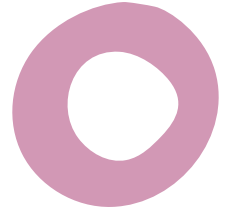


HOW TO

BUY LEATHER

WELL *





INTRODUCTION

The term “vegan leather” is popping up more and more these days, positioned as an alternative to real leather, an ethical, “cruelty-free” choice. It’s also positioned as better for the planet although that claim is highly questionable.

That’s why at Leather UK, we have put together this guide to help you buy well and navigate misinformation.

It’s more important than ever that as consumers we buy quality items that provide many years of wear and don’t impact the planet. Leather does exactly this, making it a responsible choice.



Let’s dive in and explore the world of leather together!



REAL LEATHER VS “VEGAN LEATHER”

You may have noticed the terms "vegan leather" and "plant leather" increasingly popping up on products and claiming to be ethical and "cruelty-free" alternatives to real leather that are better for the planet.

But we think these terms deserve scrutiny.

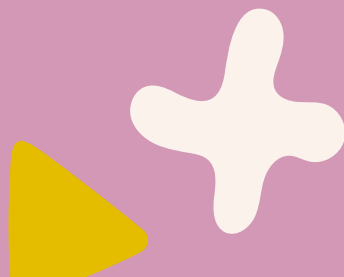
Quite simply, they are marketing terms, designed to make people feel they are making the right choice.

Let's take "vegan leather" and look at what it's made of. Well, it's a bit of a minefield. The word vegan means it's definitely not animal-based. But, and it's a big but, that doesn't mean it's plant-based. A garment labelled as vegan leather can easily be PVC or PU (polyurethane).

Yes, you read that right, PU and PVC, which are plastic materials that are derived from fossil fuels!

But equally something labelled as "vegan leather" could be made out of a "plant-based" material – read on for more information.

Our advice is to make sure you read the composition label which by law needs to list what exactly something is made of!



HOW TO KNOW YOU'RE BUYING REAL LEATHER



At Leather UK, we think there needs to be a shake-up in labelling laws. We'd like to see the meaningless terms "vegan leather" and "plant-based leather" disappear.

We hope to follow in the footsteps of countries like Italy and Portugal where it is illegal to label anything as leather that is not the original animal product. We think the same should happen here both to protect people who want to buy real leather as well as those who don't.

So how do you identify real leather at a glance? Your first stop should be the label on the product. However, you can also look for some other features:

- **Smell** – it should have that unmistakable leather scent. If it doesn't, it may well be fake
- **Appearance** – although different leather finishing processes can alter the look and feel of the surface, most of them allow the unique nature of the specific piece of leather (what we call the grain) to show through. The structure will not be completely uniform and it is possible there will be blemishes and imperfections.

If the surface is extremely smooth and consistent then that could be a sign that you're actually looking at PVC or PU.

- **Feel** – most real leather will have a sense of depth and some flexibility, meaning that it has a bit of give and you can gently scrunch it. While that's not true for smart, formal shoes or a sofa, you can usually rely on smell and appearance. PVC or PU fake leather will also flex, but it will feel different, maybe a bit "harder" and no grain will show along the fold or crease line.
- **Price** – while real leather can be extremely affordable, it usually comes in at a higher price point than PVC or PU based leather alternatives.

Leather UK's swing tag, found on leather goods, aims to provide you with information on all these aspects of leather and more.

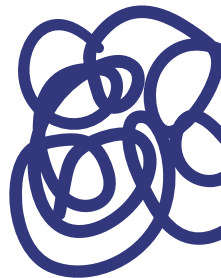


OTHER LEATHER “ALTERNATIVES”

While we urge caution whenever you see the description “vegan leather”, there are some interesting leather alternatives for people who’d rather not wear the real thing.

The term, “plant-based leather” can be even more confusing than “vegan leather”. It’s easy to assume that the use of the word “plant” means it doesn’t harm the environment. That’s not necessarily the case. Many “plant-based leathers” contain large amounts of plastic material!

As things stand today, when you see something labelled as a plant-based leather, it could contain as little as 10% plant material with the rest being plastic. It will also be relatively expensive because the amounts being produced are still quite limited. If you’re tempted to buy one of these items, ask lots of questions to make sure you understand what you’re buying.



REAL LEATHER, THE SUSTAINABLE, RESPONSIBLE CHOICE

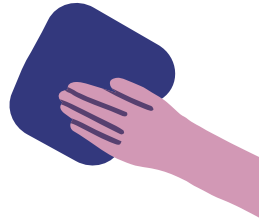
Misinformation is rife. We know this because we recently carried out a poll that found that only 24% of UK consumers knew that the hides or skins used to make leather are a by-product of the food industry.

If they weren't turned into leather any leftover animal skins or hides would be thrown away in landfill or incinerated. How wasteful is that? As long as animals are part of our food industry, leather is a valuable way of using up the bits that remain. That means that you can buy real leather in confidence, knowing that no animal has been killed specifically for its skin.

Because leather is a natural product it is long-lasting, durable and comfortable, and when it does eventually come to the end of its life, it biodegrades. That means it breaks down naturally returning to the environment. That's very different to fast fashion and synthetic garments. Not only do these plastic-based fabrics shed microplastics when they are washed, but at the end of their short lives they add to the mounting problem of fossil fuel-based fabrics polluting our planet.



HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR LEATHER ITEM



For a complete guide to looking after your leather items and tackle leather disasters such as spilling red wine or tearing leather clothing take a look at:

leatheruk.org/care-instructions

CONCLUSION



Thank you for reading our short guide. For more information about any aspect of leather and leather care, do visit the Leather UK website at leatheruk.org where we aim to answer pretty much every question you could possibly have about leather!

You'll also find some useful contacts in our brilliant Leather Directory at leatheruk.org/leather-directory, from repair services to designers and leather makers across the UK. There's some incredible talent out there!