

GO BACK TO BASICS THIS WINTER

I have never liked Winter. I have always wondered why my parents didn't pack up and head south the first time the water pipes froze. Living out in the country with the horses is a dream come true until the barn doors freeze shut and the manure buckets over flow. Basic tasks become an all day ordeal and the task of working horses goes on the back burner.

Even though we would prefer to stay under a blanket or in front of a fire, our horses need to get out and move. Horses must exercise to maintain proper body temperature and circulation. This is especially important when temperatures drop below freezing. Letting a horse stand in the stall is more harmful than taking him for a walk in the cold. The ideal situation for show horses, especially those who wear shoes all winter, is to be turned out in an indoor arena for part of the day. Unfortunately that isn't a possibility for many horse owners. The next best activity is longeing or free longeing indoors on super cold days. If you don't have access to an indoor arena, walk your horse up and down the aisle way for 30 minutes. Practice backing down the aisle and into the stall. Turn corners, pivot, halt. If your aisle is wide enough, side pass up and down. Review basic skills such as head dropping or ground tying. Focus on just one or two exercises each day. Spending extra time now on grooming and handling will pay off big in the spring time.

Riding everyday in the winter is unrealistic, so plan ahead activities that will keep you both interested. Pull out cones, ropes, poles, tarps, plywood, etc. and design a course to challenge your horse. Each new, unusual experience that you teach them

to become comfortable with increases their trust in you. A horse that trusts you will work much harder than one who doesn't. Show horses become less nervous at competitions after a winter of ground work. Looking for ideas? If your horse isn't challenged by an obstacle, raise the level of difficulty by sidepassing or backing through it. Winter is also a great time to teach your Western and Hunter horses to long line or ground drive. No need to purchase a surcingle. Run the lines through stirrups that have been

January is the month for groundwork and basics.

secured properly. (Snaffle bits are highly recommend for these activities.) This winter we plan to teach a few horses to pull various obstacles behind them without fear. This is a fun way to build trust and get them to use their hocks at the same time.

No matter how much you blanket, horses are going to grow some type of a winter coat. Be aware of this and don't over work them on very cold and windy days. Your horse isn't able to shed his layers so pay careful attention to the dampness of his hair coat. If your horse feels wet under the blanket, it is providing too much warmth. Switch to one with less insulation. Sometimes they are warmer than we realize. If he sweats during a workout, use dry towels to remove the dampness

and fluff up his hair coat. Then cover him with a fleece sheet to prevent him from getting a chill. Never blanket a damp horse!

Workouts in cold weather require longer warm-up and cool-down times. Skipping a proper warm-up can lead to serious leg injuries. Have fun and improve your balance during cool downs by practicing bareback. (Always wear a helmet for safety.) Remember, your horse's extra hair and your bulky clothes can make tack and equipment less comfortable and more restrictive. Double check your bridle fit. Does it need to be adjusted? Are the long hairs under the face getting pulled? Do your boots fit safely into your stirrups? Are your winter riding pants making you slip in the saddle? Can you grip the reins properly with your bulky gloves? Warmth is important but safety must come first. Keep this in mind before you mount up.

Be considerate of your horse's needs in the colder months. Don't clip anything except the bridle path. Keep the snow and ice out of their feet and always provide water that is at a temperature you'd be willing to drink. Some horses get dehydrated because they don't like the cold water. Providing access to a salt & mineral block is a great way to keep them drinking.

We would love to hear what you did this winter! Email us with your stories. Stay warm and Ride safe!

Jennifer Lindgren is a Judge, Clinician, and former Competitor. She is skilled in all disciplines and specializes in starting young riders and finishing serious competitors. Direct Inquiries to:
Jenlind22@msn.com

Jennifer Lindgren



Copyright © 2011. All Rights Reserved.