

RITTEL'S/ TASCOS
SNAKESKIN TANNING
INSTURCTIONS
(Catalog #SSK-10)

Rittel's/Tasco's Snakeskin Tanning Kit contains all the necessary ingredients to produce a real leather. Salt and White vinegar are the only two ingredients not included. These items are easily bought at a local store. Do NOT use Kosher /Rock Salt – Non-Iodized Salt is BEST. Unlike other methods that use Alum, Alcohol or Glycerin – RITTEL'S/ TASCOS Snakeskin Tanning Kit produces leather suitable for crafts and leather work. The leather retains the distinctive markings, plumps, has excellent durability, and strength.

Fresh or frozen snakeskins tan the best. If you prefer to dry your snakeskins, and tan them later – always avoid heat, and salt them liberally. After skinning – tack them out flat – flesh side up. Then flesh and liberally rub salt into the flesh. Leave this layer of salt on the skin for 2 – 3 days, then brush it away and allow the skin to dry thoroughly. Do NOT expose the skin to heat or direct sunlight while it dries. Heat can render snakeskins stiff and untannable. Heat causes the fibers to gelatinize, relax and tan. To freeze fresh snakeskins, place them in a plastic garbage bag and use a twist tie to seal it, than freeze them solid. Snakes normally shed their outer layer of skin to grow. This may occur during the tanning process. If it does remove the outer layer and it should not affect your skin.

1. **Skinning** – For taxidermy purposes, an incision is made on the belly midway between the head and the tail. After loosening the skin from the flesh the skin is pulled off each end, similar to removing a sock. For crafts or simply to display the skin, the snake is skinned by making a belly incision its whole length, and the skin is stripped from the flesh.
2. **Fleshing** – Snakeskins normally flesh easily. You can even use a tablespoon with one edge sharpened to scrape the meat from the inside of the skin. Some tanners give it a serrated edge. Always scrape the meat away working from the tail towards the head to avoid tearing the skin. Use a stroke from the middle of the skin towards the edge as you flesh. This is especially important when handling small snakes.
3. **Relaxing** – Freshly fleshed snakeskins can be place directly into the Vinegar and Salt Pickling solution. Dried and frozen skins however, require relaxing or thawing before they are pickled. For relaxing dried skins, use 2 lbs. of salt to every 1 gallon of water. Allow the skins to soak in this salt brine until they become soft and flexible, then rinse and place them in the pickling solution. Frozen and fleshed skins can simply be placed directly into the pickle. Always weigh them to determine the right amount of pickle to use before placing them in the pickle. Record this weight.
4. **Pickling** – To mix a Vinegar Pickling Solution: For every 2 lbs. of skin weight, mix 2 qts. of White Vinegar to 2 qts. Of water and add 1 lb. of salt. Mix enough solution to completely submerge the skins without crowding! The PH level should read 2.0-2.5. It can be checked using PH papers. Allow the skins to soak in the pickle for 2 – 3 days. As an example – If you are tanning 1 – 2 rattlesnake skins and they weigh almost 8 oz. total, than mix only 2 quarts of pickling

solution. Later when you add the KT – 10 tanning solution, use only 2.5 fl oz. After your skins are thoroughly pickled, they can safely be left in the pickling solution for several weeks, until you are ready to tan them. Stir the pickle at least once a day. Do not expose it to temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. When you are ready to tan the skins, remove them briefly from the pickle. For reliable results, always check the PH level of your solutions. PH levels are critical and if not correct your chemicals will not be effective.

5. **Tanning** – When you are ready to tan and after you have removed the skins from the pickle, add to the pickling solution: 5.0 fluid oz. using a bakers measuring cup, 6.5 oz. (by weight) or 2/3 a cup of TASCOS/RITTEL'S Kwik-Tan (KT-10), per 1 lb. of skin weight. Stir the solution, and then place the skins back into it. The PH level of the solution should read at a 4.0 PH, if not adjust it. To adjust the PH higher, dissolve baking soda in some water and pour small amounts into your solution. Stir and wait 10 minutes before checking the PH again. If it should go over a 4.0 PH, simply add more White Vinegar in small amounts to lower it to a 4.0 PH again. Leave the skins in the tanning solution for 12 – 20 hours. Snakeskins will fully tan within this time. When tanned remove the skins from the tan, rinse and drain for 20 – 30 minutes, than oil.
6. **Descaling** – If you are going to use the snakeskin for making craft material, than the scales should be removed. For taxidermy or display purposes, the scales are usually left on the skin. To descale rattlesnake and other skins that do not constrict, after the tan, rinse the skins in cold water, than crumple the skins in your hands and you will notice that the scales begin to fall away. IA like to use a brass bristled brush or packing tape to pull and loosen the more persistent scales. Use a motion with the brush, pulling it from the head towards the tail. Continue this process until the skins are completely descaled.

A Special not about tanning pythons and constriction snakeskins

After being tanned and dried, these types of skins may take on a gray color, diluting out the marking. This is due to material on the individual scales. The scales must be removed on these skins to produce a truly professional looking finish that preserves the beautiful marking. I prefer to remove these larger scales once the skin has dried. They either use a brass bristled brush or an artist's putty eraser to push back the scale and pull it off (head towards tail) one at a time. Or you can simply press packing tape on the scales in small areas than peel it off from the head to tail taking the scales with it.

7. **Oiling** – After tanning all skins require oiling. Prepare your oiling mixture by mixing 1 part Pro-Plus (PP-301) to 2 parts hot water. Instead of heating this mixture use hot tap water. Rub or brush the oil and water mixture onto the flesh side of the skin.
8. **Finishing** – If you will use the skin for display or crafts after oiling, tack it out flat and allow the oil to soak into the flesh and dry. Later these tack holes along the edge can be trimmed away. For taxidermy purposes, after oiling it is best to let the skin lay flat soaking up the oil 3 – 4 hours. It can then be mounted. If you prefer to freeze it and mount it later, use a roll of paper towels and put a layer on the flesh and then roll the skin up and freeze. For crafts, when the skin is almost dry, begin to gently work the skin with your hands to soften it. When softened and dry, lightly sand the flesh side to a smooth suede finish. If the skin is to be for display, after drying

turn the skin over to display the markings. Tack it down using decorative tacks and give it a coating of clear lacquer or a clear sealer to keep the scales from eventually curling.

Average snakeskin weights

This is for reference purposes when determining how much KT-10 you will need. You need to use 5 fl. oz. of KT-10 for each 1 lb. of wet skin weight. A 4' live rattlesnake usually weighs about 2 – 3 lbs. The skin itself only weighs about 4 – 6 oz. Eastern rattlesnakes tend to be heavier. You will want to use approximately 2.5 fl. oz. of KT-10. A 15' live male Burmese python usually will weigh about 100 lbs. and a live female about 130 lbs. The skins only weigh 10-15 lbs. depending on size. For these you will want to use between 50-75 fl. oz. of KT-10.

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