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Tying Horses Safely¹

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There are many ways to tie a horse. The safest way is by cross-tying in a stall or aisle-way. The ties should be attached to facing walls at a level higher than the withers of the tallest horse in the barn. Low cross-ties are dangerous to both the horse and handler. The ties should be long enough so that the snaps just barely meet in the center. It is best to use a panic snap or quick-release snap at the end of any kind of tie. This permits the horse to be released quickly during an emergency. Chains are more durable than rope, nylon, or leather and will not stretch. High strung or nervous horses should not be left unsupervised while on cross-ties (See Figure 1).

When cross-ties are not available or impractical, use a quick-release knot. It is one of the few knots that can be untied when a horse is pulling against it. Never tie a knot that is hard and fast. A horse can break its neck if it pulls back, falls, and cannot be untied quickly. Always use a properly fitted halter and a strong shank when tying a horse. Never tie with bridle reins or a rope attached to the bridle. Baling twine, string, and leather will break under pressure and should not be used.

Be sure to tie your horse well out of the reach of a strange horse to avoid fighting.

Choose a safe area in which to tie your horse. Do not tie the horse near wire fencing, barbed wire, porch rails, machinery, etc. Be sure the ground is free of

obstacles and is textured enough to prevent the horse from slipping.

Tie the horse to something strong such as a sturdy fence post that will not give way if the horse pulls back. Do not tie horses to movable objects such as cars or tractors. Once a horse successfully breaks away from being tied, it may then get into the habit of pulling or become frightened of being tied. If your horse pulls back, stay calm and move to the rear of the horse. Urge it to go forward with a cluck, clap of the hands, tap with a broom or buggy whip, or anything that will make the horse move forward and release the pressure on the tie.

The tie should be no longer than 3 feet in length. Too little rope will cramp the horse, while too much rope will permit the horse, or other objects to become tangled. The tie should be placed at the level of the point of the horse's shoulder or slightly higher. Tying a horse too low will easily allow it to get the tie wrapped around its leg and cause a potential injury. On the other hand, tying a horse too high puts a strain on its neck and encourages it to fight to get free.

Always tie to a fence post and not the rail. The post is less likely to give way when under the stress of a frightened horse. If possible, try to avoid tying to a smooth post or tree trunk. It is easy for the rope to slip down a smooth surface and pull the horse's head with it. If you must tie to a smooth object, then make an extra

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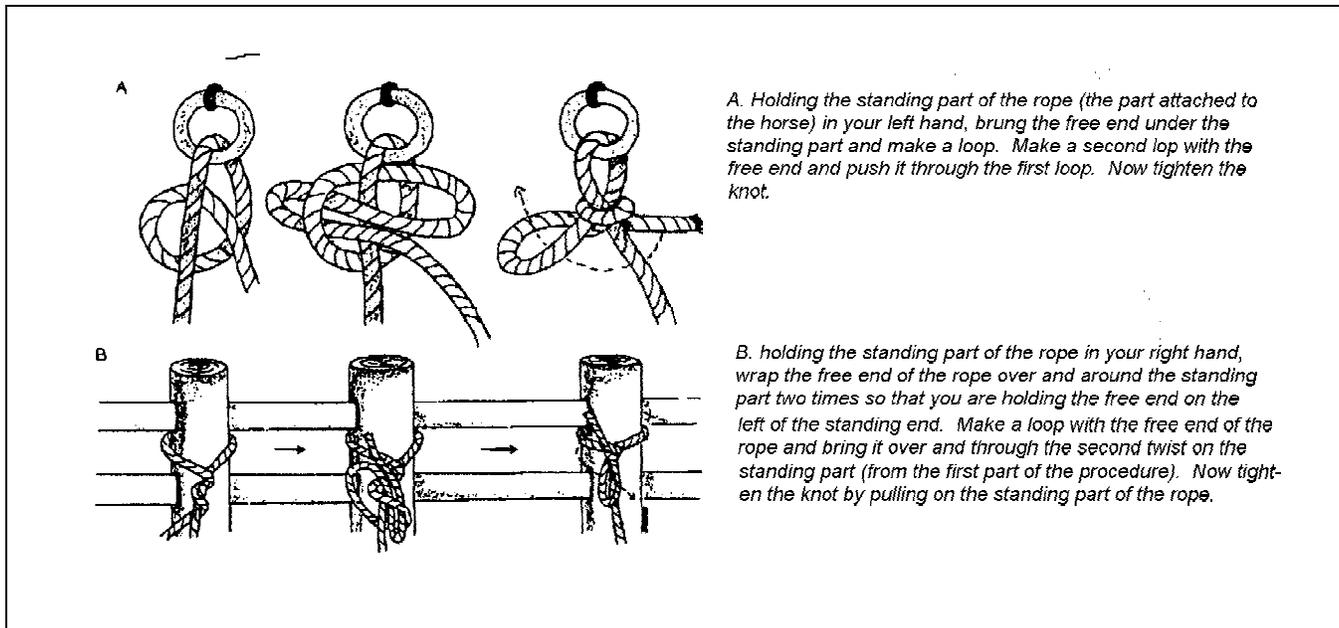


Figure 1. Illustrates two ways to make a quick release or safety knot.

wrap or two at the desired height and pull it tight. Then tie a quick-release knot (See Figure 1).

If you want to tie your horse out to graze, it first must be stake trained on at least 20 feet of rope. Do not attempt staking until you are sure the horse has accepted dragging the rope and will not become tangled in it. To accomplish this, tie a weighted, movable object, such as a brick or bag of sand, to the loose end of the rope and allow the horse to get the feel of resistance on the rope. The task can be made easier with two people, one to lead at the head and the other to follow behind to guide the rope and weight to prevent any sudden entanglement as the horse moves and becomes familiar with the rope.

Always watch the horse for possible problems during the training process. Once the horse has accepted the weighted rope it can be staked by tying one end of the rope to something solid in the ground, preferably with a swivel snap to prevent the rope from twisting. Tie the other end to the halter. Keep a staked horse under surveillance to prevent a mishap.

A bridle should not take the place of a halter. Never tie a horse by the bridle, bit, or reins. To tie a bridled horse, slip a halter over the bridle and tie with a lead rope attached to the halter as described above. Always untie a horse before removing the halter.

If the horse is to be tied in the same area for an extended period, food and water should be within reach of the horse.

If at any time the horse needs to be restrained, and tying is not enough, there are different methods to choose from. If the chain from the lead shank, over the nose, does not work, then a twitch is most commonly used. A twitch may be applied to the upper lip, the ear, or even the lower lip. Many different types of twitches are available, the most popular being a long handle with a loop of chain or rope at one end. To apply the twitch, place fingers through the loop at the end of the twitch, grasp the upper lip with your fingers, pull it through the loop, and twist the handle until you get a firm but gentle hold on the lip. Do not place it too high, because it will interfere with breathing or too low which will cause pain. Tighten it only if the horse acts up and loosen it as soon as it becomes manageable.

Do not use the twitch to move the horse around. A twitch should not be left on for more than 15 minutes at a time. If left on longer, numbness, or in extreme cases, permanent nerve damage may occur.

Assuming the twitches are placed and used correctly, they provide an effective and harmless method of restraint.

Now that your horse is safely and securely tied, you can begin to work around it. But be aware that a sound or movement that may not frighten you, may scare the horse into jumping back and pulling on the ties.