

Horse & Rider MONTHLY

MARCH 2023

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TIPS FOR A
SAFE SPRING RIDE

CABIN FEVER
DURING
STALL REST

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DEEP CLEAN
FOR SPRING

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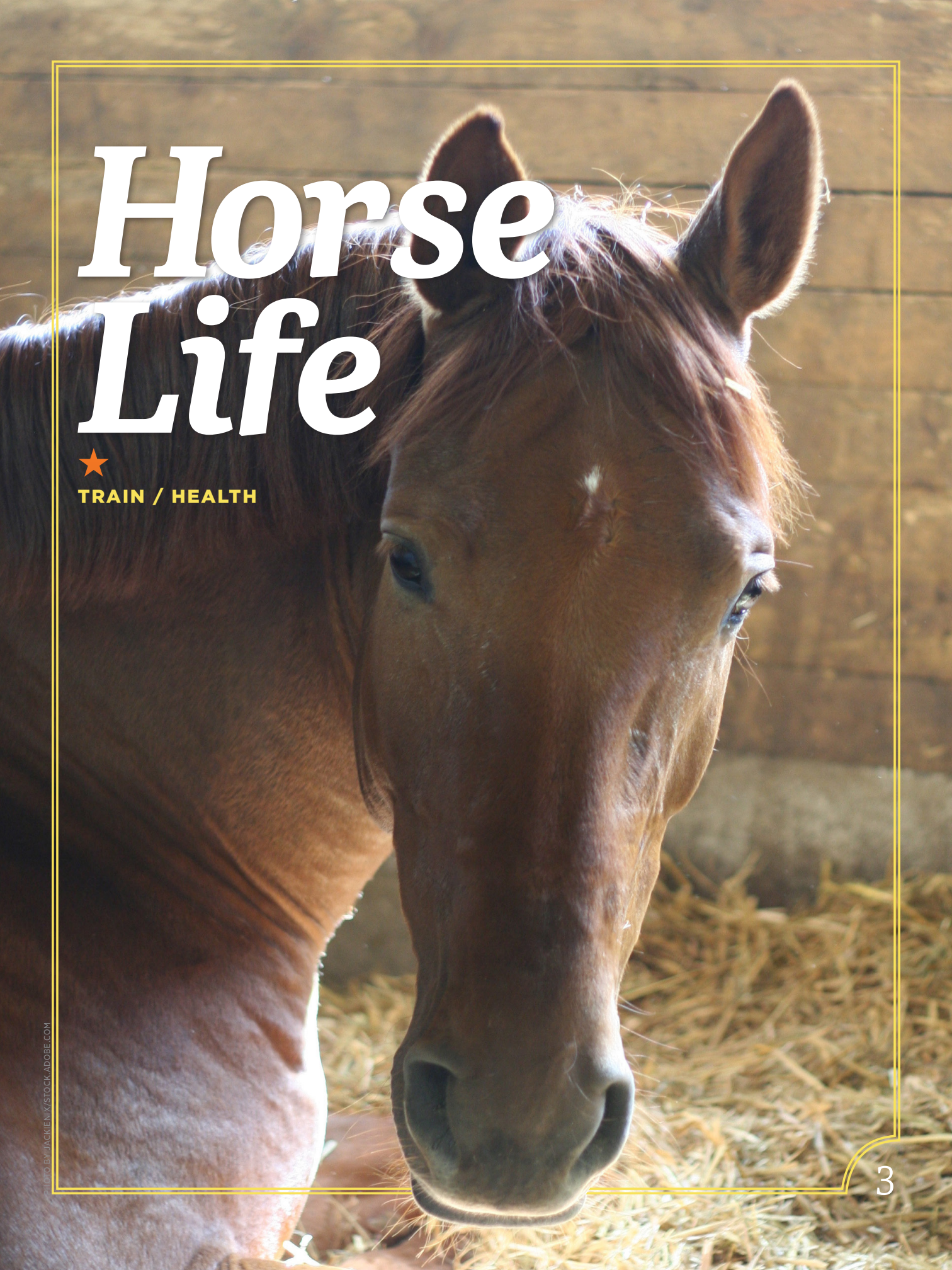
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Horse Life



TRAIN / HEALTH



TRAIN

Four Ways to Stay Safe on a Spring Trail Ride

★ Spring has sprung and you're itching to get back out on the trail, but before you load up your horse, take a few precautions to ensure a safe ride.

