

HOW TO MAKE LEATHER AYLMERI JESSES

KATIE BILZI
NATURAL ENCOUNTERS, INC.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Leather, cutting board, 6-gauge hole puncher, leather scissors, leather cutter or X-ACTO Knife, pliers (needle nose are preferable), metal ruler, pen or pencil, and jess grease.



STEP 1: CUTTING YOUR LEATHER STRIP

- Lay your leather hide flat on the cutting board. Using the ruler and a pen or pencil, mark a strip of leather at a width of 1/2 inch. Mark this width in multiple places along the flat edge of the leather hide (your strip will be the entire length of the hide).
- Using the leather cutter or X-ACTO Knife, cut the strip along your marks the entire length of the hide trying to keep the width as uniform as possible. Use the metal ruler as a flat edge to connect your marks if it helps.
- Important considerations : Making your strip as long as possible will allow you to use your leftovers for the second jess or other equipment you need later on. Only cutting what you need causes uneven edges in the hide and eventual waste of leather. Be careful to make precise cuts that do not slice into the leather strip. This section will become waste if the integrity is damaged or becomes too thin. Also note that certain sections of the hide should be cut at a different orientation to prevent the leather from stretching unevenly. Consult the leather guide that shows you the recommended orientation that will allow you to maximize the use of your entire hide.



STEP 2: MAKING THE KNOT

- Roll one end of the leather strip to make a flat knot, or button, about 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch wide and three layers thick from the center of the knot out. This will be the end that connects to the anklets so make sure it is wide enough that it won't slip through the grommets.



STEP 3: PUNCHING THE HOLE

- Using the hole puncher on a gauge size 2, cut a hole in the center of your knot. It should be cutting through five layers of leather (the sixth layer will be pulled through the hole).



STEP 4: FINISHING THE KNOT

- While holding the knot together in one hand, trim the strip down to roughly what you will need to finish the jess -- about 9-9.5 inches if your finished jess is 7-7.5 in. This should still leave a bit extra to trim your jess down after the knot is tightened so this cut does not have to be exact.
- Cut a triangle tip on this end. Again this can be a rough cut as it will be trimmed down later on. This tip will help you to slip it through the knot hole.
- Take the triangle tip and insert it into the knot hole. Pull it all the way through until the knot is tight (pliers can be used to help pull the tip through). At this point the knot should be six layers thick.



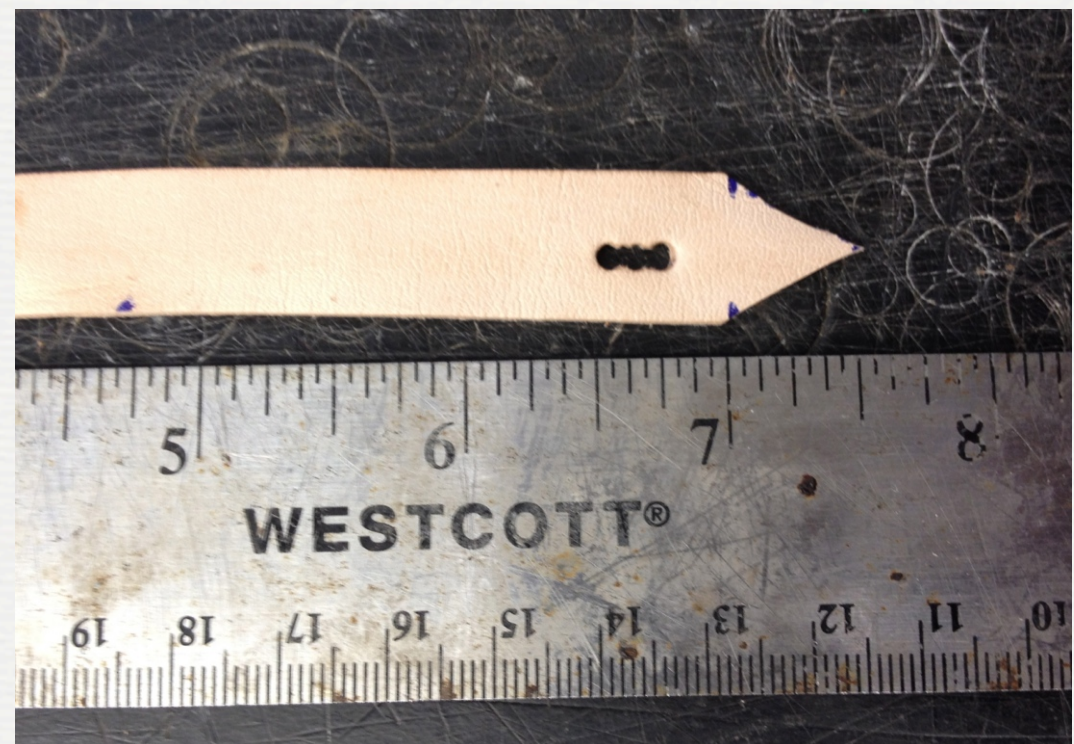
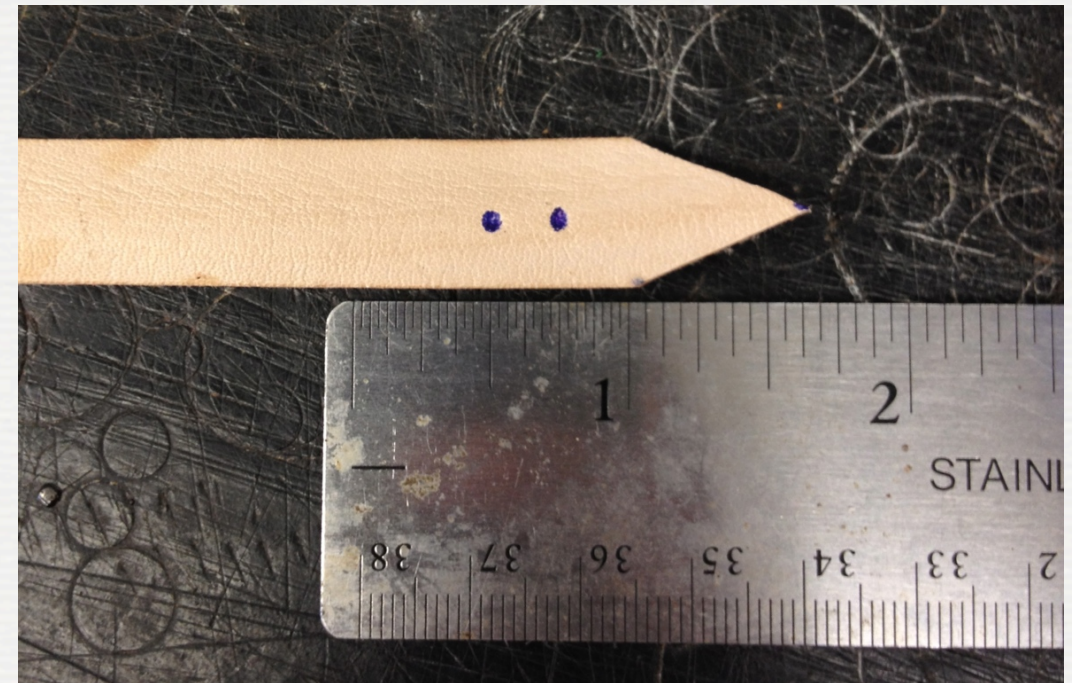
STEP 5: SIZING THE JESS

