

Fall Trail Riding Tips

From clearing brush to trail footwear selection, we offer tips from two experts who'll keep you on track.

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Equiseach.com

Detour Ahead

Dry, fallen limbs and brittle, shifting foliage can block trails in the fall. Here are a few safety tips for handling small natural obstructions on the trail:

- Do wear sturdy riding gloves to handle underbrush and limbs.
- Don't step or put your hands into places you can't see. Something could bite or cut you.
- Do carry a sharp knife or trail saw to help clear away small limbs or vines.
- Don't leave your horse unattended while you attempt to clear a path. Tie him securely with a halter and rope.
- Do dismount and lead him under low-hanging obstructions.
- Don't ask him to step over limbs that are higher than his knees, or that are rough with sharp protrusions.

Hoofing It

Trail footwear should be comfortable and safe for riding, but also comfortable and durable enough for hiking. Shop with these tips in mind:

Fit -- Loose footwear won't provide needed support for hiking, and can rub heels and ankles causing blisters. Shop for a fit that's snug enough in the heel to stay with your foot as you walk, but not so tight that you can't get your heels down while mounted. Check that you can spread your toes naturally. Pull-on and zip-up styles often aren't snug enough, but laces can be tightened as needed.

Safety -- Heels help prevent your feet from slipping through stirrups while riding, but shouldn't be more than an inch high or they could cause balance loss, or back, hip, or foot pain while hiking. Laterally stiff footwear with wide soles provides good stability for negotiating uneven terrain on foot. However, soles shouldn't be so wide at the ball of the foot (usually a shoe's widest part) that they hang up in your stirrups. If they fit snugly, buy narrower shoes or wider stirrups. Shop for soles with mild tread -- knobby tread can become stuck in stirrups; slick soles can cause a slip when hiking.

Style -- A variety of hybrid footwear caters to the recreational rider/hiker. With new technology, something with boot looks may now offer sport-shoe comfort. Ankle cuffs range from just under the anklebone to just above it, for varying degrees of support. Reinforced toe boxes help protect against a horse's misstep. Materials are rugged and often water-resistant. Conservative, neutral colors hide dirt well.