ANYONE WHO LOVES TIME IN THE SADDLE loves spring and the itch that comes with it to put a foot in the stirrup, swing into the saddle, and head out across the countryside. But spring can be two-sided for trail riders. Along with its joys, there are hazards and cautions.

And in the high-altitude western mountains these last until July, when snow in the high country finally recedes off the trails and frost in the shaded places finally thaws. Heading out on trails not traveled since the previous autumn requires special vigilance and preparation. Here are seven steps to a safe spring ride.

STEP 1: Condition your horse. First, consider your horse. Ideally, he hasn't been idle all winter growing fat on alfalfa and sweet feed, thoughts of carrying a rider up a trail far from his mind. If he's been idle, you have extra work to do before tackling spring trails.

Even if you've been conscientious about riding your horse through the winter, chances are, his muscles are soft, his trail training in need of tuning. Conflict between horse and rider is more likely with the out-of-condition horse, because saddle fit, cinch pressure, and shedding-coat itch under the blanket, headstall, and bit are all likely to be more uncomfortable for him.

Honest exercise and wet saddle blankets under controlled conditions before a challenging ride away from the home stable is kinder treatment in the long run.

STEP 2: Get in shape. The only real conditioning for riders is to ride. Other things, such as keeping the bathroom scale close, walking, aerobic exercise, and weight training do help. But if you haven't been riding, tackling 20 miles the first time out during spring is likely to bring some unfortunate after-effects. Chaucer's pilgrims, lacking other sorts of transportation, probably rode frequently. Few of us do so as part of our daily lives.

Pay special attention to leg strength. Deep knee bends pay dividends both when you mount and when you support yourself in the stirrups. Walking and bicycling build tone and strength. But don't stay out of the saddle for long.

STEP 3: Prepare for any weather. Spring brings sometimes severe changes in weather, especially at higher altitude. The poet T.S. Eliot referred to April as "the cruelest month." I suspect he was thinking of spring's seductive ability to lure you into believing summer has

arrived, then to dash your hopes with a late storm that turns dangerous.

Summer rain is one thing. Spring rain at high altitude quickly changes to spring snow. One day, you're washing the car in 70-degree weather, wondering if you'll soon have to mow the lawn. The next day, you're on a mountain trail in falling snow so thick you can scarcely see the rider in front of you.

Wear layers that are easy to add and remove, favor wool over cotton, pack extra warmth, and prepare for the worst-case scenario with fire-making equipment, a bit of food, a first-aid kit, navigation gear (map, compass, and global positioning system unit). Don't be lulled into thinking these things are unimportant because you're

only planning a short ride. Most survival situations take place very close to "civilization."



PHOTO BY PAMELA AU/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

STEP 4: Watch for mud and erosion. Spring means mud and possible trail erosion since the route was last used. Be careful on ledge trails that have narrowed as freeze/thaw cycles through winter caused wet soil to leach off their lower edges.

To be kind to the environment, avoiding riding when your horse's hooves will damage the trail. Even in drier conditions, there will often be mud in sheltered areas and on north slopes skipped by the low winter sun. Since north slopes hold moisture, they often feature the heavier timber and thus more shade that can hide the very worst footing for horses: mud over frost.

An inch of mud over frost is the one sort of footing that can make me decide to leave my horse at home. No type of horseshoe helps, because traction devices don't penetrate down into the frost. It's like going down a playground slide on sheets of wax paper. The mud layer slides over the frost beneath it. Worse, the top surface of such footing can look dry.

Get off and lead your horse, if necessary. If you do, walk beside his left shoulder rather than directly in front of him. If he loses traction or decides to jump an obstacle or depression, you'd be at risk for an injury if you were in front.

Have Fun!

Ensure a fun and safe ride, by prepping your horse and yourself for your first foray onto the trails this year. On spring rides, start easy, stay safe, and keep your ego under control. You aren't admitting defeat if you get off and lead over dangerous ground. Happy spring trails! ★



HEALTH

Stalled: Now What?

STALL REST. What can prompt your veterinarian to prescribe it? Soft-tissue injuries, bone fractures, severe wounds, post-surgery recuperation (as for colic), and more. Whatever the cause, here's how to manage your horse on stall rest in a way that keeps him happy and healing.

Location, diet. Where you confine your horse will affect how he accepts it. A stall where he can observe the goings-on around him, as in a working barn, can work well. Having other horses stalled nearby at least some of the time is especially helpful. If other equines aren't available, consider an other-species pal (such as a goat or sheep) to keep him company.

