

In This Article

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- How do You Store Leather so it Doesn't Dry Out?
- How do you Store Leather and Prevent Mold?
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- What is the Best Material to Store Leather in?
- Should I Roll Leather or Should I Keep it Flat?
- Keep Leather Like With Like
- Storing Finished Leather Goods
- How to Store Leather Long Term

Whether you are storing hides or finished goods, your ideal leather store area should have the following characteristics:

- Slightly cool to room temperature
- No large temperature swings
- Low humidity
- Low light
- Non-reactive surfaces
- Similar leather types together
- Dust-free
- Flat

If I wanted to take a long nap, I'd want the above conditions, too. While many people, myself included, can't achieve all of the above, you should aim for as many as possible. Some conditions can be difficult or impractical. Storing a whole hide flat would require considerable space while storing cordovan shells flat is very doable and will significantly impact that type of firm leather. Let's look at the most essential factors to mitigate.

How Do You Store Leather so it Doesn't Dry Out?

Avoid storing leather in extreme temperature areas, like outside or in a hot attic. Also, avoid areas with large temperature swings, like by a door to the outside or near very sunny windows. Cold is unsuitable for leather; it causes the waxes to bloom and turn white. Hot will dry out your leather, and hot, enclosed areas can create moisture, which is even worse. A basement, garage or other secondary room is often where people do their leatherworking. You may not have a choice but to expose your leather to hotter or colder temperatures, so do your best. For example, if you store your leather in the garage, keep it away from the door and keep it away from the furnace or the sub-pump if it is in the basement.

How Do You Store Leather and Prevent Mold?

Mold is one of those problems that you don't prepare for until you've ruined something. I ruined three pairs of shoes because I stuck them in the back of the closet. Unfortunately for me, that closet's back wall shared the outside wall. So when the rainy season hit, our old plaster walls

started to retain moisture, and mold crept into the bottom corner. They were nice shoes, but I wore them rarely. When I pulled them out, they were covered in a blanket of green fuzzy mold. I tried to clean them as best as I could, but they were too far gone.

When storing leather, hides, or finished goods, keep them away from areas that accumulate moisture. This seems like a no-brainer until you discover these areas, like I did, the hard way. Interior walls that share an outside wall.

Areas close to the furnace, AC, lots of plants, or similar things that generate moisture.

Areas close to an exterior door.

If an area feels cold, clammy, and dark, it might get enough moisture to cause mold. Most places bad for temperature are also bad for humidity, so you can usually mitigate both by selecting the correct location.

Sun and Light Will Fade Out Colors

Storing leather in containers will mitigate color fading. This isn't typically an issue for hides and cuts of leather, but sun and light damage can happen to finished pieces you leave out. This can be a conundrum if you sell leather goods with a permanent display. You want to show your works prominently, but leaving them in the window or under bright lights will eventually fade the colors. Rotate your display items, which hopefully happens anyway because you are selling your pieces. It's especially important to consider when you have signature pieces that are your best examples, where you'll need to swap them out. I had a tote by the front door, which was a great display area, but the front of it had noticeably changed color because I hadn't turned it around nor rotated out the piece.

When storing leather, there are other considerations as well, like:

- **What is the best material to store leather in?**
- **Should I roll the leather or keep it flat?**
- **How should I store my finished**
- **What is the Best Material to Store Leather in?**

If you buy leather online, the easiest thing to do is keep it in the box that it came in. Keeping leather in the shipping box is fast and easy as long as you consider temperature and moisture. One additional exception is if it was shipped in a tighter roll than it should be. Chrome tan leather can be rolled relatively tightly, but medium to firm temperature veg-tan should have more room.

If you have lots of leather, like I do, cardboard tubes are great. The bigger ones can be pricey, especially on the shipping, but they are great because they are a uniform size and shape, you can stack them, and they allow some moisture to escape. Home Depot has concrete form tubes that work if you clean them out, and carpet stores sometimes have tubes that they are throwing away. Regular square corrugated boxes work, but be careful when stacking them because they will collapse if too heavy.

Is it OK to store leather in plastic containers?

It depends. Storing small leather offcuts can be ok if they don't get much light and moisture exposure. I do this to organize my offcuts. I've read about people storing leather wrapped in garbage bags or plastic garbage cans. First, I don't like storing anything in garbage cans because visitors and kids easily mistake them for actual garbage cans. If you do this, set the can on its side on a shelf or in some orientation where it is unmistakably leather storage. Second, plastic can trap moisture, leading to water stains or mold. Perhaps storing in plastic is ok where it is really dry. We have a long rainy season here in the Bay Area, and I wouldn't be able to store leather this way. Large plastic containers like laundry baskets are tempting because they are cheap and readily available; however, ensure that if there is a mesh or pattern, it doesn't imprint on the leather.

Should I Roll Leather or Should I Keep it Flat?

Many types of leather are ok to store rolled. It's much more practical than laying out a huge hide flat and keeping it somewhere dust and moisture-free. I keep firmer, more pricey leather like shell cordovan, bridle if possible, and a few other exotics, stored flat. Everything else I roll. Chrome-tanned leather can be rolled tighter and stacked very efficiently in tubes. Don't wrinkle or fold the leather; those marks can stay permanently.

Depending on the temper, veg-tan needs more space but can also be rolled loosely. I'll keep big boxes for thick veg-tan, 12"x12" or bigger. This size lets me roll the leather loosely so I don't wrinkle or crease it.

When rolling leather, I'll roll brown paper on the outside to prevent scraping the leather against the tube and absorbing wax or oil where applicable.

I prefer storing cordovan shells flat.

Keep Leather Like With Like

Try to keep leather of the same type and color together. Different colors can bleed onto each other; think red onto white, especially untreated veg-tan. I keep colors together also so I know where to find them.

I separate oily leather like Chromexcel or waxy bridle leather into dedicated containers. I use these containers for the same leather lest I accidentally put something like tooling leather in and get out oil stains and wax marks.

Keeping like with like applies to scrap as well. I'll keep medium-sized pieces in a large tote bin. I have a separate one for oily and waxy leather. Small pieces go into stackable containers organized by color and type. When looking for an accent color or texture, it's easy to rifle through the bins and quickly find what I need.

Storing Finished Leather Goods

As I mentioned, if you put your finished goods out for display, rotate them and clean them regularly. Dust and moisture will wear out a piece quickly. When not being displayed, store finished leather goods in cool, dry places out of the light, like your hides. You can put them into dust bags but check them regularly to see if your storage area retains moisture. Make your projects clean and dry before putting them away. I let them sit at least overnight so that paint, burnishing, glue, etc., have time to fully dry.

Keep it Clean, Keep it Organized

That was a lot of criteria for storing leather. If you do it right, though, your reward will be clean, usable pieces that are well-organized, easy to find, and immediately ready to make your next masterpiece.

By: Fine Leather Working

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- leather goods?