

How to Select Horse Boots

Horse boots serve different purposes depending on their design. They can protect a horse's legs from interference that can lead to abrasions and splints, or provide support for a horse's tendons and ligaments.

Some riders use horse boots to prevent leg injuries during riding or turnout, while others choose boots to combat a particular horse's predisposition for recurring injuries. Studies have shown that many boots, no matter their purpose, also help absorb some of the shock on impact as a horse's hoof hits the ground.

Protective boots are particularly important if your horse has big movement in his gaits, has sustained an injury, or if he interferes – meaning he has a propensity for one or more hooves to strike another leg during movement.

Horse boots are made of a variety of materials, including easy-care neoprene and plastic, sheepskin, leather and gel. Various styles of boots may have hook and loop closures, buckles, or hook and stud closures. Regardless of the differences between styles, most protective horse boots come in pairs with a left and a right boot, with the closures of the boots designed to be on the outside of the horse's leg. If the boots are not clearly marked left and right, the closures should still end up on the outside of the leg with the ends facing toward the rear of the horse. If the closures were located on the inside of the leg, they could interfere with each other, come undone or cause the horse to stumble.

The array of boots on the market might seem overwhelming initially, but if you identify your main goal in putting boots on your horse, along with the type appropriate for your riding discipline, your decision will become easier. Add to that your preference for materials and your budget, and your field of choices narrows even more. Horse boots fall into five main categories as described here.

Cross Country Jumping Boots

Designed to protect your horse through the rigors of cross country courses, these boots are usually made of a fairly lightweight, strong material. They'll have durable strike pads to provide extra protection to the interior side of a horse's leg. They usually have heavy duty hook and loop closures, are easy to clean, and do not absorb water, which would add weight. When choosing boots for eventing, some riders prefer those that reflect their team or stable colors. Examples of cross

country jumping boots include: Dalmar Eventer Boots, which provide ventilation, Woof All-Purpose Boots and Eskadron Cross Country Boots.

Open Front Jumping Boots

These boots typically have elastic straps and traditional hook and stud closures, though some styles offer hook and loop closures. The open front design encourages a horse to be more careful going over jumps as the horse will feel a fence pole if he hits it. The boots provide strike protection from the back hooves for the tendons in the back of a horse's leg. You can find horse boots made of synthetic materials, such as the Eskadron Flexisoft Boots, EquiFit T-Boots and Veredus Nero Carbon Gel Boots, or horse boots made of leather, such as the Dover Premier Leather Open Front Boots and Pessoa Fleece Lined Open Front Horse Boots.

Open front boots are usually placed on a horse's front limbs, while ankle boots are placed on the hind limbs. Riders generally choose a set of matching open front and ankle boots in conservative colors. These boots are permitted in the jumper ring, but are not allowed to be worn in the hunter ring.

Dressage/Flat Work

Boots designed for dressage protect a horse's legs from interference, and can be a time-saving alternative to polo wraps. Dressage boots are usually lined with fleece or neoprene, and are made of materials that are easily cleaned with water. Because of the tradition of elegance in dressage, popular colors for dressage boots are white and black, and some riders choose brown boots to coordinate with their chestnut mounts. Boots (and polo wraps) are not permitted to be worn in a dressage test, but they may be worn in the warm-up area. Examples of dressage boots are: Dover Pro Sport Boots, Dressage Sport



Boots and Equilibrium Stretch and Flex Flatwork Wraps.

Support Boots

This type of boot is engineered to support a horse's tendons and ligaments. The boot surrounds the leg and has a strap that cradles the horse's fetlock joint to prevent hyperextension. Horses with a history of or predisposition to support related injuries (such as suspensory injuries) can benefit from this type of boot. Support boots are available in a wide variety of colors. Examples are: Professional Choice Ventech Sport Elite Boots, Equilibrium Stretch and Flex Training Wraps and Eskadron Pro-Active Boots.

All Purpose Splint Boots

Splint boots are a necessary accessory for horses that interfere. All purpose boots have a reinforced inner strike area and are usually some of the most affordable types of horse boots. Support boots are available in a wide variety of colors. Examples are: All Purpose Galloping Boots, Devon-Aire Splint Boots and Davis Splint Boots.

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How to Estimate Your Horse's Boot Size

Most boots are available in small, medium and large sizes, and a few manufacturers produce boots that are scaled to fit ponies and extra large horses. Some manufacturers, particularly those that produce support wraps, provide sizing charts with their product packaging.

In general, the height, weight and breed of your horse in combination with the circumference of its leg, will provide you with an estimation of the appropriate boot size to try on your horse.

If you have a small horse with refined bones, perhaps a large pony or Arabian that weighs less than 1000 pounds, you'll probably need small sized horse boots. Many horses require a smaller size boot on their front limbs and one size larger boot on their hind limbs.

Most Thoroughbreds of average bone and an average height of about 16 hands will require size large boots, while warmbloods and sport type horses may need large or even extra large boots. Horses that fall into the middle categories of medium sized boots will be Quarter Horse and Morgan types standing anywhere from 15.1 to 15.3 hands, along with fine-boned and smaller Thoroughbreds.



How to Check the Fit of Horse Boots

You should be able to slide one finger between the protective boot and the horse's leg. Your finger should feel snug between the two surfaces. If the boot is too big or too loose, dirt can get inside and cause abrasions, or slide downward where it may disrupt the horse's movement. If the boot is too tight, it can damage the horse's tendons.

The length of a boot on your horse's leg should be checked as well. You don't want the boot to be so long that it rises to the back of a horse's knee and interferes with normal movement. It should, however, be long enough to cover most of the cannon bone area as well as the inside of the fetlock.



What is a Splint?

The word "splint" is a term used for a protruding, hard bump that forms between the splint and cannon bone on either the inside or outside of a horse's lower leg. Splints are more likely to occur on a front leg than on a hind leg, and usually happen in younger, developing horses from an internal strain. A splint can also occur because of an exterior strike or bruise, such as a horse kicking itself with one of its feet.

The strike causes bruising to a small ligament that connects one of the leg's two splint bones to the cannon bone. Initially, the lump feels warm or hot to the touch and can cause very mild, hardly noticeable to moderate lameness.

With rest, the site heals by building up a calcium deposit that essentially bonds the splint bone to the cannon bone. Once a splint heals, the new bony protuberance is quite hard and cold to the touch. Horses do not usually experience pain from a cold, or healed, splint.

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Boot Tips

When fastening horse boots, be sure to use even pressure on each strap as you work your way down the leg.

Be sure that closures are located on the outsides of the horse's legs with the ends facing toward the rear of the horse.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully for your type of boot, and be careful not to over tighten the boot.

Remove boots from your horse's legs as soon as possible after your workout to allow any accumulated heat to escape and to allow the skin and hair to dry.

Keep the boots clean and free of accumulated dirt, grime and sweat which can be irritating to a horse's sensitive skin.