

DRESSING AND PRESERVATION OF SKINS

Alum process (sulfate of aluminum)

The skins (3 or 4) are allowed to soak in fresh water for 24 hours, then stretched over a convex surface and bits of flesh removed by seraping with a large blunt knife. They are then soaked for 48 hours and occasionally stirred in a lukewarm bath composed of a gallon of water, 1 pound of alum and 8 ounces of coarse salt. They are spread out in the shade on frames or boards, then stretched in every direction as soon as they are half dry. For greater security the latter part of the operation is repeated by soaking them again in a bath for another day before letting them dry.

When the hair is still somewhat oily, the skin is spread out with the hair underneath, sprinkled with bran, sifted wood ashes or plaster, covered with a sheet of thick paper and rolled up. It is then pressed down and lightly beaten. The skins are then ready for use.

Another alum process consists in using a mixture of half a pound of powdered alum per pound of barley flour.

The skins are cleaned, scraped and gently wiped on the tanning side. The mixture is spread on the fleshy side about half an inch thick and the skins are thus rolled up to remain in a dry and cool place for eight to ten days. Fermentation tans the skin.

On the tenth day the preparation is removed and the skins are spread out in the shade, so that they may dry, neither too quickly nor too slowly. As they dry they are stretched out by being pulled in every direction and rubbed between the hands.

The hair drying process is always the same. The hair is given its natural direction by combing and shaking the skins, which are then piled up with hairy sides facing each other.

Sumac Process

"The skins should be carefully cleansed of the remains of blood and flesh with soap, water and scraper; then stretched on a board with the hair underneath; pricked with a needle in many places to insure the soaking in of a strong decoction of dried and ground curriers' sumac leaves, which is vigorously rubbed over the skin by means of a linen pad. It is then washed in water and dried in the shade. This operation is repeated three or four times. The dry skin is unfastened and rubbed between the hands to restore its pliancy." *Le Cosmos*.