

DIY barefoot sandals guide - Leather & Tarahumara style

9-11 minutes : 4/17/2021

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I sold everything 8 years ago to play professional sports & explore the world. After living in 7 countries, I made this to share everything. 100% authentic and strange!



After years of wearing barefoot shoes (Vivobarefoot in particular) I really wanted to create some DIY barefoot sandals. I had been doing some hiking and walking around completely barefoot, but I figured a small layer of protection would help – and also reduce the amount of strange looks.

I went for some [Tarahumara](#)-inspired barefoot sandals made from leather and they're incredibly comfortable and I have no problem running in them. Here's a guide on how to make barefoot sandals 😊



Hiking with barefoot sandals is amazing! Both on tough rock or soft grass

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Materials need to make DIY leather sandals

Of course you can substitute any of these tools/materials for whatever you feel like. You can use paracord and a bike tire to make the sandals instead of leather.

- Leather (cow, buffalo, deer, moose, etc)
- Strong scissors/shears
- Leather punch (or pick & box cutter)

- Long straight ruler (if making laces)
- Box cutter (if making laces)
- Dye (optional)
- A beer or joint and a sunny day



You can use an old MTB bike tire. This one is 2.2" but the entire casing is large enough for a foot even!
Hmm... future project?

Truly, you can use anything. An old car tire, bicycle tire, or plastic, rubber, foam, or leather.

I went with leather because, well, it's basically just thick skin. That's what we want, no?

I went to a local leather/hides trader and asked away. He did say that buffalo leather is superior, but the cow leather was far more affordable and still really good. I bought a 2×1.5m cut so I could make multiple pairs (7) and some laces. The cut of hide was ~\$60 CAD.



Leave room for lace holes! Make little tabs and give your foot a little extra space.

Step 1: Super easy, just trace your foot. Use a pencil and give yourself a bit of space on the outside of the shape. You can always cut more but you can't put cuts back on! Making it too small at first would suck – remember, you

need space for lacing!

Make marks for lace holes between your big and small toe, in front of your ankle bone (interior), and behind on the exterior. Visualize how you want the laces to interact with your foot. Of course you can do this after cutting the shape, but you'll need extra room for the laces when making the sandal so it's better to do this **before cutting** the sandal.

Cutting the shape

Now that the extreme task of tracing your foot is done, simply just cut it out. Use strong shears/scissors so you can get a nice and clean cut. Leather is pretty tough stuff, so maybe hit up the hardware store because regular kitchen scissors may not do the trick.

Cut *outside* the lines. Again, you can always trim it down afterwards.

Making holes for the laces



If you taper the end of the lace you can use a fairly small hole. A regular single overhand knot is sufficient for the end knot.

Using a leather punch is certainly superior. You'll make a clean, non-fraying, non-abrasive hole which is much less likely to widen or tear.

Still, you can use a pick, make a hole, cut out a small hole with a razor/box cutter, and then singe it with a lighter/torch. Be very careful to smooth out or make a clean hole because you don't want to abrade the laces or

allow the grain to tear. Cheap leather punches can be found for ~\$10 at hardware stores.

Punch the hole right where the guide marks you made are. You can always make it bigger later, so don't worry if you punched small holes at first.



Here we have 0.5mm and ~0.9 mm thick laces. Bigger is more comfy and durable but I found 0.5mm to work fine.

Okay you have two options – make your own laces, or buy some. You can also use paracord or something else, but from my experience, leather is the most comfortable, least abrasive, flexible, and attractive material to use. Beware of cheap eBay '*fashion*' laces – they'll snap quickly.

Buying the laces:

- Go to a leather store or order online. Find the right diameter and choose a very tough and durable leather. Wider is also more comfortable (apply pressure with dental floss versus a strap to your arm). I like ~0.7mm wide laces. My laces are ~1.5m long, each.

Making the laces:

If you have will of steel, you can make the laces. I made 8 pairs of laces and it's not really that hard. Having a friend helps. You'll need:

- Long ruler
- Box cutter
- (optional) calipers
- Pen/pencil
- A joint

1. Carefully trace a long strip, equal in width on each end and in the middle. Use the ruler to guide
2. Very carefully score a shallow line with the box cutter, using the ruler to guide.
3. Remove ruler, deep cut all the way through. *Go slow!*

I recommend making extra laces so if you do accidentally break one through wear and tear, you'll have a fresh one to slide in. I've never broken a lace so far, but you never know!

The actual most difficult part and which will require lots of adjustment, lacing your new DIY sandals may take a couple efforts and walks to find out what works best for you. What feels good when walking might be horrid and slipping all over the place when running – but you'll get it eventually. Here's how I lace it the Tarahumara way, which, from experience is the most effective and comfy way.

1. Lace between toe hole first. Tie off underneath the sandal with a simple knot.
2. Across the big toe
3. Across the exterior ankle bone
4. Across to interior ankle bone, but don't forget to pass *in front* the exterior lace (pictured)
5. Cross *behind* interior lace then in front of ankle. Pass underneath the lace running behind your ankle.
6. Finish wrap around ankle, tie off with sliding knot.



How to tie barefoot sandals the Tarahumara way. Don't forget to pass back in front on each eyelet!

The pictures evidently do a *much* better job than I can explain. Once you get it though it's fairly simple. You can tie either of two ways. The method on the left offers outside protection and is nice when walking, but I found it to move the sandal a little much when running. YMMV.



Start with the toe loop



Next to the outer foot. To stop the heel from falling on your sandals, you'll want to cross underneath the heel loop when it comes to the final tying of the sandal.



This is the **WRONG** way to lace your sandals! They'll be slipping all over. You must pass the lace back over the front side when lacing!



This is the RIGHT way to lace the sandals! You can see the lace going back in front each turn. This is crucial to prevent the laces moving so much and making your sandal loose!



Now with any excess lace left, wrap it around your ankle and with the final length loop it under the highest wrap



Almost done lacing! Very easy now, just create a little loop and...



Pull tight! Now you have an adjustable end loop to tighten/loosen the sandals with ease.



With this lacing setup you can pull the string to tighten/loosen the sandal in a second.

Of course this is completely optional. In my case the dye mostly ran out after a while, but did tint the leather into a darker color. I didn't like the light tan of the original leather so I went for a dark burgundy. You can seal it with clear coat afterwards, but this may impact the feeling or slipperiness.



Here you can see a freshly dyed pair vs my used pair after ~1 year of use.

Summary

Honestly, it's less than an hour of work in total. Completely worth it and I made something like 8 sets of sandals for ~\$60. Go to your local leather specialist if you have one and ask away. I'm lucky enough to have been in a place which has a strong 'cowboy' scene so I was able to get advice from someone legit and pick up some awesome leather.

However, a simple kit from [Xero shoes](#) or a pair of their sandals will save a lot of hassle – I'd definitely recommend them for beginners!

While I still use regular barefoot shoes for climbing things like [Devils Head](#), I've used them on scrambles and hikes with no problem. Once your feet get conditioned to the earth and rock, you'll be fine!

Check out my [barefoot exercises](#) to help you adjust to barefoot walking and running!



Perfect and easy DIY barefoot sandals, Tarahumara inspired, made of leather 😊

- Measure twice cut once! Be slow and methodical with your process.
- Make extra laces and measure them out from your main chunk of leather first
- It'll take a few days to get your laces fitted perfectly, don't worry if it feels weird at first!
- Don't trim extra material until you've tested the sandals for a while! You might regret it at first
- Enjoy the feeling of the earth with your amazing barrier of protection!

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