If your vet OKs it and weather permits, an outside pen downsized to stall dimensions can provide an enjoyable change of scenery. You can also move a portable pen to provide your horse with a little fresh grazing plus proximity to pasture-mates.

A stallbound horse needs his diet adjusted to minimize the energy buildup that confinement can cause. Ask your vet about cutting back on carbohydrates and emphasizing lower-calorie grass hay in a slow-feed net. This keeps your horse munching longer without energy overload.

Diversions. Hand walking or grazing, assuming your vet OKs it, helps your horse deal with stall rest from both mental and physical standpoints. (Some stallbound horses may require a sedative in order to be walked safely; more on that in a moment.)

If your horse mustn't leave his stall, extended grooming sessions are an alternative that offers both companionship and relaxation.

Stall toys can help your horse pass the time, as well; those that dispense small amounts of pellets or hay as horses play with them are particularly entertaining.

Even an unbreakable mirror, mounted so your horse can see his own reflection, can help to break up the boredom.

Sedatives. Though many horses adapt reasonably well to stall confinement, others quickly develop cabin fever and are unable to relax, potentially posing a danger to themselves and others.

If your horse endlessly paws, circles, or kicks at the walls, consult your veterinarian about the possibility of prescribing a mild sedative—such as acepromazine—to help him relax and settle in.

A small dose of sedative can also help calm him for hand walking, plus steady him the first few times he's turned out after his stall rest is over.

In some circumstances, your vet may also consider the use of a longer-acting tranquilizer, such as reserpine. ★

★ Confinement can be a horsekeeping ordeal. If your vet prescribes it, here's how to manage your horse on stall rest.



PHOTO BY FABIANODP/ISTOCK.ADOBE.COM

Some injuries require the limiting of movement to encourage healing, but it can be a daunting challenge to manage your horse on stall rest.

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♦Source: Survey conducted among equine veterinarians who recommended oral joint health supplements.
Pellets not actual size. Color may vary.

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It's been a long winter, so it's time to grab
some cleaning supplies and freshen
up your barn and trailer.

OPERATION SPRING CLEANING



PHOTO BY SANDRA CUNNINGHAM/GETTYIMAGES.COM

Cleaning out the barn is much more fun than cleaning the house—nobody likes to dust behind the kitchen appliances. Putting energy into cleaning the barn not only makes you happy, but it's a great way to pamper your horse to help keep him healthy.

Freshening up your barn is more than just organizing and sprucing up the feed room, there are other areas of your barn that could use tending when you start spring cleaning. Here are some tasks you don't want to overlook this spring.

Freshen Up the Barn Scrub Tanks and Buckets

Clean water will help encourage your horse to drink and will help to prevent bugs from laying eggs in the water. Vinegar and baking soda are safe cleaners to use when cleaning tanks and buckets. For large tanks, a long-handled scrub brush will help to complete the job. Grab a spare dish scrubber from your kitchen to clean the smaller buckets—leave the scrubber in the barn for future use, you won't want it back in the kitchen anyway!

Clean Out the Hay Area

While your hay supply is at its lowest, take time to move out the remaining bales to sweep out the loose hay that has accumulated. Check the area to make sure it's free of moisture, as this could be a sign of a leak in the building that needs repaired to prevent the hay from molding and having to be thrown out. When you restack the hay, make sure to put the oldest hay where it can be used first.

Muck Stalls and Paddocks

Use a broad shovel to strip the bedding in your stalls. This should be done regularly and not just during spring cleaning. When your horse's stall isn't cleaned on a daily basis, ammonia can start to irritate his lungs and cause respiratory issues. Standing in manure can also be a source of hoof problems, so even if your horse has a large paddock, be sure to clean it out often so you don't find him standing in his waste—this will also help keep the fly population down as the weather warms up.

Maintenance and Barn Repair

As you're cleaning out your stalls, look

for areas in the stall and barn that could use repair. Check for protruding nails and rotting wood, as this could cause injury to your horse or you. If you find a spot that needs repaired and you're unable to fix it at the moment, find another place to temporarily put your horse, so that he can remain safe.

Sweep up Cobwebs and Dust

Cobwebs and dust have no place in the barn and can easily spread a fire, if such a tragic event were to happen. Grab a long-handled broom and sweep away all of the cobwebs that are nestled into the corners of the barn. If a dusting is long overdue, start by using your broom to knock most of the dust off and then you can use a leaf blower to remove the rest of it. Remember to take your horse out of the barn while you do this and to wear protective coverings for yourself, so you don't inhale the dust.

