

Horse Show Grooming and Braiding

Top Tails for Show Hunters

Step by Step Tail Braiding Tips

By Cindy Hale / Photos by Sharon Fibelkorn

A neatly braided tail accentuates a hunter's hindquarters. It adds to the overall picture of refinement and elegance, which makes it a pity that braided tails are rarely seen outside the A-rated divisions. Here are some step-by-step tips on how to braid your horse's tail like a pro.

Begin with a freshly shampooed tail. Although you can use a conditioner, avoid any coat polish or detangler, as it will make the hair slick. You aren't ready to braid until you can easily comb through the hair without encountering any snags.



Basic braiding tools for mane and tail.

Dampen the hair at the top and all along the sides of the dock with a mixture of water and a styling lotion. You'll need a piece of yarn about 24 inches long, a latch hook and a pair of scissors. Match the yarn to your horse's hair. (Brightly colored yarn is a trend whose time is past, however, we're using it here for illustrative purposes.)

If your horse is tall, you'll also need a step stool so that you aren't accidentally pulling the hair downward as you braid. Pulling downward will eventually cause the tail braid to droop and sag. Instead, you want to hold each section of hair level as you plait it into the braid.



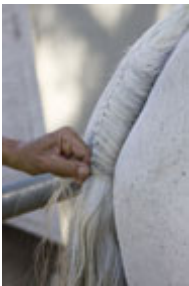
Separate out three sections of hair at the very top of the dock. One section comes from the left side, one from the right side, and one from the center. Although the hair for the center section may be very short, especially if your horse rubs his tail, you can coax it into submission with extra styling solution.



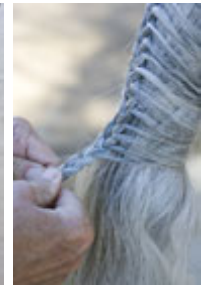
Using the three sections, begin your French braid.



As you pick up hair from alternating sides to plait into the French braid, reach for hair underneath the dock. Only take a few strands at a time, or your French braid will become chunky and unmanageable. Press inward toward the dock each time you plait the hair together. This will help prevent the French braid from sagging away from the tail bone.



Approximately two inches from the end of the tail bone, stop French braiding...



...and incorporate the three sections of hair you hold into a simple "pigtail" braid, about six inches long



Fold your yarn in half and incorporate it into the braid and continue for another two inches before knotting it.



For a secure knot, wrap both pieces of yarn around the bottom of the pigtail while forming a small loop with your index finger, then feed the yarn ends back through and pull taut, in a sort of half-hitch knot.

There are three ways to finish the job.

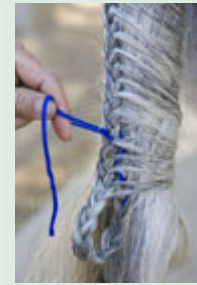
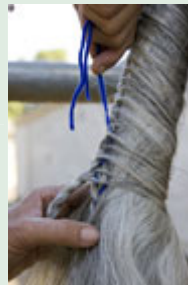
The Loop



The traditional way is to simply end with a demure loop. Insert your latch hook underneath the French braid, about two inches from the bottom.



Grab the yarn tails and pull them through until the top of the pigtail is anchored beneath the French braid. Next, use your latch hook to take one half of the yarn and pull it through to the other side of the French braid.



Finally, knot the ends on top of the French braid and snip off the excess yarn.

The Pinwheel



To create the stylish pinwheel, braid down into your pigtail; then split the hair into two equal sections, each one containing a strand of yarn.



Roll the braid upward in a tight pinwheel, with each section of hair on either side of your coil.



Continue rolling tightly.



Once the pinwheel is nestled against the French braid and the tail bone, find each piece of yarn and make a knot beneath the pinwheel.



Then bring the yarn ends together above the pinwheel and knot again, right against the French braid.



For some extra security, knot above and below the pinwheel a few more times. Snip off any excess yarn.

The Wrap



The most expedient finish is the trendy wrap technique.



Wrap the pigtail braid once around the dock.



Tuck the end under the loop of braid, gently pulling any unbraided tail hair along.



Pull the yarn ends through on either side of your French braid, cross it over your pigtail braid and tie. Neatly snip away extra yarn.



A Strong Finish: To help strengthen your French braid for a long day of showing, and to help it lie straight, pull through several short pieces of yarn under it and knot on top. This treatment also adds a little bit of subtle decoration.