

Dyeing Rawhide and Backing Bows



photo1

dye is extracted from tree bark by using a rasp, then boiled for about an hour and filtered into a large bucket where the rawhide is placed for a few days either as whole skin or in pre-cut strips. The longer it is left in, the more tannins will be absorbed making the skin thicker and of more a leather texture.



photo2

This process of dyeing is good if using the skin for strings for braiding, but for the backing of a bow, it is best to not dye the skin as you need it to retain a certain amount of strength, stiffness. Backings can however, be painted once on the bow, after it has cured for a while and before it is varnished.



photo 3

I use two methods to attach the **backing** - as dictated by the wood I use. All backing is done on one limb at a time overlapping on handle for about 2-4 inches. The rawhide should be cut so that the thicker parts are over the middle of limbs with the handle and nocks being thinner.

For bows made from boards, which have a **flat** back, I use **clamps** as shown in photo 4. First is to get everything you need ready and close to hand;

Enough clamps to produce even pressure along the bow (3-2 inch size, about 10 of)
2 spare lengths of wood long enough to cover backing and bow
Glue and brush (evo-stick does the job)
Backing (pre-cut to outline of bow and dampened).

First the back of the bow and the skin are covered in a thin covering of the glue with a brush and left to dry slightly for about 5 minutes.

Once they are joined together, use a scraper to get rid of air spots, then place spare wood both sides of limb and start placing clamps, starting at the handle end. Once they are all attached, tighten up.

I allow up to two days for the glue to fix, then remove the clamps, apply the backing to the other side, then allow the backing to cure for three days once all the clamps are removed. Next I trim the backing using a sharp knife and rough sand paper.

I normally do not start tilting the bow until a week after the backing is



photo4



photo5

For Bows made from staves, meaning that the back is **curved** I prepare the rawhide the same as above, but making sure that it is wet enough to curve to the contours of the wood.

For this method all that is needed is a wet strip of rawhide to wrap around bow plus the glue. Instead of rawhide wrapping, plain string and bike inner tubes could be used, but I find the rawhide best as there is no need to keep it tight as you wound it around the bows limbs (which can be difficult) as it tightens as it dries.

The glue is applied only to the bows limb and left for a few minutes, then the rawhide is fixed in place and again the scraper is used to get rid of air pockets and to push hide into the bows contours. Then starting from the handle, the rawhide strip is wound around the bow.

This I leave on for about 3-4 days to allow for the rawhide to completely dry and then treat as the flat was.

When the bow has been tilted, varnish should then be applied to protect the backing from the damp.



photo6



photo7