

Teach your horse to smile!

tips 'n' hints

Every horse (except wild ones of course) is trained to some degree. Riding horses that have been broken in have obviously been taught to accept a saddle, bridle, rider, and the rest. Someone has put in the time and effort to 'break' in a horse, and hopefully, it's worked well.



So what do you need to be able to do to train a horse? Anyone can train a horse to do almost anything, following a simple rewards system. The hardest part can be trying to figure out how to get your horse to do the movement in the first place!

There are some things you can do to make your training more effective. Firstly, make sure you're working with your horse in a quiet place, where neither of you can be distracted. Keep the atmosphere fun and exciting, and keep training sessions short.

Don't try to teach your horse more than one trick at a time. It can get confusing for your horse considering you can't both directly communicate.

The tricks you're teaching should be practiced at least once every couple of days to keep it fresh in his mind. Some horses will take longer than others to learn, and some trainers will take longer than others to teach.

Once you've taught your horse to smile, why not teach him to hug, bow or nod his head? It's all fairly simple once your horse understands what it is you want him to do.

Using this training method, you can teach your horse that your key phrase ("Good Boy!") when said in a particular tone of voice is a reward.

So, it's technically not smiling - but it's pretty clever!! So how does a horse 'smile'? The horse's 'smile' is actually called the 'Flehmen Response'. It's pretty much a 'that smells' expression. Most people will have seen horses make this face - and it usually gets a laugh. This 'trick' is no exception!



As with any animal, the trick we're 'teaching' is something the animal can already do. We're just training the animal to do it when we ask them to. Most animals are happy to entertain us.. except maybe cats! => Horses are certainly willing to please, and happy to smile for us.

Horses have very flexible muzzles - they can pick up things, hold things, push things along, and generally move their muzzles almost any way they like. Some horses have even been known to untie knots or unbolt stable doors! All horses are different - some have more flexible muzzles than others. This pretty much means that some horses will have a big long lip extension, and some can only manage to lift their lip a little bit.

how to do it

Equipment you need includes:



A Halter
A Leadrope
Carrots
The Secret Ingredient

The most important tool in teaching this trick is the secret ingredient - something your horse thinks smells funny. It depends on the horse - a cut up onion should do it, or something like vaseline. Be careful with what you use. Don't use chemicals or anything too strong.

Step One: Put the halter and leadrope on your horse and stand him somewhere quiet - where he's free from distraction. Stand directly in front of him, and show him your strange smelling object - let's say it's the onion. Give him the command 'Smile' very clearly. Most horses will curl up their lip at this scent. If your horse doesn't do it, you'll have to experiment with other 'smellies' until you can get him to curl up his lip. You can also try tickling his upper lip with a feather or your finger.

Step Two: When your horse does the right thing, make a fuss of him, praise him, pat him and give him a piece of carrot for his reward. You can also use a key praise word like 'Good Boy' (Yeah, we know it's not that creative, but you can think of your own!) Reward him even if he only does it slightly - if you can see the effort, reward it. Teaching this takes time!

Step Three: Repeat steps one and two until your horse will raise his lip everytime you say 'Smile!' It takes time and practice, and above all, patience. Generally, the greedy horses will learn very quickly. Remember that your praise and rewards go a long way. =>

