



Leathercraft Projects

General exhibit requirements and judging score sheets for Colorado County Fairs can be found at <https://co4h.colostate.edu/program-areas/state-fair-information/>

Unit Structure:

Intro to Leathercraft & Creative Stamping - Unit 1

Beginning Leather Carving - Unit 2

Intermediate Leather Carving - Unit 3

Advanced Leather Carving - Unit 4

Advanced Stamping - Unit 5

Sewing Leather - Unit 6

Braiding and Un-Tooled Leather - Unit 7

Master Leathercraft - Unit 8

Making and Rebuilding Saddles - Unit 9

All units will have:

1. Completed Leathercraft e-Record.
2. The article(s) constructed by the exhibitor using skills learned in their respective unit(s). See exhibit requirements for specifics.



This judging guide has been developed to assist 4-H project judges of all experience levels to successfully judge the 4-H Leathercraft project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This revised 2025 edition of the previous Guide for 4-H Leathercraft Judges was primarily compiled by Teddi Baird-Tharp, 4-H Leathercraft Leader, La Plata County, with input from the following contributors:

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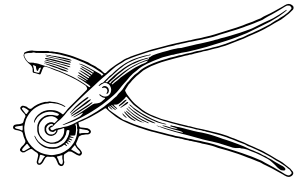
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Things to Look For



General Leather Judging Suggestions

- Refer to the [Colorado State Guide for 4-H Project Judging](#) for general 4-H judging information.
- Please refer to lower unit sections for the details of techniques that are also used in higher units.
- Read the story the member wrote in their e-Record to see if they describe any challenges or reasons for using particular techniques.
- ENTRIES MUST NOT SHOW SIGNS OF WEAR OR USE.

Overall Appearance Should Be Neat

- Ballpoint pen and pencil marks should not show.
- Backsides of belts, buckles, coasters, etc., other than framed hung pictures, should be cleaned and finished. Belts may or may not have a buckle attached. If the belt has a buckle that requires holes in the billet to be functional, they must appear on the billet end.
- Garments should not show signs of wear.
- Utility items should function properly.
 - Billfolds should fold flat and insides should not wrinkle or bend.
 - Edges and corners should meet evenly. Boxes and lids should match and be able to open and close.
 - Book covers should remain open or closed when put in those positions.
- Also, check for neatness of the insides.
 - No glue smudges
 - No pulled, stretched or wrinkled liners
 - Check that folds have not cracked.
 - Watch for bulkiness of wallets.
- Check for neatness of antiques and dyes.
 - Dye work should be tidy and should not completely obscure leather-working techniques.
 - Use of acrylics or Cova color should not completely obscure the grain of the leather.
 - Oil can darken leather, and that is ok.
- Check for uniformity of lacing or stitching.
 - Ends finished correctly



Note: Units 1-3 have “Not Permitted” techniques. Read exhibit requirements carefully for each unit you judge.

Specific Unit Suggestions

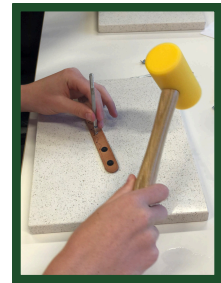
Introduction to Leathercraft and Creative Stamping - Unit 1

Questions to Answer

1. Is the entry displayed correctly on a 12" x 18" x 1/8" board?
2. Does the project meet the unit requirements?
 - a. Is there a completed article or set of articles with a creative stamping design on a single layer of leather?
 - b. Is there a completed article with a creative design on at least two pieces of leather that are hand sewn together with lacing or thread using a whip stitch, running stitch, or a saddle stitch?
 - c. Do the completed articles have a clear finish applied?

Things to Look For

- Are the tool impressions distinct and not blurred?
- Is the design or border creative and unique?
- Is the design placed on the leather correctly (i.e. centered, border even around the piece)?
- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Does each of the tools used have good depth and consistency?
- Are exposed edges of the articles finished?
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth
 - finish applied
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
- Are the articles complete and neat?
- Is the finish applied evenly and correctly?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Beginning Leather Carving - Unit 2

Questions to Answer

1. Is the entry displayed correctly on a 12" x 18" x 1/8" board?
2. Does the project meet the unit requirements?
 - Are there three samples?
 - One with a swivel knife and camouflage tool?
 - One with a swivel knife, camouflage tool, pear shader, beveler, and veiner?
 - One with a swivel knife, camouflage tool, pear shader, beveler, veiner, backgrounder, and decorative cuts?
 - Is there a completed article that uses the tools and skills in this unit?
 - Does Sample 3 and the completed article have a clear finish applied correctly?
 - Is the completed article Double Loop Laced?



