



Proper Use of a Chain

Holly Grayton

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Proper use of a chain lead shank is an important thing to learn for you as the handler as well as for the horse you are leading. It is an important tool to keep your horse in control as well as to ensure both you and your horse's safety.

I think it is a good rule of thumb that all horses at a horse show be led with a chain – even the 'good horses'. There is always a lot going on at a horse show, meaning that any horse will be more likely to be spooked than a more familiar and relaxed setting. It's important for everyone at a show that we don't lose control of our precious horses! A loose horse running around the property is very disruptive to people and other horses, and of course potentially very dangerous. Having an appropriately affixed chain will help avoid this situation.

Another good reason for using a chain shank to lead is so that you don't get dragged around to the nearest patch of grass or to a friendly-looking equine friend. My own horse is very well-behaved with his chain on, and I almost never have to use it; he is more respectful of me when he wears it, and he certainly knows when it isn't on. Your chain should never be used in an abusive manner or to satisfy your frustrations. It is an aid that must be used only to keep you, your horse, and others safe.

The first thing to note when putting on your chain is to do it all the way up. That is to say you must thread the chain through the halter all the way until the beginning of the leather or rope. This ensures it doesn't become a 'choke chain', when pulling on the lead makes the chain tighter than the nose band of the halter and potentially pinches and frightens the horse. Depending on the length of chain, it may be necessary for the chain to go through the loops on the side of the halter to go across the nose, and then back up to the loop up near the head strap. This method also prevents the chain from pulling the halter into the horse's eye, which again may frighten or otherwise disturb the horse.

If the chain is too short to be threaded through in this manner, it will suffice to simply put the chain through the loops and over the nose, but it's important to check often that the halter is not twisting.

It is very important not to attach the chain back to itself, creating a hole large enough for the horse to get its foot stuck in it, or become snagged on something.

Further, a horse should never be tied to anything, cross-tied, or ground-tied when the chain is over its nose. If the horse gets loose or pulls back, the chain can do serious damage to the horse's face if stepped on or becomes caught in something.

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As always when leading your horse, use caution and be sure to stay attentive to your horse's attitude and behavior. Recognize when your horse is nervous or cautious, and act accordingly. The goal is to lead your horse with a chain shank, but very rarely ever need to use it.

