

## *Looking for Leather and Faux Leather*

Leather is sold in pieces or full hides and is available online and at some retail stores. Leather can also be harvested from leather garments available second hand. Leather is available in multiple thicknesses and densities from soft and drapey to cowhide almost as tough as rhino hide. For sewing on a domestic machine, choose a medium to lightweight leather. Thicker leather or multiple thicknesses of medium weight leather are best sewn on more powerful machines that are designed to handle those robust materials. If leather crafting is going to be your dedicated interest of choice, ask for a machine such as the Janome M8 or M7. (Contact customer service with questions about this type of machine.) Lightweight machines generally can handle only the thinnest leather. Faux leather is generally sold by the yard and is widely available online as UltraSuede™ and other vinyl fabrics designed to look like real leather. Vinyl also is available in multiple weights and with or without backing for strength. When buying either material online or if you are unsure before making a large investment, make sure to ask for a sample generally available at nominal cost.

## *Choose a Project with Leather in Mind*

Sewing leather uses special techniques and simple patterns are best suited for your beginning projects. Some patterns are specifically designed for leather garments and accessories. Simple patterns are adaptable to leather or vinyl construction. Match the project to the weight of leather. Drape able leather will work for a blouse or skirt, but stiff leather would only really lend itself to a tailored skirt. Medium weight leather will wear well for an accessory that gets repetitive use, such as a wallet or handbag. Leather can be used for whole projects or as an accent for durability. Adding leather as a trim is a good option for edges and doesn't require much product. Vinyl is not as durable and will crack and delaminate faster than real leather. UltraSuede™ will pill with abrasion over time. Vinyl and UltraSuede™ are washable.

## *Special Techniques for Leather*

Pinning creates permanent holes in leather, vinyl or cork. Use alternate methods such as clips, tape or glue to hold items in place. When cutting out a pattern use weights to hold a pattern in place or trace around the pattern and then cut just inside the lines. Cutters such as the Scan N Cut. Use caution when considering heat with these materials. To open seams in leather use pressure to open the seam from the wrong side (be careful not to impress a crease onto the right side) and use glue to hold the open seam allowances in place. Rubber cement is commonly used, but other glues such as PVA or common white glue also work well.

Always test any marking device on a scrap of leather, vinyl or cork before marking the project as many will not be removable. Chalk may be a safe choice if no excessive pressure is needed. A pattern tracing wheel with sharp points when used lightly makes an even series of tiny holes for topstitching. For a smooth edge that matches well, add about 1/8" extra to two pieces of leather glued back-to-back. Stitch the topstitch along the marked line and then trim for an even edge.

Machine needles for leather or vinyl involve creating needles with specific features to suit the needs of leather sewing. The size of the needle should match the size thread used for sewing. Larger threads will shred with too small a needle. Sharp or Topstitch needles will work well with most leathers, but seek a specialty Leather needle for heavier, dryer or denser materials. Leather needles have a reinforced shaft, a larger eye and a sharp point to reduce the organic tearing material. For most sewing on a domestic machine that will not accommodate heavier materials, a sharp or topstitch needle will work well.



Machine feet for sewing leather, cork or vinyl work best if they are friction resistant. Select a Teflon™ or UltraT™ foot to reduce friction and engage the Automatic Fabric Sensor feature (if available on your machine) to adjust the pressure on the foot. The Dual Feed foot is another option for feeding heavier materials. Make sure the top and bottom pieces are well secured with glue in the seam allowances, tape or clips to avoid slipping.

Polyester all-purpose thread has both strength and UV resistance, so it is a good choice for leather projects like handbags and garments. When durability is a must choose a nylon

thread for strength. Nylon extra strong thread is a good choice for projects that are subject to abrasion such as wallets, belts and upholstery. When using a thicker thread, select a larger size needle to accommodate the thread.

The pattern for the saddle used in the video is Vogue 7603 and the feed bucket is from Vogue 7729. These patterns are out of print and may be available through resellers such as Etsy or eBay.