Things to Look For

- Are swivel knife cuts smooth with no undercutting?
- Are the pearshading and beveling smooth and not choppy?
- Are the tool impressions distinct (crisp or sharp) and not blurred for the veiner, camouflage and seeder?
- Are the camouflage, veiner and seeder evenly spaced?
 - Make sure they don't cross carved lines.
 - Make sure they don't overlap each other.
 - Are they placed correctly in the pattern?
- Is the backgrounder even and deep enough?
- Are exposed edges of the articles finished? (Run your finger along the edge to check.)
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth (no fuzzies)
 - finish applied
- Is the Double Loop Lacing correct?
 - Is the smooth side out with no twisting?
 - Is it smooth and even?
 - Is it more toward the front of the article than the back?
 - Are the holes even if not a kit?
 - Are corners consistent? (same number of stitches in each corner hole)
 - Is lace hammered down to lie flat?
 - Are the ends hidden?
 - Are splices hidden?
- Is the article complete and neat?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Intermediate Leather Carving - Unit 3

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed article, matching set, or picture/wall hanging?
2. Is one of the following skills/techniques present?
 - a. Traditional Floral Carving
 - b. Inverted Carving
 - c. Silhouette Carving
3. Is there a finish applied to the completed project using one or a combination of the following?
 - a. Clear Finish
 - b. Staining/Antiquing
 - c. Two-Tone Finish
 - d. Background Dyeing
4. Is there an explanation in the e-record about the finish used?
5. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?

Things to Look For

- Is the tooling correct for each type of technique?
- Is the technique adequate or mastered?
- Does each of the tool impressions have good depth and consistency?
- Is the design placed on the leather correctly (i.e. centered, border even around the piece)?
- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Are exposed edges of the article finished?
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth
 - finish applied
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
 - Stitching should be done by hand - not machine.
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
- Is the finish applied appropriately?
 - Does it complement the tooling?
 - Is it pleasing to the eye?
 - Is it neat?
 - If background dyeing, is it applied in the background?
 - Does it overlap lines?
 - Is it applied consistently?
 - If Staining/Antiquing, is it applied evenly or used to achieve the desired effect?
 - If Two-Tone Finish, is it on the appropriate parts of the tooled pattern?
 - Is it applied evenly?
- Is the article complete and neat?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Advanced Leather Carving - Unit 4

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed article, matching set, or picture/wall hanging?
2. Are one of the following skills/techniques present?
 - a. Advanced Traditional Carving
 - b. Figure Carving
 - c. Pictorial Carving
 - d. Decorative Swivel Knife Carving
 - e. Embossing
 - f. Filigree
3. Is there a finish applied to the completed project using one or a combination of the following?
 - a. Clear Finish
 - b. Staining/Antiquing
 - c. Two-Tone Finish
 - d. Background Dyeing
4. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?

Things to Look For

- Is the tooling correct for each type of technique?
- Is the technique adequate or mastered?
 - Embossing - was their technique described in the e-record?
 - Is the embossing in the correct perspective?
 - Filigree - was their technique described in the e-record?
 - Do cuts touch?
 - Is the cutting clean and even with no fuzz on the edges?
 - Does the piece retain structural integrity?
- Does each of the tool impressions have good depth and consistency?
- Is the design placed on the leather correctly (i.e. centered, border even around the piece)?
- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Are exposed edges of the article finished?
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth
 - finish applied
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
- Is the finish applied appropriately?
 - Does it complement the tooling?
 - Is it neat for the desired effect?
- Is the article complete and neat?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Advanced Stamping - Unit 5

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed article, matching set, or picture/wall hanging?
2. Is there a finish applied to the completed project?
3. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?

Things to Look For

- Are the tool impressions distinct and not blurred?
- Is the design or border creative and unique?
- Is the design placed on the leather correctly (i.e. centered, border even around the piece)?
- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Does each of the tools used have good depth and consistency?
- Are exposed edges of the articles finished?
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth
 - finish applied
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
- Is the finish applied appropriately or used to achieve the desired effect?
 - Does it complement the tooling?
 - Is it neat for the desired effect?
- Is the article complete and neat?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Sewing Leather - Unit 6

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed article, matching set, or garment made primarily by sewing leather?
2. Is there a finish applied to the completed project (if appropriate)?
3. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?

