



Bag of peanuts: Japanese company turns legumes into leather

Kashiwa Leather sells products made from the skins of peanuts. No dyes are used; the brown color comes from the skins.

HIBA, Japan -- A company in Japan's peanut heartland of Chiba prefecture has come up with a way to make faux leather out of peanut skins that would otherwise go to waste.

Kashiwa Leather, in the city of Kashiwa, includes purses, wallets and knapsacks among the eight types of Peanut Leather products in its lineup. It gets the skins from Kimura Peanuts, located in the Chiba prefecture city of Tateyama.

"We're not just reducing waste, we're aiming for products with local production and consumption in mind," Kashiwa Leather chief Satoshi Iijima said.

Peanut Leather is about 1 millimeter thick and does not use any dye, with its brown color coming from the peanut skins themselves. It is made water-resistant with PVC.

Fifteen kilograms of peanut skins can make a leather sheet 90 centimeters wide and 100 meters long, according to Kashiwa Leather.

The company has long developed novel leathers from the skin of farm-raised pigs or from muntjac, a type of deer notorious for damaging crops. But turning peanut skins into leather is a completely different process, according to the company.

Making leather from animal hides normally involves tanning, cutting and sewing. For Peanut Leather, the skins are turned into fine powder, processed into long, thin sheets, and then finished to look like animal leather.

Because peanut-skin leather is unprecedented, it took Kashiwa Leather about a year of trial and error to develop it. The company failed to make leather out of peanut shells, and about a dozen contractors approached could not provide suitable skin-crushing services.

Peanut Leather is a promising innovation because the quality can be made uniform, much like synthetic textiles. With animal leather, parts are discarded over size or quality considerations. There are cases where the animal's small size limits what products can be made.

Peanut Leather has no such size or shape constraints. In addition, plant-based "vegan" leather has been drawing attention globally from an animal welfare perspective.

High-end brands in Europe and the U.S. have been adopting vegan leather. In Japan, vegan leather products made from cactuses and apples are available. But most vegan leather in Japan "is made from imported plants and fruits," Iijima said.

Chiba produced 14,900 tonnes of peanuts in 2022, amounting to 85% of Japan's total, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Kashiwa Leather expects to make use of the wealth of discarded resources in the prefecture. The company has set its sights on prices lower than both animal leather and conventional vegan leather. It foresees Peanut Leather being adopted in everyday settings, such as automobile and restaurant seating.

Kashiwa Leather will feature its Peanut Leather products at the Fashion World Tokyo trade show opening in October. The company has sold leather products such as bags and wallets mainly through the Nuizaemon store it operates in the city of Kashiwa. Going forward, Kashiwa Leather will look to expand sales channels for the Peanut Leather material itself.

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