



Photo A

MOUNTING DEER TOES

Deer toes have long been used as natural “bells” for dancers to keep rhythm with the drum. Some traditional men dancers are returning to this natural sound. Deer toes also can be used as decorative pendants. When attaching a group of them to a wood hand wand, they become a rattle.

Deer toes are often recovered during the deer harvests held annually throughout the United States. If you are a hunter, you can process them yourself. Depending on your state regulations, they may be available from butcher shops handling game processing. Again, depending on state regulations, they may be available from craft suppliers prepared as we describe here.

When processing deer, the leg bones are available as shown in **Photo B**. It is necessary to boil the toes on the legs in order to remove the toe nails. Use a big kettle. We suggest doing this outside to avoid smelling up the house! Bring the water to a boil and hold for at least 15 to 30 minutes. The boiling time will vary depending on how fresh the legs are. Just the first 4 inches of the leg need to be under water.

We recommend using heavy leather gloves when working with the hot legs and bone. Using a box cutter as shown in **Photo C**, cut a slight edge around the nail. With a heavy pliers as shown in **Photo D**, twist and pull off each of the nails. The toe pad will also come with the nail. We suggest processing all of the legs you have before going on to the next step. The toes with pads are now like the ones available from craft supply shops.

Toes can be used with the pads on. But you will find that if you are using them as leg bells or rattles, cutting out the pads gives them a crisper tone.

When the toes have been soaked and boiled, they are fairly soft and pliable. To clean and shape them for your project, you need to get all of the toes soaking in hot water again in a pan as shown in **Photo E**. Taking them out one at a time, clean out any loose tissue inside the toe nail with a small pen knife.

If you are going to remove the pad, use a sharp tin snips as shown in **Photo F**. Cut up both sides of the pad and remove it. Finish cleaning the inside of the toe nail if needed. Using the tin snips, trim around the nail edge to smooth it out. You can cut some decorative shape to the edge as shown in **Photo G**. Complete all of your toes and let them dry.

When they are cooled down and dry, you are ready to drill a stringing hole. If you left the pads on, drill into the tip of the toe nail on the pad side. The hole should go into the pad to the inside of the toe. If you cut the pad out, drill the hole at the tip of the toe nail, starting the drill bit on the inside exposure of the nail as shown in **Photo H**. These holes need to be big enough for the lacing you plan to use.

Photo I shows three deer toes strung with lacing, but for different projects. The top one is used in the leg band in **Photo A**. Knots are tied to the end of the thongs which are then strung through the hole in the toe. A bead is threaded. **Photo A** shows that these attachment thongs are then threaded through the front side of the leather leg band and then back out another in-line hole. A bead, then another toe is laced and a knot is tied to end the attachment at the selected length.

The bottom two toes in **Photo I** are used as pendants. These have the pads left on. The bottom one has a bundle of horse hair tied into the lacing's knot and then pulled inside the toe. These examples use the deer toes as you would use a cone.

Boil bottom 4" of the feet in a kettle.



Photo B



Photo C



Photo D



Photo E



Photo F



Photo G



Photo H



Photo I