Reduce Odors

What if you keep your barn clean, dry, and well ventilated, but want to go that extra mile for the freshest possible effect? Consider one of the many products available to further reduce ammonia and moisture in stalls and other areas of your barn (see box). Barn lime (calcium carbonate, or ground-up limestone) is a less expensive option, though modern products specially designed for use in horse stalls are safer overall and less dusty. (Calcium hydroxide—"hydrated lime"—is caustic and should never be used.)

Organize the Feed Room

When emptying a new bag of grain into a bin, be sure to scoop or dump the last of the old grain out into another bin or bucket. Once you've refilled the bin with fresh grain, put the remainder grain on top to use first. Or look for a feed hopper that allows you to access grain from the bottom and pour new feed in from the top. If you feed different types of grain, look for a bin with dividers, or place recycling bins inside a large bin

Cleaning out your horse's pen daily will help to keep him healthy from lung and hoof issues.



H&R PHOTO ARCHIVE

to compartmentalize it. Sweep up the floors, discard trash and empty waste cans, and double check that you're not low on feed!

Organize Your Tack

If you don't miss a chance to head to the tack store, we can empathize. However, the piles of unused tack can grow quickly, so this is a great time to go through and downsize or organize!

Clean

Using a cleaner and conditioner on your leather tack will give you the opportunity to inspect your tack to ensure it's in working condition, while also making sure the leather is properly taken care of. Take note of anything that could potentially cause discomfort to your horse and try to repair or replace the piece of tack before you saddle up for a ride this spring—this will not only make your horse happy, but also keep you safe.

If you have rubber reins, you'll need to clean these differently than leather reins. Taking care of your rubber reins is very different from taking care of leather reins. Here's what you need to know about cleaning your rubber reins and how to keep them from melting or becoming goeey.

Cleaning the rubber.

To clean the rubber, don't use chemicals or other cleaners. The best way to clean the rubber is to place them in a bucket of water to soak. After soaking in a bucket, you may take them out and use a toothbrush to scrub the remaining dirt off. Once you've scrubbed rinse again and the rubber part will be clean! To keep your reins in their best condition, rinse/dunk your reins after every ride.

Cleaning the leather.

If your rubber reins have a leather part, be sure that when you're cleaning them with leather cleaners and conditioners to avoid getting those on the rubber part. If you're cleaning the rubber part of your reins daily, try to avoid getting

the leather wet or if you do spend extra time conditioning.

Avoid grooming products and fly spray.

If you can avoid using grooming products and fly spray on the areas your reins may touch, this will help them to last longer. If you must apply these products to your horse's neck and other areas your reins may touch, we recommend rinsing/dunking your reins after your ride.

Clean Your Sport Boots

Step 1: Take your sport boots to the car wash and hang them from the clips on the walls—the clips that hold car floor-board mats.

Step 2: Use the rinse option. (Using the soap option might result in skin irritation for your horse.)

Step 3 (Optional): If you have soap that's safe for your horse's skin, add a

vacuum area of the carwash and vacuum them dry.

Freshen Up Leather Tack

Try this method that is under 2 minutes:

- **30 seconds:** Use a clean towel to wipe the bit clean.
- **60 seconds:** Slightly moisten the same towel and wipe down the underside of your tack—anywhere that may have come in contact with sweat. Sweat will break down leather, so this step will prolong the life of your tack.
- **30 seconds:** Finally, use the same towel to scrub away any dirt or mud accumulated on the outside of the girth or the bearing surface of the stirrup.

Check Your Trailer

It can be hard to get to a show in the dead of winter, so oftentimes the trailer sits where we parked it in the Fall. If you