Things to Look For

- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
 - Are stitches the same length?
 - Is stitching recessed in a stitching groove?
 - Is the thread clean?
 - Are stitching holes neat?
 - Are ends hidden well?
- Is the finish applied appropriately or used to achieve the desired effect?
 - Does it complement the tooling?
 - Is it neat for the desired effect?
- Is the article complete and neat?
- Is the overall construction of the article good quality?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Braiding and Un-Tooled - Unit 7

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed article, matching set, or picture/wall hanging?
2. Is one of the following skills/techniques present?
 - a. Lacing
 - b. Braiding
 - c. Expanding
 - d. Sculpting
 - e. Molding
3. Is there a finish applied to the completed project (if appropriate)?
4. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?

Things to Look For

- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Is there minimal tooling for effect?
 - Is it distinct and not blurred?
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is braiding uniform and demonstrating correct technique?
- Is the finish applied appropriately or used to achieve the desired effect?
 - Does it complement the technique used?
 - Is it neat for the desired effect?
- Is the article complete and neat?
- Is the overall construction of the article good quality?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Master Leathercraft - Unit 8

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed article, matching set, or picture/wall hanging?
2. Are there multiple leather working techniques present?

Examples:

- a. Article with stamping design that includes an area of figure carving
 - b. Carved picture with stamped frame
 - c. Floral carving with areas of geometric stamping
 - d. Purse with basket stamping and an embossed horse head on the front flap
 - e. Belt with silhouette carved horse and a name in the back with filigree
 - f. Combinations of techniques are endless.
3. Is there a finish applied to the completed project using one or a combination of finishes?
 4. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?

Things to Look For

- Is the tooling correct for each type of technique?
- Do the multiple techniques used compliment each other and the article?
- Are the techniques adequate or mastered?
- Does each of the tool impressions have good depth and consistency?
- Is the design placed on the leather correctly (i.e. centered, border even around the piece)?
- Is design appropriate for the article?
- Are exposed edges of the article finished?
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth
 - finish applied
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
- Is the finish applied appropriately?
 - Does it complement the tooling?
 - Is it neat?
- Is the article complete and neat?



Specific Unit Suggestions

Making and Rebuilding Saddles - Unit 9 (Refer to Manual)

Questions to Answer

1. Is there one completed saddle - new or rebuild of existing saddle?
2. Is there a finish applied to the completed project?
3. Does the overall article show good quality workmanship?



Things to Look For

- If tooled -
 - Is the tooling correct for each type of technique?
 - Is the technique adequate or mastered?
 - Does each of the tool impressions have good depth and consistency?
 - Is the design placed on the leather correctly (i.e. centered, border even around the piece)?
 - Is design appropriate for the article?
- Are exposed edges of the article finished?
 - edge beveled
 - burnished smooth
 - finish applied
- Is the lacing or stitching appropriate for the article?
- Is the lacing or stitching uniform and straight for the technique used?
- Is the finish applied appropriately?
 - Does it complement the tooling?
 - Is it neat?
- Is construction of the saddle complete and good quality?
 - Does saddle seem balanced?
 - Is horn covered adequately?
 - Will it last?



Additional Guidelines

You should have a copy of the exhibit requirements and judging guide to refer to while judging.

- All items WILL be critiqued in writing. These critiques should be constructive, such as suggestions for improving specific techniques or possibly why the item did not qualify to be judged.
- You should judge the quality of work instead of subject matter which is strictly a matter of personal taste and has no bearing on the ability of the competitor to do leatherwork.
- Also keep in mind that choice of colors is a personal taste; however, the method of application can be considered in judging.
- If you feel unqualified to competently judge any specific categories, please notify the superintendent or Extension staff. Likewise, any categories in which you feel more comfortable than others should be noted to the above.
- If you feel that you will be influenced in any way FOR or AGAINST a piece by anything other than the quality of the work, please have the courtesy to excuse yourself from judging that class. Also notify the superintendent or Extension staff immediately so that you can be replaced in that class. If you are concerned as a judge, get a second opinion. It is better to step away, so there is no opportunity for someone to raise the question about fairness.
- Under no circumstances will a judge change any item into another class or category unless it is approved by the 4-H coordinator/specialist.