

Confidence Builder: Plastic Bags-Part One

Teach your horse that plastic bags are not a threat.

Many equestrians are familiar with the “plastic bag of death,” either on the trail or in the arena, when a plastic grocery bag floats into a horse’s path and he is certain it will kill him. Wouldn’t you like your horse to know that the bag is not a threat? You can build his confidence in only a few minutes a day, using the concept of “approach and retreat.” When horses are worried about something, they gain confidence by approaching the object until they get nervous, then retreating until they feel safe enough to re-approach and check it out again.

Wad up a plastic grocery bag in your hand and allow your horse to investigate it. Don’t shove it under his nose – let your horse approach the bag. Hold it a few feet away and let him grow curious about what’s in your hand. When he gives it a good sniff, use that same wadded bag to give your horse a good rub all over his body, and allow it to make some noise. Take breaks where you un-wad and re-wad the bag, making as much noise with the bag as your horse can comfortably tolerate. Notice your horse’s reaction, and if he gets tense or worried, retreat. Slow down, back off or make less noise. Repeat the process until you see a change. Your horse should relax, lick his lips or exhale deeply and sigh.

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