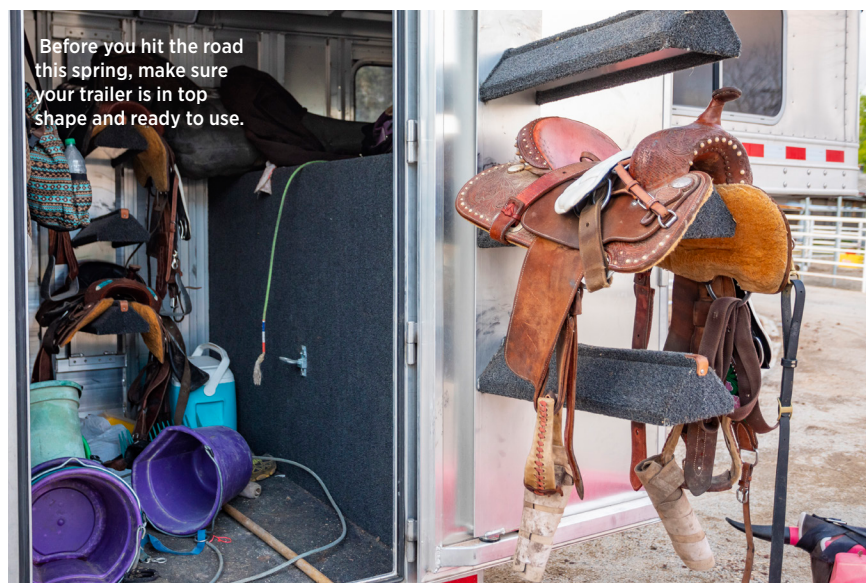


PHOTO BY DAVID/GETTYIMAGES.COM

small drop to each boot.

Step 4: Stand back and spray your boots.

Step 5: Flip your boots around and spray the other side. You may have to repeat this step a few times until the water runs clear and free of dirt and soap from both sides of your boots.

Step 6 (Optional): Take them to the

have some extra time on your hands, now is the perfect time to take time and examine your trailer and give it a good cleaning.

Check your tires. Now is the perfect time to check to make sure your tires are not balding and still in good condition. It's also a good time to make sure you have the proper amount of air in them. →

Look for rust. It's easy for rust to start developing on the outside of your trailer while it's sitting around during the winter. Also examine the inside for any rusty metal that might be hazardous to your horse's legs.

Test your lights. Nobody wants to find out their brake light is out when they're getting ready to head out to a horse show or head out to a new trail riding destination. Take time to ensure all your lights are functioning properly on your trailer.

Look at your trailer floors. While we always recommend looking at your trailer's floor before loading your horse into the trailer, now is the perfect time to really examine your floor to make sure there's no corrosion. You can also take time to disinfect your trailer using the same methods you would for cleaning your horse's stall.

What's in your living quarters? If you have a trailer with living quarters, now is the perfect time to go through all the drawers and get rid of anything you no longer need. Who knows, you might even find a pair of riding jeans stashed away that you've been looking for. This is also the perfect time to clean out your fridge and make sure it's ready for use.

Clean out your tack room. It can be easy to use our tack room as a dumping ground for many things. When you're in the midst of spring cleaning, this is the perfect time to get rid of any garbage that might have ended up the floor. It's also the perfect time to go through all your equipment that's stored in the trailer and make sure it's clean and ready for use.

Go Through Your Medicine Cabinet

Whether it's a large cabinet filled to the brim or a small box with the necessities, every barn has a place to store medication. It's important to keep your medicine cabinet organized and clean so you know exactly where to get something when you need it fast.

Tip: Clean out your medicine cabinet every 6 months.

Here's an idea of what to look for when cleaning it out:

- any expired products
- ointments with visible dirt or hair mixed in
- products that have changed color or clarity
- pills that are crumbling, changed ap-

pearance or give off an unusual odor

- powders that have clumped together from moisture
- self-adhesive wrap that has "melted" onto itself over time, becoming difficult to unroll

Make sure to keep a list of what you've thrown out and replace it right away.

You can also check the battery on your digital thermometer, make sure scissors or other tools are in good working order and wash all of your fabric bandages.

Once you have everything cleaned and organized, repack your medicine cabinet with items in waterproof containers with lids. Now, when you're in a pinch and need to find something right away, you'll know exactly where to look and won't waste time checking the expiration date.

Take a Breath!

That was quite the cleaning jaunt you just went on! However, you can now go into show season, trail riding season, and warm weather with the knowledge that your gear is ready to go and your barn is fresh and clean. ★

A fun trail ride can quickly be spoiled when safety precautions are ignored. Ensure the safety of yourself and horse, by being prepared.



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BEST HORSE FENCING OPTIONS

Before you add or replace fencing on your horse property, get familiar with the pros, cons, and costs of your many choices in materials.

PHOTO BY DON WHITE/GETTYIMAGES.COM

While investigating a 5,600-year-old village site in Kazakhstan, archaeologists determined that its Copper Age inhabitants were among the first cultures to tame horses. The evidence? The buried remnants of corral posts. Clearly, fences have been crucial to our shared relationship all along.

