

Introduction to Floral Tooling

Richard Harber

You're starting with a 4"x4" piece of vegtan leather, a paper pattern, a piece of tracing film, and your tools, including a pencil.

- (1) Wet (case) your leather. Use your sponge to wet the leather. Watch as the water absorbs into the leather and as it is absorbed add more. Your goal is to get the fibers wet through about half the depth of the leather. Don't soak the leather. Once the absorption rate slows, set your leather aside so the water can spread through the fibers.
- (2) Unlike previous projects, we are dealing with a pattern that has different layers, i.e., some elements are on top of others. Take some time to understand which elements are above and below each other. This will guide your cutting and tooling process.
- (3) Take the pattern, the tracing film and your pencil and transfer the pattern to the tracing film. Place the film over the pattern and secure the two together with a piece or two of masking tape so that they won't shift on you. (Photo 1) Then trace the pattern on the tracing film. Take your time with this. Note that the center circle is dotted and not a solid line. You want to include it in the pattern. The fact that it is dotted indicates that you will not cut this line. It is a reference for beveling. (Photo2 shows the pattern on the tracing film)
- (4) Your leather should have begun to return to its original color and feel cool to the touch. Place the tracing film on top of the grain side of the leather. Using your stylus, trace the pattern onto the leather. This process will leave an indented line in the leather displaying the pattern, as shown in Photo 3.
- (5) It is time to cut the pattern into the leather using your swivel knife. Be sure to strop your swivel knife blade 3-5 times on each side to ensure it cuts smoothly. If you start feeling the knife drag as you cut, strop it again.
In this and subsequent steps, remember to keep your tools upright (vertical), relative to the leather surface. Remember, don't cut the dotted line. Once you start tooling, don't use all your muscles when striking the tools with your mallet. The goal is to have smooth clean tooling.
Start the cutting process with the elements of the design that are on top of the pattern; that is, the flower petals. After those are cut proceed to the leaves and stems. Again pay attention to where leaves or stems go under and over each other. Concentrate on keeping flowing lines as you cut and don't over cut into the different elements. It is ok to start and stop lines a little bit away from intersecting lines. Cut pattern is shown in photo 4.
- (6) Bevel the outside of the dotted line. This will help raise the seed pod up from the flower. (Photo 5)
- (7) Use the Camouflage Tool to add texture around the seed pod. The camouflage impression should be on the area that was beveled in step 6. (End result shown in Photo 6)
- (8) Use the Pear shader to sculpt the interior of the flower petals and leaves. The pear shading is deeper toward the tips of the petals and leaves and fades out as it moves towards the center. Photo 7 shows the effect of the pear shading.

- (9) It is now time to bevel the outside of the petals. Start at the tip of the petal and work your way in towards the center. The depth of your beveling should be less as you approach the seed pod. The goal is for it to look as if the petal is sitting underneath the seed pod. Remember that the petals are overlapping, so that some go under their neighboring petals while others sit on top of their neighboring petals.
Now bevel the inside edge of the stem circling the flower. These are the lines running between the petal tips. The petals are sitting on top of the stem. Photo 8 shows the end result of this step.
- (10) Next background the area between the petals and the inside of the stem. This gives an added level of depth to the flower. (Photo 9)
- (11) Bevel around the outside of the stems and leaves. On the long edges fade your beveling as you approach the end of the cut, then lightly continue beveling for a couple of strokes.
Now it is time to do some cleaning up. This is accomplished using your pear shader and beveler without the mallet. On the interior of the petals and leaves, use your pear shader to smooth things out and make transitions gradual. This is done by rubbing the pear shader along the leather. The pear shader can also be used to “rub out” the ridge lines left by your beveling. You want it to look like the flower is just sitting on top of the leather.
You can use your beveler to smooth out the beveling, and to roll the edges of the petals, leaves and stems so that they look rounder rather than boxy. See Photo 10 for the end results.
- (12) Use the Muleshoe tool to catch the ends of stems and leaves that just run out. This helps end those items and adds a bit of decoration. Add several impressions (3 or 4), in a series, but make each one lighter than its predecessor. See Photo 11.
- (13) For the last step, we return to our swivel knives to add decorative cuts (deco cuts). These cuts add character to the petals and leaves; plus, they help draw the eye along the flow of the design. Deco cuts should not run across an item, but along it. They should start deep and be lighter as they end. Photo 12 shows the final tooled flower.



1 Tracing Film Taped on Top of Pattern



2 Pattern Traced on Tracing Film



3 Pattern Traced onto Leather



4 Pattern Cut with Swivel Knife



5 After Beveling around the outside of the center circle



6 Camouflage Around the Seed Pod



7 Pear Shade the Petals and Leaves



10 Bevel Leaves & Stems and Clean Up Pear Shading & Beveling by Hand



8 Bevel around the flower petals



11 Add Seeds and Muleshoe Under Junctions



9 Background Between the Flower and inside stem



12 Final after Deco Cuts