

Teaching Your Horse To Stand For The Farrier

Proper training will make things easier for horse, owner and shoer

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Many horses have good “ground manners” for leading or tying, but frustrate a farrier at shoeing time because this aspect of their education has been neglected.

Just picking up a foot briefly to clean it or check for rocks is not enough to get a horse accustomed to being worked on by the farrier. Even a gentle horse may not like to have its feet held up for any length of time. The horse may fuss, fidget or try to take its feet away

Start Them Young

The best time to train a horse to have its feet handled is when it’s young, but any horse can learn better “foot manners” if you take time to handle its feet regularly and in proper fashion.

If your horse is nervous or ill-mannered about having its feet worked on, you can make farrier visits much more pleasant for you, the horse and the farrier by doing some training or re-training.

Regularly handling your horse’s feet will accomplish two things:

- You can more closely monitor the health of its feet.

- It will come to accept hoof care and having its feet handled as part of the daily routine, becoming easier to trim and shoe.

If the horse is nervous or spoiled about having its feet handled, have an experienced person hold him while you work with its feet, so it won’t use his resentment as an excuse to sit back when tied.

This is also a good rule for farrier visits: The horse should be held rather than tied. The person holding the horse should insist that the horse stand quietly and in one place, without moving around, pushing, rubbing or nibbling at the farrier.

Train And Retrain

If your horse won’t stand still while held, go back to the basics of training and ground manners.

With time, you should be able to pick up any foot and clean it whether the horse is tied, held or just standing quietly with its lead rope dangling on the ground. The keys to creating good foot manners are repetition and consistency. Handle the feet often, so the horse knows it's no big deal and also knows it's expected to behave.

To pick up a foot, make sure the horse is standing squarely or at least not standing with most of its weight on the foot you want to pick up. If necessary, reposition the horse by having it take a step forward or back, so it can easily shift its weight to the other three feet.

If the horse doesn't readily pick up the foot when you run your hand down the lower leg, squeeze the indentation between the bone and tendon just above the fetlock joint. On a young horse or foal, tickling or pressing gently at the heel will usually encourage it to pick up the foot. Hold a front foot between your legs. Rest a hind foot across your thigh.

Take Charge, Stay In Charge

The mistake some people make is to only hold the foot briefly with one hand for cleaning or checking (never holding it in shoeing position) and putting it right back down again. If your horse doesn't like to keep its foot up, or starts fidgeting, take time every day to handle the feet whenever you handle the horse — for feeding, grooming, riding, etc.

Make it part of the daily routine. Pick up each foot a few times, holding it in shoeing position and holding it for a little longer period each time. Don't let the horse take it away. Only put it down after it quits fussing, so you are the one deciding when to put it down.

If the horse is nervous about shoeing, take more time in your training sessions to mimic what the farrier will be doing. Tap on the hoof wall or the shoe with your hoof pick. Move the foot into various positions.

Like any training or re-training, you are getting the horse accustomed to what will be required, so it is at ease. You are desensitizing the horse to stimuli that it might have been nervous about. Even a spoiled horse can be retrained if you start out slowly, insisting on good manners for short periods and gradually increasing the length of time you ask it to stand still, or hold up the foot, clean it or tap on it.

If there is a particular aspect of foot handling or trimming/shoeing that your horse resents or is nervous about, take extra time to work on that bugaboo so the horse can become at ease with it or know that it won't get away with bad manners. Your farrier will greatly appreciate a well-mannered horse — and your horse will be more relaxed and less stressed if there are no confrontations/fights with the farrier!



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