Wood fencing is highly visible and strong, but cost can be a downside to this option.

Unlike ancient horsemen who were limited to sticks and stones to enclose their horses, we benefit from a vast variety of traditional and modern materials from which to choose. Unfortunately,

murderous when used improperly. While barbed wire is relatively safe for huge pastures holding thick-skinned, placid cattle, the use of barbed wire for horse properties has caused untold tragedies. If you have any on your horse acreage, your first fencing priority is to remove it.

Building codes may ultimately determine fencing requirements for your land, but some general rules of thumb apply nearly everywhere. Field fences should be 54 to 60 inches above ground level. Err on the side of caution and go with a 5-foot minimum height where fences abut highways or anywhere that

can reach them; good design (such as boards used in corners to block access) can prevent injury, even death.

Visibility, especially with wire fencing, is too often overlooked. While a white plank fence of wood or PVC is easily seen by horses, wires can be almost invisible when a horse panics and runs the time when the worth of a fence is truly tested. Improve visibility to wire fences by adding a top rail of wood; PVC; or durable white vinyl fence ribbon, either standard or electrified. This addition not only makes a wire fence more visible, it also deters horses from reaching over the fence to graze.

Regardless of fence material and design, one of your goals should be to present a smooth side to the horses. Do-it-yourselfers occasionally make the mistake of mounting boards on the outside of fence posts, which makes them easy for horses to knock loose. Further, the exposed posts can injure a horse that runs down the fence line. With cross-pasture fencing, you may not be able to avoid this exposure; in such cases, using an electric fence wire to create a psychological as well as a physical barrier offers a safe solution.

Corners also present problems, especially if you plan to pasture horses that don't get along well. Any corner can create an entrapment situation where one horse is bullied. The problem is especially bad when the corner angle is acute (90 degrees or less). Some solutions include corners that curve. This requires placing wire fence barriers on the outside of the posts, but this is less of a problem in corners than it is along straight runs. Another solution is to affix planks across corners to block access.

POSTS

The strength and integrity of a fence come from good fence posts, properly installed. Wire fences require tension, which means that corner assemblies and gate assemblies need to be braced against the pulling forces. Generally, when using wood posts, it's best to use



A combination of fencing options are often used to create an optimal, safe pen

PHOTO BY MANDARINBLUES/PIXABAY.COM

despite over 5,000 years of development, there's still no ideal fence for every horse-keeping purpose. Each fence choice involves balancing safety concerns with aesthetics, cost, and upkeep.

Chances are you'll employ a variety of materials and fence designs on your property for paddocks, arenas, and pasture fences, or even mix fence materials for a single enclosure. Choosing carefully will help maximize the safety, value, appeal, and utility of your fences. Before looking at the broad range of choices, let's discuss safe fencing construction.

HORSE FENCE SAFETY

America's West was tamed by blazing guns and barbed wire. Both remain

an escaped horse can flee your premises. Six feet is the safe minimum height for stall runs and paddocks.

At the bottom, an opening of 8 to 12 inches will keep feet and legs from getting trapped, and also prevent foals from rolling under the fence. Fence openings should be either large enough that a hoof, leg, or even the head can't become trapped, or very small (no more than 3 inches by 3 inches) to prevent a hoof from penetrating. To maintain tension, most wire fences, both fabric, and high-tensile smooth wire, require triangular-shaped bracing at the corners and at intervals of about 1/8 mile. The acute angles formed by brace wires represent entrapment hazards if the horse

concrete to set corner assemblies and gate posts. Metal T-posts benefit from having sturdy wood corner and gate assemblies as well. These are an absolute requirement for high-tensile wire.

Wood is traditional and commonly used for fence posts. Whether you're making a plank fence or just using wood posts, local availability and custom may determine your choices in woods. For instance, while hardwood fence materials tend to be readily available in the East, Southeast, and parts of the Midwest, softwoods predominate in the West. To deter decomposition, common softwoods that are resistant to rot and insect infestation include cedar, redwood, and cypress. Unfortunately, these woods are very expensive.

For this reason, horsemen often choose pressure-treated lumber (usually pinewood or fir); such lumber costs 1/3 to 1/5 of the above-mentioned varieties. With pressure-treated lumber (or "PTL"), the manufacturer impregnates the wood with chemicals that resist rot, fungi, and insects. Look for treated lumber posts that are certified for in-ground use. Paint won't bond to the material, so PTL fences are invariably natural.

