

# DEER HIDE RATTLES

Deer hide rattles are an easy, economical way to utilize smaller pieces of deer hide and are relatively quick and easy to produce. They can be made in a variety of shapes and sizes.

## Materials:

- Rattle rawhide body: deer hide, elk, moose hide, etc. The thickness of the hide can vary, however, larger size rattles are more durable when made with thicker hide (or the thicker part of a hide). For example, on a deer hide there are areas of the hide, such as the neck and shoulders, that tend to be thicker than other areas, such as the belly and back.
- Types of handles: wooden dowel, tree branch, plain or carved antler, etc. You can also embellish plain wooden handles with cedar twining/weaving or beadwork. Be creative.
- The “rattle”: use anything from small pebbles to beads, buttons, dried corn, etc., to achieve the “sound” you want.



Decide on the shape and size of your rattle pattern. Trace the shape onto the deer hide with pencil. Remember to place the pattern on the thicker part of the hide for strength (rattle will hold its shape better). Cut 2 shapes and place them together with the rough side of the hide on the inside.



You can hole punch small sewing holes on the outer edge of the cut deer hide when the hide is dry but it is usually easier to cut when the hide has been soaked for 30 minutes or more. Hide is skin and therefore must be soaked in cool to lukewarm water (never hot). The holes should be placed approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the edge and approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch apart.



Thinly cut hide (soaked and gently stretched) or artificial sinew is usually used to sew the 2 pieces together. Thread the sewing material into a blunt nosed darning needle and start at one end of the rattle edge. It is easiest to sew from edge to edge with a plain “whip stitch” but make sure you leave at least a 4 inch “tail” on the edge that you begin in order to make any necessary adjustments when you are completing the rattle. Depending on the design and durability of the rattle you can choose to whipstitch back to your original edge which creates an alternative look by creating an “X” sewing pattern to your rattle edge.



Once you have sewn the rattle shape you will fill it with dry rice to the desired shape. It is easiest to approach this with a funnel and stick (i.e. chopstick) to compact the rice to get the appropriate shape. You can also use dry sand, or salt, but I find it messier to work with!

You can now attach the handle into the neck (open area) of the rattle and temporarily tie it in place until it has dried. Depending on the size and shape of the rattle it generally only takes 12 – 24 hours for the deer hide to dry.



Once dry, the rice can be removed ( it isn't necessary to get all of the rice out but you can place some beads or buttons inside and shake it until the rice does not adhere to the sides and can be poured out). Now you need to place your "rattles" (i.e. 4-6 small pebbles or glass beads) inside the dry rattle to achieve the sound you like. Once you are satisfied with the "sound" you can attach your handle.

To attach your handle you can also be creative in your choice of material and shape. Often rattles handles are wrapped with tanned leather or suede. You can cut out one rectangular shape to wrap the handle or a longer strip approximately 1 inch wide to wrap (spiral) around the neck of the deer hide rattle and handle. It is important to attach the leather/suede wrap to overlap both the deer hide neck of the rattle to the wooden/antler handle. White glue can be applied to the underside of the wrapping



You can also embellish the neck/handle of the rattle with beadwork, weaving, smaller leather lacing, etc.

The completed rattle is now a great opportunity for your artistic expression! You may chose to draw and paint a design and almost any paint will work including natural and acrylic ink. Design and embellishment often depends upon the purpose of the rattle (i.e. ceremonial versus decorative).

# FINISHED RATTLE EXAMPLES



# RATTLE TEMPLATES

