

Howdy Folks, Lately I have been asked repeatedly by clients about building temporary round opens as well as semi-temporary and permanent ones. So in response I am including this month a semi-brief description of how to build a safe temporary round pen as well as for a permanent one.

Temporary Round Pens

If a more permanent round pen is not allowed where you are, Temporary round pens can be built from plastic poles and electric tape or wooden poles. For a 40' diameter pen : the circumference is $(40 \times 3.14 \text{ PI})$ or 125.6 feet, therefore, with a post every 7 feet you would need about 18 posts. To make them tall enough you would need (2×18) or 36 posts that are 4' tall and taping the bottom 12" of one onto the top 12" of the other (overlapping and taped in two places) makes them 7 feet tall. Of course, if 6 or 7 foot tall plastic or wooden posts are available then only 18 posts would be needed. Then three strands of electric tape (one about 12" from the top, one 12" from the ground and one in the middle) $125.6 \times 3 = 377$ feet of tape total. The tape can be 1/2" width or greater and white or other color if preferred .A power supply is needed if the horse doesn't already respect electric fencing or at least until the horse learns to respect it, then it is generally no longer needed. You need relatively flat ground with no holes or sharp rocks, etc. If you can get wooden poles, they are available in better lengths such as 8' at most fencing suppliers and if sunk one foot into the ground they will be the desired 7 foot height and will work well. You would then need 3 plastic screw in insulators for each post to hold the wire.

Permanent Round Pens

A general guide for permanent round pens : Round pens (used for Join Up and much more) need to be built safely with sides/walls being built at least six to eight feet tall and with no gaps left between the top edges of where panels meet, if panels are used, in order to prevent a cannon bone or fetlock / pastern joint slipping into a gap. If a wire mesh panel is used, no greater than 2 inch square design is desirable so that no hoof can go through or get caught. If rails or slats (wooden or plastic) are used then there should be no spaces larger than 2 inches between the horizontal or vertical slats or rails - as a foot could force through and becoming cast. Flat heavy plastic, wooden or metal panels can work if there are no gaps larger than 2 inches between the panels. Although not absolutely necessary, a very good ground surface would be a packed clay base with about 1.5 inches of sand on top. Minimum round pen size should be 30 to 40 feet diameter with a circumference of 94' to 126 ' w/ 14 to 18 posts (7 feet between posts). A better size is 60 feet diameter with a circumference of 189' requiring 27 posts at 7' feet spacing. This size is better for larger horses. A 75 to 100 foot round pen makes an even better riding pen. A rubber or non-splinter type wooden skirt around the bottom (about 18" high) is also a good idea to protect the horse's feet.

Riding & Training Advice:

Riders should never forget that when on the back of a horse, the horse cannot see you unless they have turned their head. As their attention span is so relatively short, it is very important to remind them who and what is sitting on their backs lest they think, in their subconscious minds, that we might just be a creature with claws and large teeth as the millions of years of DNA imprinting has instilled for their safety and defense. Typically, riders are not focused sufficiently on their horse when out on a hack, too many other things are going on in the rider's mind, which puts the rider "behind" the horse in reactions instead of ahead.

Often, riders who have ridden for five or more years usually believe that they are more experienced riders than they are in reality as they actually have less experience than they assume. This is primarily due to the fact that they continually repeat the same errors without being aware of it and their horses have learned to compensate. As a result, their horses don't progress or advance as well as they could otherwise and do not trust their riders as much as they could do. They don't see and believe us to be sufficiently competent and protective leaders to keep them from harms way. Many riders are unknowingly guilty of this and sorely need qualified / professional instruction in order to have errors pointed out so that they can begin recognizing their errors and begin making changes. This is especially so in their "muscle memory" which is always so difficult to recognize and change. Typically we all learn faster when we recognize an error and make the correction and then feel the result.

Some riders become frustrated and loose patience following extended periods of incorrectly trying to rebuild the foundation between themselves and their horses without realizing that they are committing the same mistakes over and over. Rebuilding clear communication between horse and rider, initially via ground work then carrying that onto the saddle work, is often changing a long ingrained habit and is much more difficult without professional assistance. It is often false economy to cut corners and save money by avoiding professional assistance.

A Closing Reminder:

If you don't want your horse to become numb to your foot cues, it is important not to nag them with foot cues once they have given a response or at least given an honest attempt to comply with a cue.

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

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