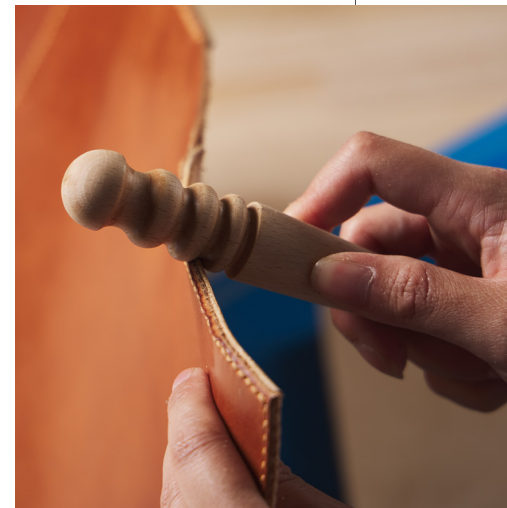
- a. Starting on the darker-colored side, insert needle A through the first hole on the top edge and needle B through the second hole on the same side. Pull the thread through both layers, making sure to even up the thread so you end up with the same amount of thread on both needles.
- b. Sew the top, side and bottom of the right side pocket to the cover using the leapfrog saddle stitch.
- c. Finish the seam in the same manner as before.

END OF DAY 2

DAY 3: STEPS 14 TO 16, AND SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 1 HOUR.

14 CLEANING THE OUTER EDGES

- a. Using the 150x sandpaper, sand all the bumps or rough edges that do not line up along the stitched edges. This step should be a quick correction for lining up the side pockets to the outer cover. With the outer cover facing out, sand the edges back and forth from outside to inside.



***Tip:** Use the block of wood to elevate the cover off your worksurface. This not only allows you to dress the edge more easily, but it also helps in supporting your work.*

- b. After sanding the edges with the 150x sandpaper, sand them again with the 220x sandpaper until they are smooth. Apply a liberal amount of water to the edge and burnish with the slicker.
- c. After the burnished edges are dry, apply beeswax to the edges and rub with the slicker. Apply a second coat of wax, and burnish again.

15 ATTACHING THE TIE

- a. Open the leather cover so that the flap is to your right.
- b. You will notice that one end of the tie has a slit, and the flap has three slits, which are identified as 1, 2 and 3, with 3 being the closest to the outer edge of the flap. Insert about 2 cm of the slit end of the tie, flesh (rough/suede) side up, through slit #1 from the grain side of the flap.
- c. Pass the other end of the tie through both slit #2 and the slit end of the tie.
- d. Feed the free end of the tie through slit #3.
- e. Pull the free end tight such that the slit end forms a loop knot. Tighten and adjust the loop so it sits flush with the flap.



- f. Once you are satisfied with how it sits, gently hammer the knot on a smooth surface with the smooth-faced hammer. With the tie secured to the leather cover, you can smooth its edges with some water and the slicker. Although a bit finicky to do at this stage, the tie edges can also be dressed with wax.
- g. Knot the free end of the tie, if you want.

16 INSERTING THE LOGBOOK

- a. Using the narrow end of the slicker, gently pry open card pocket, as well as the two side pockets. If there is any excess glue in these areas, the slicker should be able to pry them open without much effort.



- b. Fold the leather cover so the side pockets face out. Open the front cover of the journal and partially insert it into the left side pocket. Open the back cover and partially insert it into the right side pocket. Ease the journal covers into the side pockets. This will be a snug fit initially, so take your time working it into the leather cover.



- c. Insert your favorite pen in the holder, then wrap the tie around the leather cover and let the journaling begin.



PERSONALIZING YOUR LEATHER JOURNAL COVER

We hope that you will be inspired to personalize your leather journal. You can use waxed colored thread, or incorporate monograms and designs with a wood burning tool, branding iron or leather stamps. You can even use the scrap of leather lacing that was used to wrap the leather contents as a bookmark.



CARING FOR YOUR LEATHER JOURNAL COVER

You can let the natural wear and tear of your leather journal cover tell its story, or you can keep it looking almost like new. This is up to you. However, a little care goes a long way to ensure your leather journal cover does not dry or crack prematurely. Regularly wiping the dust off your journal cover with a damp cloth (not wet, with no soap) may be all that is necessary. To provide moisture protection and enrich the color of the grain (skin/smooth) side of the leather, you can apply a leather oil or wax, such as our **Walrus Oil leather oil** or our **Walrus Oil leather wax**, once every 6 or 12 months. How often you do this depends on how dry the leather cover feels.

Besides keeping your leather journal cover moisturized, keep it away from direct sunlight and heat, which could dry it prematurely or affect its color. If the cover gets wet, wipe it with a dry cloth and let it dry naturally.

NOW WHAT?

The tools and supplies in this kit are reusable. We hope that you will be inspired to develop your leatherworking skills by making more objects from leather: key FOB, luggage tag, tool pocket, bracelet, knife sheath, wallet, card holder, cord holder, cup cozy, storage tote, belt and bag, to name a few.

Visit our website for our **complete line of leatherworking tools** and accessories, including specialty tools, hardware fittings, leather, waxed polyester thread, needles and books, as well as a selection of other leatherworking projects.

You can also explore our leatherworking videos:

How to Pick the Right Tools: Provides an overview of some of the basic leatherworking tools and a short demonstration on how to use these.

How to Do a Saddle Stitch: Shows another stitching technique.

How to Make a Simple Leather Pouch: Shows you how to make another simple, beginner project.

You can reassemble the box and store the tools and supplies in it so you know where to find them when the need for them arises. The more you make, the more the tools will be of continued service.



CREATED BY LEE VALLEY. MADE BY ME.

Now that you have completed your leather journal cover, we would love to hear about your experience and see the finished project.

#LVMadeByMe #LVLetsDoSomething



MK107 Leather Journal Cover

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