

Early American Life

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Leather Care Formulas

BRITISH MUSEUM LEATHER DRESSING TREATMENT (BML)

7 ounces anhydrous lanolin
1 ounce cedarwood oil (acts as a fungicide)
1/2 ounce beeswax (optional)
350 ml diethyl ether or 330 ml hexane*

Gently melt together the lanolin, oil, and optional wax—it serves primarily as a polish—and pour the liquid into the ether or hexane. Stir constantly while the mixture cools.

Apply to leather sparingly, rubbing it in. If you use the wax, wait two days before polishing the leather with a soft cloth. Although this treatment often darkens leather, the British Museum reports success with it.

** Be careful: Both solvents have low boiling points and are very flammable.*

CENTRAL RESEARCH LABORATORY FOR ART AND SCIENCE FORMULA

The Central Research Laboratory for Art and Science in Holland uses a friendlier treatment based on lanolin and neat's-foot oil made into an emulsion with distilled water to condition leather and regain flexibility.

2g lanolin
10g neat's-foot oil
6g surfactant – Teric N9 (Nonylphenol ethoxylate)
100ml distilled water

Warm the lanolin and oil to about 140 degrees F. until they melt. Cool the mixture to room temperature (68 degrees), and add the surfactant as an emulsifier, stirring thoroughly and rapidly. Continue stirring while adding distilled water bit by bit. After all the water had been added, observe the mixture for 10 minutes. If the emulsion does not separate, it is ready for use.

Because the mix contains no preservatives, use it immediately or refrigerate it. Paint the leather with the emulsion using a soft brush. Apply as many coats as necessary to make the leather flexible, allowing each coat to dry before applying the next coat.