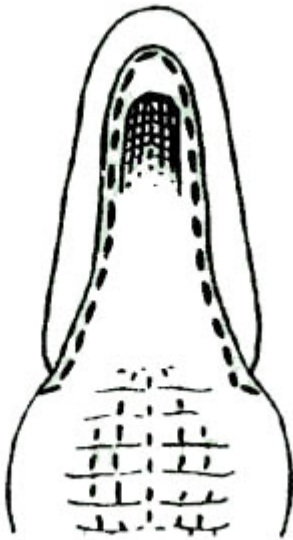


HIDE CARE TIPS:

This page is not a basic guide on how to skin an alligator, but we can offer a summary of skinning steps, tips on how to best care for alligator skins and explain why careful skinning and scraping is important.

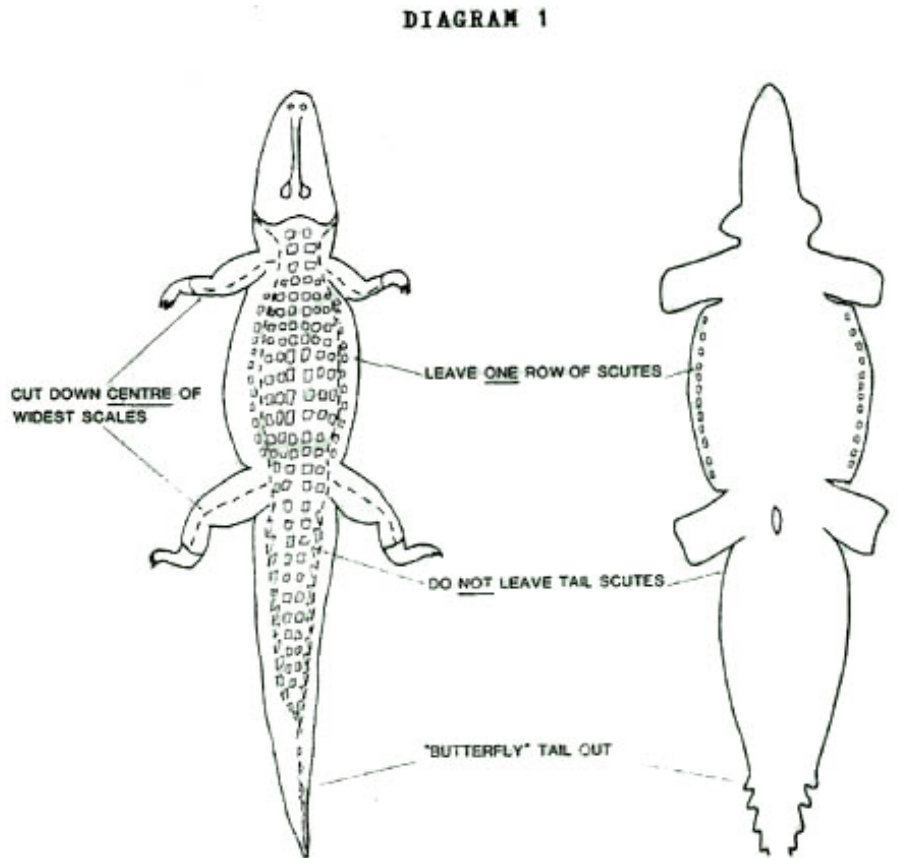
Start with a good place to skin an alligator and have the right tools to do the job. Obviously, you need a steady table at a comfortable height, a good light, a knife and a sharpener, a scraper and salt to get started. You also need to develop your own skinning routine. The best skinners say this comes with practice and experience, but learn to skin an alligator the same way each time instead of changing from one way to another. That way you begin to develop your own system. You will develop a feel for each spot in the skin, and by doing it the same way each time, your moves and knife strokes almost become second nature. A standardized method of skinning, curing and handling alligator skins increases the value of the product and improves buyer confidence in a uniform lot of skin. Diagram 1 shows the standard opening cuts when skinning an alligator and the belly patterns of the skin.

SKINNING STEPS:



- Outline the body where skinning will start.
- The cut along the sides is made between first and second row of scutes on the back.
- A straight cut is made from the back along the top of each leg (through the largest scales).
- Cut completely around each foot at the wrist or ankle.
- The outline cut on the tail is below the top row of tail scutes.
- When cuts reach the single row of tail scutes midway along tail, cut through base to end of tail (butterfly end of tail).
- Skin tail completely along the sides.
- Begin skinning body section with front legs and adjacent side skin.
- Slowly cut skin away from front legs and side of body.
- Some pulling can be done on upper leg portions.

