



How to Care for Your Saddle

A custom saddle is a big investment. For that reason it only makes sense to protect that investment, & regular cleaning will add years to the life of your saddle.

After taking your saddle apart & laying out all the pieces fill 2 pails with warm water. One pail is for rinsing & one is for soaping, you will also need 2 sponges & a bar of glycerine soap & a soft brush.

Work up a lather & *lift* the dirt off your saddle. If you scrub the dirt & don't use enough suds & water it will have a sandpaper effect on your leather. You will need the soft brush for tooled areas. Work from the top down, clean a small area & rinse off all the suds before they dry. Don't be afraid of using a lot of water, there should be a large, messy puddle when you're done!

Change the water in your pails if need be, & do the dirtier things, such as flank cinch & stirrups, last. Pay special attention to the areas that come in contact with the horse.

Before your saddle is completely dry, (*do not put it in the hot sun*) you may need to oil. This depends on use, storage & climate & will have to be a judgement call. Most people overoil, too much oil is just as bad as too little. First of all, it will darken your leather. Oil has a cumulative effect & once it starts to darken you cannot reverse it. Secondly, dirt will stick to the oil, which will be abrasive to your saddle. Third, too much oil causes the leather fibres to break down & the leather will be soft, raggy & prone to stretch.

If you feel your saddle needs oiling, use *Pure Neatsfoot Oil*. Never use a petroleum based product. Warm oil will penetrate better. Use a trimmed piece of sheepskin & rub in lightly & sparingly in a circular motion. If the oil is sitting on the surface, you are using too much. You can choose to only oil the critical parts of the saddle, backs of the fenders, underside of flank cinch, backs of billets etc. No amount of oil will reverse dry rot or "bring it back to life?" once the leather is dry & cracked, it is ruined.

A good product is Williams Saddle Dressing, which will soften, waterproof & not darken as much as Neatsfoot. I apply it, like the oil, with a piece of sheepskin. A blow dryer will soften it & help it penetrate & not lay in the tooled areas. Use it on the strings as well.

Finally, I like a coating of Tan Kote (protective, moisture resistant finish). Go over the saddle *once*, with small circular motions. It will look streaky at first but will dry to a rich lustre. It is a water based product so it doesn't *seal* the surface.

Storage & climate is important, & you should always use a saddle rack, or lay your saddle on its side with the leathers straight. Never store in a dark, warm, damp place. This is a perfect breeding ground for mold & mildew & once you have it, it is almost impossible to destroy. It will eventually spread through your entire tack room & ruin your gear.

Tips

- Use a mixture of oxalic acid & water to lighten & remove stains
- Use sandpaper on roughout, being careful not to hit any stitching
- Re-dye the edges & polish the silver
- Keep a piece of sheepskin in your trailer to lift the dust off your gear