A professional fence contractor may have the capability of driving round wooden posts into the ground, a technique that packs the posts more tightly than digging and backfilling. Rather than being loosened with digging, the soil is actually compacted around the post as it is driven. If you build the fence yourself, consider having a contractor set the posts this way, if feasible. It's worth the added expense and results in a stronger, longer-lasting fence with less upkeep.

Many horsemen choose wooden posts in concert with wire materials to cut down the overall expense of their fences. Suitable materials include high-tensile wire, woven wire "field fence," and V-mesh wire fabrics, as well as relatively new materials such as flexible PVC vinyl-and-wire planks and vinyl-covered wire products.

METAL T-POSTS

These are inexpensive to purchase and labor-saving to install, though most would agree they lack aesthetic appeal. Regrettably, most horsemen don't use the savings to make them as safe as can be. If you do use metal T-posts, top them with plastic mushroom-shaped caps to minimize the possibility of a horse getting impaled. Better, buy the kind of caps that allow you to install an electrified mesh ribbon that will increase visibility

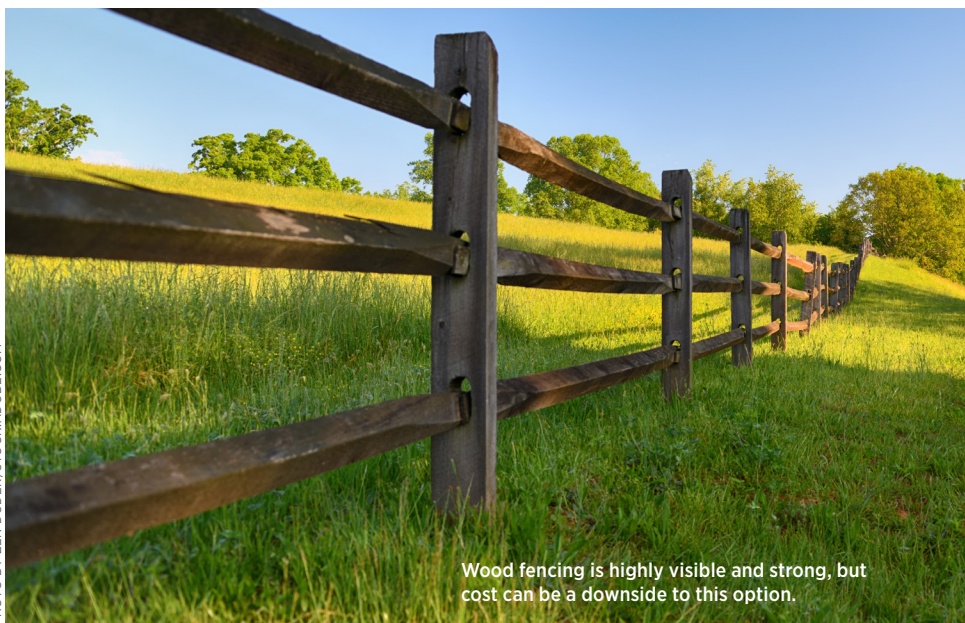


PHOTO BY ZEN DUDER/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

WOOD BOARD FENCE

We've already touched on wood in our discussion of posts. Wood board fences are revered for their aesthetics, high visibility, and good strength. Disadvantages include high initial cost (\$4 to \$5 per linear foot for a traditional, unpainted four-rail fence) and high maintenance due to horse chewing, weathering, etc. Horses can break through if spooked, and nails and splintering can present hazards.

Wood fencing is highly visible and strong, but cost can be a downside to this option.

while discouraging horses from reaching their heads over to nibble. Over-the-fence grazing and socializing often cause damage to wire fencing and can bend fence posts as horses push against the wires or mesh.

BARRIERS

Barriers are the functional part of fences; posts exist merely to hold up barriers. Ultimately, nearly every barrier can be overcome if a horse has his mind set on escaping. Your goal should be to create a fence that is strong enough to contain a horse, is resilient enough to not harm the animal if it charges the fence, and also provides a psychological deterrent that keeps a horse from attempting to escape in the first place.

PVC BOARD FENCE

Many horsemen like these fences, which have the visual appeal of a painted-wood fence without the maintenance headaches. But the cost can be extravagant; around \$10 per linear foot. Internally ribbed PVC boards can resist breakage but are designed to break away when pressure is applied. Not the best barrier for a 1,000-pound animal. An electrical wire system is recommended to keep horses respectful of and contained within the PVC enclosure.