- Measure out the length that you will need for your jess and trim it back down to a flat edge. Most of our free-flying raptors have a jess length of 7.5 inches (some of the larger hawks and eagles will have longer). Note that the length starts at the base of the knot; this is where it will be connected to the anklets.
- After the jess is trimmed down, cut a triangle tip 1/2 inch long. To maintain symmetry, I find it easier to make the three marks of the triangle with a pen, connect the marks with the ruler to make a flat edge, and use the X-ACTO Knife to make the two precise cuts. (Note: In the photo, dotted lines are added as a visual aid for where the cuts will be made. It is not necessary to draw these in to make your cuts.)



STEP 6: CUTTING THE SLIT

- Measure 1 / 4 inch from the base of the triangle tip and mark this spot in the center of the jess. Measure and mark a spot another 1 / 4 inch down in the center of the jess. The space between your two marks will be the slit of your jess.
- Using the hole puncher on the smallest gauge size (size 6), punch a hole on your marks. Then connect the two holes using the hole puncher or X-ACTO Knife. I find it easier to simply connect the dots by making one or two more punches in a row. Your finished slit will be 1 / 4 inch long and 1 / 4 inch away from the bottom of the triangle tip.



STEP 7: MAKING THE MATCHING JESS

- Repeat steps 2-6 to make your matching jess using the leftover piece of leather strip cut earlier. It is important that the matching jess is the exact same length as the first and the points and slits are symmetrical. If the bird bates while wearing asymmetrical jesses, it can put unequal pressure on the ankles and cause injury to the bird.
- To create symmetry with the second jess, I find it more accurate to measure it with the first jess rather than using the ruler. You can line up the finished jess next to the second one and make the marks on the second jess to match it to the first.

STEP 8: GREASING THE JESSES

- Once both of the jesses are completed and matched in size, the last step is to treat them with jess grease. Heat the entire container of grease in the microwave until melted. Do not put it in any longer than it needs to melt or you could burn yourself AND ruin the leather! The length of microwave time depends on how full the container is, so start with 30 seconds and check it after every 30 second interval until it has just melted. Dip the jesses directly into the melted grease and wipe off the excess back into the container. Again, be careful not to burn yourself!
- Your jesses are complete and ready to be put on your raptor. If you are storing them for later, make sure to keep them connected together (to themselves or with a zip tie) to ensure that the matching jesses stay together.

