



**REAL
LEATHER.
STAY
DIFFERENT.**

MAKING THE GRADE:

GUARANTEEING QUALITY, CHOOSING THE RIGHT LEATHER

One of the defining features of leather is its individuality - no two pieces are the same. It comes in many forms and thicknesses, each suited to different purposes. In order to ensure it finds its perfect use, it is graded at each stage of production, from hide to finished leather. We provide an introduction to help you find the right leather for your requirements.

The quality and characteristics of hides vary according to cattle breed, environment and branding practices, so there are differences according to where in the US they are produced. US hides benefit from environments that offer significant open spaces, low levels of insects, disease and infection and low use of fencing types that can cause marking. ⁽¹⁾

Before they are made into leather, hides are classified into three separate grades ⁽²⁾:

- **NUMBER ONE HIDE:** these are free from holes, cuts, deep scores or gouges more than halfway through.
- **NUMBER TWO HIDE:** these can have one to four holes, cuts, deep scores or gouges and a grain defect no larger than one square foot.
- **NUMBER THREE HIDE:** these contain either five or more holes, cuts, deep scores or gouges, one hole or cut over six inches in length, or an area of repeat marking or small holes larger than one square foot.

The tanning process turns hide into leather. Alongside the quality classification, its trimming informs both the quality and use:

- **FULL GRAIN** is the full thickness of the hide. It is not buffed or sanded so it retains its natural characteristics. It is mainly used for high-quality footwear and furniture.
- **TOP GRAIN** consists of the top layer of the hide sanded and treated. It is more pliable than full grain and is used for clothes, footwear and furniture.
- **SPLIT GRAIN** is made from a layer taken lower in the hide. It has a rougher surface and is what we would call suede or nubuck, often used for boots and jackets.

There are many tests to certify the performance of leather including thickness, durability, tearing strength and resistance, abrasion resistance, permeability, and shrinkage. These are set standards governed by the International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies and can help in your choice of leather. ⁽³⁾

This factsheet is produced by the Leather and Hide Council of America (L&HCA), established to promote the US leather industry which is responsible for a significant proportion of the international trade in hides. The L&HCA works to establish best practice in US leather production and to share this worldwide. Figures quoted refer to the USA unless otherwise stated.

SOURCE:

- (1) [US Hide Geographical Regions \(USHLA factsheet\)](#)
- (2) [https://www.ushsla.org/sites/default/files/documents/Standards%20governing%20the%20Sale%20of%20North%20American%20Cattle%20Hides%20\[PDF\]%20interactive.pdf](https://www.ushsla.org/sites/default/files/documents/Standards%20governing%20the%20Sale%20of%20North%20American%20Cattle%20Hides%20[PDF]%20interactive.pdf)
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