

About Stirrup Leathers

Your first goal in selecting stirrup leathers should be the effectiveness of your riding. Appropriately sized leathers allow you to make the proper length adjustment for your legs and riding discipline. Your second goal in choosing leathers is to coordinate their color with the color of your saddle.

Types of Stirrup Leathers

Three types of stirrup leathers are available: traditional, lined or synthetic.

Traditional stirrup leathers typically last a long time and maintain their appearance. You can add holes or have leathers shortened by a saddler if needed. The drawbacks of traditional leathers are that they may stretch slightly over time and use, and can do so a little asymmetrically depending on rider habits. Traditional leathers are easy to clean and condition.

Nylon-core stirrup leathers were developed as a way to help guard against stretching. Nylon webbing, which has very little stretch, is surrounded by a thin layer of soft leather. Drawbacks of this type of stirrup leather are that holes cannot be punched and the leathers cannot be cut if needed. Depending on the type of soft leather surrounding the nylon, it may not be as durable when compared to a traditional, heavier stirrup leather. The integrity of the nylon inside the soft leather is unlikely to change, and the functionality will likely remain. These types of leathers are easy to clean, and should be conditioned with a lederbalsam.

Synthetic stirrup leathers are produced by synthetic saddle manufacturers. Although there is no rule against it, you may not want to put synthetic stirrup leathers against a leather saddle as the synthetic materials tend to scratch leather saddle flaps. Synthetic leathers can be cleaned with a mild soap and water solution or with Wintec Saddle Cleaner.

Preferences

Stirrup leathers are available with holes spaced at one-inch and half-inch intervals. Some riders strongly prefer the more precise length adjustment provided by the half-inch inch (also known as half-hole) leathers.

Another preference you might consider is leather width. Leathers generally are available in three widths: 1 inch, 7/8 inch and 3/4 inch. Many riders looking to reduce bulk under the leg choose the narrower widths, which are also especially helpful for children and small riders.

Buckles are key components of stirrup leathers too. They are fashioned of stainless steel for durability and strength, and they come in two basic designs—curved and flat. Some riders prefer the traditional flat buckle, while others find that the slightly curved buckles tuck into the stirrup bar area more smoothly to reduce bulk under their thighs.



You can also choose the finishing characteristics of your stirrup leathers, which could include beveled edges or subtle stitching for extra style. After you've decided on the type of leathers you'd like, consider color (as described in the sidebar) and length (according to your riding discipline).



Coordinating Color

If you have a dressage saddle, chances are it is black. Color matching your leathers to your saddle will be easy! Brown leather saddles, however, can create a bit of a challenge for coordinating color.

Because leather used in making saddles is not the same type used in making stirrup leathers, an exact color match is unlikely. Even when produced by the same manufacturer, the different leathers will accept dye slightly differently.

If you have a used brown saddle, it has probably darkened with time and conditioning. You should be able to coordinate the current color of your saddle with the brown of your leathers, understanding that the leathers too will darken slightly with conditioning.

If your saddle is new, consider how it and the leathers you select will change hue as you condition them. If the brown of the leather appears to have red undertones, for example, it may appear to be even redder after oiling. A shade of medium brown leather may never darken enough to match a very dark, or ebony brown saddle. A good quality leather stain and conditioning oil may be used to darken leathers.



Helpful Tip

If you want to reduce bulk under your leg as much as possible, look for Bates Leather Webbers. This design uses a single layer of leather under the leg to provide a closer feel.



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Stirrup Leather Lengths for Hunter, Jumper and Cross Country Riding

For jumping disciplines, the average adult takes 54 inch stirrup leathers. A rider who is short in height may do best with shorter length leathers, from 48 to 52 inch lengths. A tall rider may require a 56 inch length. Children usually require 48 inch leathers, but Dover/England Premier Leathers are offered in 42 inch length for very young children.

To get a general estimate of the length of leather you require, measure the length of your arm from your armpit to the tips of your fingers. Double that measurement, and add a few inches to be sure that you have enough leather to tuck into the leather keeper on the saddle flap.

Remember that the height of the stirrup iron will add six to eight inches to the overall length. Being able to slip the surplus stirrup leather length into the keeper will reduce bulk and friction under your leg. However, too much excess leather can be unattractive, and in the show ring can be distracting to the judge.

This measuring technique is merely a guideline and you should make adjustments in your calculations depending on your particular physical build.

Note: If you ride in an all-purpose saddle in which you both jump and work on dressage, be sure you select leathers that are long enough to accommodate a longer leg length for your flatwork.



Stirrup Leather Lengths for Dressage

In general, the average length of dressage leathers is 60 inches with the goal being to have the leg hanging long against the horse's side for maximum contact. If you're short in height, you may want to choose leathers that are 56 or 58 inches; tall dressage riders can find leathers in 62, 64 and 67 inch lengths. For child dressage riders, Passier Leathers are available in 50 inch.

To get a general estimate of the length of leather you require, measure the inseam of your leg to the ankle bone. Take that measurement, double it, and add six to eight inches to be sure that you have enough leather to tuck into the leather keeper. Remember that the height of the stirrup iron will add six to eight inches to the overall length. These factors will give you some surplus to tuck into the stirrup leather keeper on the saddle flap. Being able to slip the surplus length into the keeper will reduce bulk and friction under your leg. However, too much excess leather can be unattractive, and in the show ring can be distracting to the judge.

This measuring technique is merely a guideline and you should make adjustments in your calculations depending on your particular physical build.



Stirrup Leather Care

Clean and condition your saddle and stirrup leathers regularly to keep them healthy. As you do, keep these points in mind:

- Stirrup leathers are under stress while you ride. Be sure to monitor the leather where it meets both the buckle and the iron to be sure it isn't cracking.
- Replace your stirrup leathers if you feel they are compromised by loosening stitching or cracking.
- Check to be sure that the release latch on your saddle's stirrup bar is always in the open position to allow the leather to slip from the bar if necessary.



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