

My Favorite Way to Teach a Horse to Tie by Bonnie Martin

Did you ever see a horse that was tied to something set back and fight against the rope? It's not pretty and can be very dangerous. I knew a gal who tied her horse to the stair rail while she ran inside for something. When she came back, there was no stair rail any more. It was attached to the end of the lead line and "chasing" her horse around the yard, banging his legs at every stride. It was an expensive vet bill, and expensive repair bill, and a lesson learned the hard way. Not only did she learn not to tie a horse solidly to an object that might give way, but she learned that her horse didn't really tie well.

What's the best way to teach a horse to tie? I've heard and even tried lots of ways. The way that we've learned doing natural horsemanship seems to be the easiest on the horse and it solves a lot of other problems at the same time. It involves teaching the horse to give to even the slightest pressure on the lead line.

Begin by having the horse wear a good rope halter, not the flat web or leather kind. The rope halters offer a better feel to the horse and are not as easy to lean against and ignore pressure. Then, stand by the horse's shoulder and gently and steadily use the rope to ask the horse to bend its head towards you. At the slightest movement of the horse's head, release all the pressure and rub the horse. Do it again and again and again from that side and then also from the other side of the horse until the horse becomes very tuned in to bending its head on the slightest of cues and until it can bend farther and farther around. The release of pressure when the horse gives even a little is very important.

Stand out in front and to a slight angle of the horse and put light pressure on the rope asking the horse to come forward towards you. If there is resistance, just hold steady, not pulling, just steady, until the horse gives to the pressure. At that point, be sure to release the pressure quickly.

Once your horse really understands how to give to pressure, you will find that if it steps on the lead line while grazing, there is no jerking its head when it feels its

head held down. Instead, the horse will drop its head back down and step off the rope.

You can enlist the help of someone else for the next step. Have them stand on the outside of a fence holding the lead rope of the horse that is inside the fence. You be inside with the horse and gently flag the horse from the rear to move its feet over and then forward. Release the flagging pressure immediately when the horse begins to move away from the pressure. Do this moving the horse from side to side several times until it is comfortable changing sides and seeing you out of the opposite eye.

What does this have to do with tying a horse? Well, the horse has to know how to give to pressure to be able to stand tied, and once you have a horse that will respond instead of pulling against the pressure, you have a horse that will tie and not pull back. The process of really getting it to give to pressure may take a few sessions, longer perhaps if the horse has already learned to set back, but it will make for a much safer and responsive animal and is well worth the time it takes to teach.