- Skin hind legs and adjacent side skin same as front legs.
- The sides should be completely skinned and only the belly portion should be left un-skinned now.
- After sides and legs are skinned, turn alligator on its side and make outline cuts along lower jawbone.
- Cut is made along the outer edge of the lower jaw skin.
- By pulling on the jaw muscle, the flesh can be tightened, allowing for easier skinning.
- After skin is cut from lower jaw and neck, the alligator is ready to be skinned down the belly.
- Skinning the under side of the alligator can be accomplished by both pulling and cutting.
- Pulling is easier on small alligators, with careful cutting required otherwise.
- Cut carefully around anal opening (vent) so this area won't tear if pulled.
- Both pull and cut skin from the remaining tail section.
- Meat and fat remaining on the skin must be removed.
- Scrape with dull objects (pipes, scrapers, spoons, etc.) taking care not to cut or tear skin.
- Once scraped, hide should be relatively free of flesh and white in appearance.
- Skin should be washed in clean, fresh water to remove blood and other fluids.
- Hang skin in shaded area and allow to drain.

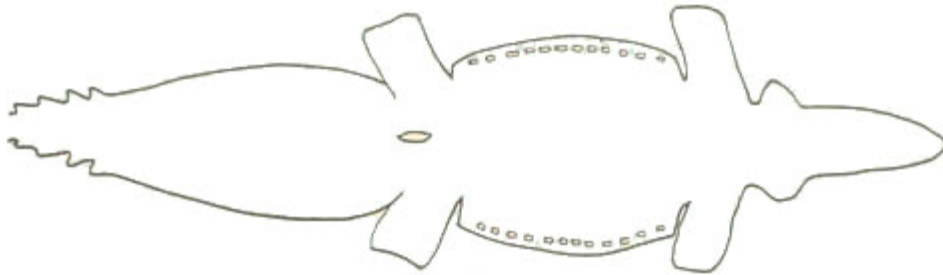


The shaded area between the neck and vent in Diagram 2 is the part of the belly skin that is graded. Holes or cuts in this part of the skin make it difficult or impossible to cut full belly patterns for purses, briefcases or larger leather articles. Enough holes or cuts in the flanks can even make cutting shoe vamps or smaller leather-goods difficult. The one row of scutes along the sides of the alligator are left so the tanner has some extra skin to tack to when the skin is stretched and dried during the tanning process. Special care should be taken not to cut or put holes in the belly pattern of the skin (particularly around the legs and flanks where the thin skin is easy to nick with a knife).

The proper care of alligator skins begins as soon as the animal is harvested. Here are some more helpful tips:

1. Skinning should take place as soon after the harvest as practical.
2. Avoid direct sun or heat on the carcass or skin whenever possible.
3. Keep skin away from blood, entrails, or other contact with dirty surfaces where more bacteria can get into the hide.
4. Always skin carefully and particularly avoid holes or cuts in the belly pattern.
5. Scrape excess meat and fat from the underside of the skin with blunt knives, paint scrapers, beveled pipes or other dull tools.

DIAGRAM 2



Removing meat and fat from the skin is very important because of the time necessary to store and ship alligator skins for tanning. This often takes several months and the -excess meat simply helps bacteria get started and can lead to "red heat" or "slipping" skins. If excess fat is not removed it can prevent salt from properly penetrating the skin. Also, if the fat heats up, it can actually penetrate the skin and leave grease spots on the finished leather.

The purpose of curing alligator hides is simply to remove moisture from the skin so it can be better preserved before tanning. A fine grain mixing salt works best and should be applied generously (1/2 to 1 inch thick) and rubbed into all parts of the skin. Salt should be rubbed thoroughly into the skin, making sure enough salt gets into the creases, flaps, tail and similar places where bacteria can get a start. Salt helps slow bacterial growth. Tightly roll the skins and stack in a well-ventilated place where they can drain. After three to five days in a cool or shaded place, the skins should be re-salted for best curing. Don't use rock salt and don't freeze hides (freezer burned hides won't tan properly).