

Beginning Ground Training: Build a Proper Foundation with Groundwork

By Lynn Palm

Part 2

In this article, I am continuing on with our discussion of the proper equipment needed to begin groundwork with your horse. I also want to give you ideas on how to create a training plan and tips to remember about groundwork.

The Whip

Use a three- to four-foot dressage whip to reinforce your voice commands. An "in-hand" whip is a valuable tool to encourage your horse to move forward without pulling on the longe line. Whether you are working on his near (left) or off (right) side, your whip is held in the same hand that is holding the excess longe line.

Practice using an in-hand whip properly before beginning any ground training. Extend your outside arm straight back behind your body to use an in-hand whip as a tool for forward motion. This must be done with relaxation and slowness through your shoulder. Then, through a slight twisting of your wrist, bring the whip toward the horse's hip and touch him at the hip or the top of the hind leg (gaskin). There should be enough slack, between your "lead" hand (nearest the horse) and the "outside" hand holding the loosely coiled excess longe line, to allow you to do this movement slowly and smoothly. When the whip is pointing downward, it is not an active tool.

When using the whip you want to touch your horse in the very precise area I just explained, not hit him in the flank. Ask a friend to "stand in" for your horse and practice proper whip application, before trying it with your horse. Two common errors to avoid include bringing the whip down too low and using your entire arm to move it. This will cause it to touch his flank instead of his rump.

The other is bringing the whip up too high and not even touching the horse. This happens when your arm is not brought far enough behind you. Don't put your horse through confusion while you are learning how to properly use an in-hand whip—practice first!

Create a Plan

Get a training notebook and start the habit of creating a lesson plan for each training session. Write down the date of each lesson, objectives for the training session, specific steps you will take to teach the lesson, the training location you will use, and how you will evaluate your progress.



Your horse is not the only one that benefits from warm-up exercises.



Training sessions should be divided into three segments. Start by repeating the maneuver worked on in your previous lesson. Review it in the same location(s) where you taught it to your horse to reinforce his learning. The middle of the session is the time to introduce something new that you want to teach the horse or to work on improving a maneuver that he is

not consistent with. In the third part of your session, review something that your horse does well to end on a positive note.

After each session evaluate what went really well, what was average (responsive, but not perfect), and what was poor. This will help you build the next lesson plan. It will help you think through the steps and give you a record of your accomplishments.

Tips to Remember

- Schedule training sessions around a lesson plan. Structure will help both you and your horse to focus and learn better.
- Include a warm up period to allow your horse to stretch his muscles and warm up his joints. This is especially important if the weather is cold. A warm up can help avoid injuries and get your horse's body prepared to participate to the fullest.
- Give your horse a "mental" warm-up before the real lesson to get him in the mood to learn by reviewing different figures, transitions, or maneuvers that he does well. This reinforces past training and gets him thinking.
- Always introduce new lessons in small, easy steps that your horse can understand. Always give a kind word or pat when he gets a lesson right. If your horse refuses or resists, he is showing you that he doesn't understand the lesson you are introducing. Be patient with your horse so he can learn to trust you. If you do this, he will respond positively and show you the same respect you show him.
- Just before you end the lesson, have your horse do something that he knows well. This gives him confidence and reinforces your partnership.
- End the session with a cool down period so the horse can stretch his muscles and have "quality time" with you, without having to concentrate on learning.
- Finish with a relaxing grooming session to show your appreciation to your horse.

Whether you are starting a young horse, re-schooling an older mount, or need to improve your eye for understanding your horse, ground training will improve a horse's responsiveness to commands and build your skills as a handler and rider. Visit www.lynnpalm.com where you can order my six-part **Longevity Series** in video or dvd and/or my **Longevity Training Book** as well as my cotton longe line and training halter mentioned in Part 1. While online, check out Lynn's "Women Luv Horses" Retreat to be held May 18-20, 2007 in Concord, NC.