

## Preparing Sheep Hides for Tanning

by Karen Lobb, bide a wee farm, Newberg, OR

We save the hides from animals we have butchered and send them out to be professionally tanned. Preparing them to send off to the tannery is easy - they just need to be salted and dried. It is important to salt the hides shortly after the animal has been butchered so the hide doesn't start to deteriorate but do let it cool for a few minutes. The salt draws the moisture out of the hide and helps to preserve it. I use fine, non-iodized hay salt from the feed store. It comes in 50 lb. bags at about \$7/bag. A 50 lb. bag will salt 6 to 8 hides depending on the size of the hides. It's important to completely cover the skin side of the hide clear out to the edges but the salt doesn't need to be very thick (about a 1/8" will do). If flesh or fat needs to be cut off, wait until the hide has been salted and dried and it will come off easily. Lay the hide skin side up on a pallet (or something that allows air flow—I use old bread racks) positioned at a slight angle to allow the moisture to run off. Space is an issue for us because we do 10 to 12 at a time so once they're salted I fold the pelts in half. After a few days I flip them so the opposite side can dry. Once the pelts have started to dry I unfold them, shake the salt off, stack them and let them finish drying (so they'll weigh less for shipping). Once dry they're ready to box up and ship to the tannery.



Racks are laid out at an angle over plastic (to catch moisture and excess salt).



Pelt is laid out skin side up on racks, then salt is applied.



Salt is applied just thick enough to cover skin (about 1/8" thick).



Salt application in process.



Be sure to cover skin all the way out to the edges.



After salting I fold pelts in half to save space. Skip this step if space is not an issue for you.



View of salted, folded pelts. They will be flipped after several days.



Loosely cover salted pelts to shield from rain and direct sun.



Photo shows a dried pelt which is ready to send to the tannery.

The Tanneries we've used successfully are:

[Bucks County Fur Products](#), PO Box 204, 220½ N. Ambler St., Quakertown, PA 18951 - (215) 536-6614 (no e-mail)  
[Stern Tanning](#), 4010 W. Douglas Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53209 - Toll Free (877) 783-7682 - [www.sterntanning.com](http://www.sterntanning.com)