



Trainer's Tip: Is your horse fit to be tied?

by Brent Winston, equine trainer

Well, it's that time of year when we're all excited to get out and enjoy the great outdoors on our horses! Some of us ride around our neighborhoods, some of us trailer to horse shows and various events, and others pack up and hit the trails. No matter your source of enjoyment with your horse, being able to tie your horse is not only a handy skill, but also an important training tool.

I believe there are phases to teaching your horse to be tied. I don't generally tie my horse right away when I am teaching him something like being saddled or picking up his feet. If a horse isn't experienced at a task and isn't used to being tied up, that could be a recipe for disaster.

At Harmony, before we start to teach a horse how to be tied up, we make sure the horse is giving well to pressure on the halter rope. We do this by applying slight pressure on the rope forward, backward, left, then right. We increase the amount of pressure until the horse gives even just a little bit, then we release. This will create a situation where the horse can learn how to give to the pressure instead of resisting it. In my experience, a horse that doesn't lead well won't tie well either.

Once your horse is giving lightly and willingly to the pressure on the lead rope, you can practice tying him up. We actually don't tie a horse the first several times we train on this; instead, we wrap the rope around the tie rail three or four times—tight enough so the horse will feel the pressure and be encouraged to stay there, but loose enough that if the horse were to panic, he would be able to get away. I would rather go catch a horse than have one flip over pulling back at the tie rail.

It's best to try this out the first few times in a corral or arena (there are several products and tie rings available on the market for which you don't need a tie rail). Practice after a workout or ride, as your horse will be less likely to be anxious, appreciate the rest and start associating being tied up with being able to rest and relax. Eventually you will be able to tie a slipknot that will come untied with a pull from you, but not allow your horse to get away when he starts playing around with it.



After you feel that you can safely tie your horse to a rail or tie ring, you can start moving around and increasing your comfort zone to different places you tie up. However, when you go to tie up your horse, always be aware of the area where you are tying. If you are at a tree, make sure there aren't a lot of low branches that can poke your horse in the eye or logs on the ground around your horse's feet, and never tie to any tree that isn't 100 percent alive. The last thing you want is for your horse to pull over a tree or branch and have it "chase" him. If you are tying to your trailer, make sure there aren't any sharp edges on or around your trailer causing a potential hazard. Also, be aware not to tie your horse on the side of your trailer where someone might pull their rig too close to yours.

In conclusion: As always, start small and work your way up to setting yourself up for success. Prepare your horse, be aware of where you tie, and have fun experiencing the world with your horse.

Until next time, be safe, keep riding with a loose rein and check your cinch from time to time.