PIPE STEEL

Pipe steel makes an exceptionally strong and long-lasting fence. There is, however, no give to these fences, and a horse can suffer damage if it runs into the

fence. Fortunately, high visibility keeps such incidents minimal.

Even in the Oil Patch, where pipe can be cheap and plentiful, transport and labor costs may be high, and you'll have to hire a professional installer to cut and weld the pipes. Planning must be exact, as modifications will be difficult and expensive once the fence is completed. Upkeep tends to be minimal, though repainting may be required.

HIGH-TENSILE WIRE

The term "high-tensile wire" simply refers to wires under tension. This includes woven-wire fabrics, smooth-wire fences, and the majority of electric-fence designs. The key characteristic of all these is that the fence is pulled tight like a tuned instrument string (though not nearly as tight). Posts, corner assemblies, and braces placed intermittently provide the counter force to the pulling forces of the fence material.

Proper construction, therefore, requires a knowledgeable application of construction techniques to assure that fences are properly braced. In some cases, springs or tighteners are applied to keep fences properly tensioned in changing temperatures and as an effect of aging and stretching. Fence fabrics often have kinks, which act as springs to counter the expansion and contraction of metal in changing temperatures.

SMOOTH WIRE

Smooth-wire designs are the least expensive fences to construct. They're basically barbed-wire fences without the barbs. Wide spacing of poles as much as 20 feet adds to the low cost of some designs.

There are dozens of different designs in use, ranging from three to eight wires.

Generally, the smaller the confinement area, the more wires used. Visibility is a problem, so manufacturers have introduced wire wrapped in PVC coating in a variety of colors. These are also safer, as the unprotected, thin metal wires can be dangerous when struck by horses traveling at high speeds. Typically, smooth-wire fences are coupled with electrical systems to create a deterrent effect, as horses soon learn that a smooth-wire fence is safe to push against.

WOVEN FIELD FENCE

Woven field fence is used in a wide variety of livestock applications, and is readily available and inexpensive, especially when coupled with metal T-posts.

Its primary advantage is its cost per foot as well as its ability to contain animals safely while fencing out wildlife.

Note the word woven. There are cheap fence fabrics that are brazed or spot-welded, but these tend to break and fail under the demands of horses and aren't suitable for equine use. The best-quality fence fabrics use knots at the wire intersections. Ideally, openings should be

no larger than 3 inches square. Quality and price can vary greatly and affect longevity and performance. Visibility should be improved with a top board or the use of electrified fence tape.

V-MESH

Among the safest fence materials, V-mesh has horizontal and diagonal wires woven into a fabric to create a "V" or diamond pattern. This wire fencing can absorb the energy of a galloping horse while creating a nearly impenetrable barrier to varmints, wild predators, and roving dogs. These qualities make it a favorite for foaling operations and for small paddock enclosures. Its biggest downside is cost (around \$4

a linear foot, almost equal to that of a traditional wood fence). It's the most expensive of wire-fencing materials, but cost savings can be realized by using metal T-posts in pastures.

ELECTRIC FENCING

Good barriers work on two levels: They provide a physical presence that deters escape, and they provide a psychological force that makes horses think escape is either too arduous or impossible. We seldom think of psychological deterrents, but that's the principle underlying electric-fence systems. Once shocked, a horse learns quickly not to touch the fence.

Electric-fence systems include a charger that dispenses a high-voltage, low-amperage current; a conductive wire material to carry that current; and ground rods sunk in the soil to complete a circuit. When an animal touches the wire, current flows through his body, to his feet and the ground, then through the ground to the ground rods. For the system to work properly, the current cannot be obstructed at any point in the circuit. Failure usually results from either a broken wire or ineffective grounding; either the ground rods are too shallow to reach moisture or the ground is too dry.

For these and other reasons, fence installers (either professional or property owners) need to be exacting in following installation guidelines. Further, electric fences need to be routinely inspected for proper function. Damages must be repaired to restore operation. Today's electric livestock fences are safe when properly installed and maintained.

Most horse owners combine electric-fence systems with conventional fences whether wood, PVC plastic, wire mesh, or high-tensile smooth wire to act as a deterrent and keep horses from pushing, climbing, chewing, or otherwise testing a fence. At a cost of about 15 cents per linear foot, electric-fence systems are inexpensive additions that can increase your pasture fence's effectiveness and longevity. ★

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