

Wilderness Way Tips by Tamarack Song

It is prime moccasin-wearing weather; have you given them a try? If not, I suggest you do, as most people I know who have used them off-pavement wouldn't consider wearing anything house. In this season moccasins are particularly easy to wear, so it would be a great time to treat your feet to what was probably the first, and still the best, overall footwear we humans have devised.

However, the great comfort, sensitivity to the trail, and foot health that moccasins give, do not come without a price. Whether made of self-tanned or commercial leather, they require special care and maintenance to keep them serviceable and comfortable to wear. Following are some suggestions to help you do that:

- **Traction** The slipperiness of moccasins is partially compensated for by the fact that their soft soles conform to ground contours, which gives more surface contact and better grip. When I need more traction I'll either go barefoot or slip a pair of rawhide net sandals over my moccasins.
- **The More the Merrier** Waterproofing moccasins makes them less breathable, and thus less comfortable. I travel with two or three pairs so that I have dry footwear in reserve. Moccasins are best dried slowly, and as soon as possible after getting wet.
- **Cold Feet** Most heat is lost through the sole. Adding an insole or two of flexible, insulative material can work wonders. I trace the outlines of my feet on scrap buckskin or wool (felt, coat or heavy blanket material will work) cut them out, and insert them. Rob Beiber, a regular contributor to my columns, has been using the flaps of cardboard boxes for years and swears by them.
- **Real Cold Feet** Autumn moccasins and mukluks are little more than oversized moccasins, which give room for insulation. The colder the outside temperature, the more porous the moccasins need to be, to allow for the escape of sweat.
- **Insulation** The insulative value of a material is dependent on its loft. As warm and comfortable as soft furs (such as rabbit and hare) can be, they do little good in footwear because they easily compress. Choose fur that best holds its loft when squeezed between the fingers. The same is true of socks, blankets, grass, or any other material you might use.
- **Resoling** It's usually best to remove the old sole rather than stitch a new one over it, as double soles tend to become lumpy, and they can take a long time to dry. Some folks like to install soles grain-up, believing it improves traction.

• **Soling Material** Depending on your environment, rawhide or partially tanned buckskin might wear and protect better than fully tanned.

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Send me your favorite tips to share with others. I'm at tamarack@teachingdrum.org or Teaching Drum Outdoor School, 7124 Military Road, Three Lakes, Wisconsin 54562.