

Luxury ‘Cruelty-Free Leather’ From Dried Cactus Leaves

Two Mexican entrepreneurs are pioneering a sustainable alternative to animal leather made from nopal cactus plants. The durable, part-biodegradable “vegan leather” has the potential to change consumer impact on the environment for the better.

Friends Adrian López Velarde and Marte Cázarez created vegan cactus leather, trade name Desserto, after years spent working in the traditional leather industry. López Velarde worked in furniture and cars; Cázarez worked in fashion.



Adrian López Velarde (L) and Marte Cázarez. (Courtesy of Desserto)

The duo recognized the severity of environmental pollution while working in the furniture automotive and fashion industries. They researched Desserto for two years before hitting on the winning formula.

Working from an organic ranch in the Mexican state of Zacatecas, López Velarde and Cázarez found that the nopal, or prickly pear cactus, provided the perfect sustainable solution to the problem of

environmental pollution.

Nopal cactus is profuse throughout the Mexican Republic. Their company only uses mature cactus leaves to make vegan leather, so no plants are killed during the harvesting process. Harvested cactus leaves are washed, mashed, and dried naturally in the sun for three days before processing.



López Velarde and Cázarez showcased their game-changing product at the International Leather Fair Lineapelle in Milan, Italy, in October 2019. (Courtesy of Desserto)

Traditional leather is usually made by tanning animal rawhide. Cows will consume up to 1,800 gallons (approx. 6,814 liters) of water in a year, making Desserto products far superior in terms of energy consumption, according to the report.

Cactus leather can be formed into any desired color or texture and still complies with the technical specifications of the fashion, leather goods, furniture, and automotive industries. Most importantly, the process is free from toxic chemicals and plastics. This vegan leather’s durability means it can last up to 10 years. It is breathable, thanks to its organic composition, and is comparable in price to animal leather.



If incorporated into major fashion production lines, the pair said, Desserto could effect a 32 to 42 percent reduction in global plastic waste and roughly 20 percent savings in water consumption, López Velarde told Fashion United.

“The enthusiasm for our Desserto sustainable materials at Lineapelle was overwhelming,” López Velarde told the fashion news platform. “We didn’t expect such interest from so many different industries and designers from around the globe.”

The entrepreneurs currently cultivate nopal cacti on 2 hectares of land on their ranch in Mexico. They have an expansion capacity of 40 hectares.

Despite already working with major brands across different industries, López Velarde and Cázarez are not yet done with their big green dream. The pair hopes to create job opportunities as well.

“Our hope is not just to help the environment, but also help to create jobs,” López Velarde said in the video.

“Cactus is green, and so is the future,” the duo said.