



Braiding to Win

Nothing finishes off the proper look of a hunter or a jumper or a dressage horse like a neatly braided mane. It takes time to do it right but it's worth the effort.

Materials needed:

- Small natural sponge
- Water bucket
- Small mane comb (plastic or metal)
- 30+ lengths of yarn cut to 18"
- "Pull through": a crochete hook or rug hooking tool work well
- Pair of scissors

What I am to show you today is the proper braid for a hunter or jumper.

The mane should be no longer than 4 inches to make a proper braid. If it is too long it needs to be pulled or carefully trimmed. Pulling gives a softer appearance and thins the hair. Thick hair is hard to braid.

Once you have the proper length and thickness you can start to braid. First, wet the mane with water using a sponge. This makes the mane lie flat and smooth (Fig. 1) and makes it easier to hold onto.



(When removing braids wetting the mane again makes them come out easier and keeps the mane from curling so much.)

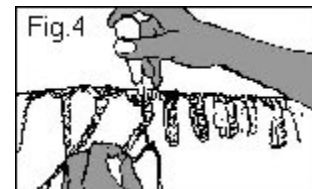
Divide the hair into 1/2" to 3/4" bunches to braid. Divide each bunch into three parts and start to braid (Fig.2).



About half way down the braid start to work in the yarn (approximately 18" long, folded in half), loop end up (Fig.3). When you reach the end of the braid tie the yarn in a knot to hold it. Do this down the full length of the neck braiding every strand of mane.



When you have finished this it is time to pull the yarn through to give the looped appearance that looks so neat. A smooth crochet hook or a rug hooking tool work well. Insert the hook on the opposite side of the mane at the base of the hair and reach down and hook the long ends of the yarn (Fig.4)



and pull the yarn through (Fig.5). Do this all of the way down the mane.



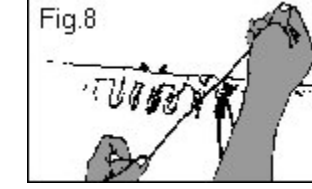
The next step is very important in getting a smooth braid. Carefully pull the yarn through until the knot at the end of the braid is just through the base hair and align each braid. (Fig.6)



Next, tie off each braid. First tie a knot underneath the base of the hair, wrapping the yarn from the top of the hair to underneath. Then tie a knot on top (Fig.7).

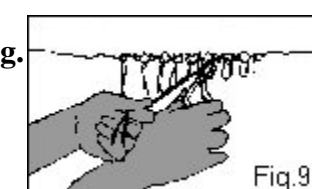


The secret to a secure braid is not just a square knot, add an extra loop to each half of the knot to make it tight.(Fig.8)



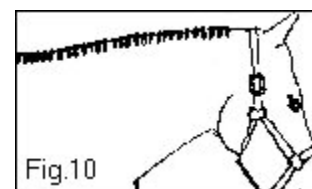
What makes a braid look smooth is to push up a little bump of braided mane above the knot making the rest of the braid lie flat.

The last step is to cut off the excess yarn (Fig.9).



Don't forget to braid the forelock as one braid.

Now, you have a lovely braided mane and are ready for the show ring. (Fig.10)



More on Hunter Braiding

Braiding: You'll need a braiding kit if you plan to braid your horse often. You can assemble your own from items purchased at the drug store, or buy a pre-assembled kit. You'll need: several 12-inch strands of yarn matching your horse's mane; small rubber bands; a braid pull-through (purchased at tack stores or you can make one out of some twisted wire, or you can use a crochet or rug latch hook); hairdressers clips or clothespins; small blunt-tip sewing scissors (to clip the yarn); gel or braiding product; and braid aid (a sectioning comb available at tack stores). I put each braiding tool in easy reach in a pocketed grooming apron.



Hunter Braids: You can braid a mane that is wet, dry or gelled — it's your personal preference. I favor braiding a damp, slightly gelled mane because it makes the mane neat and holds stray hairs in place.

To start, stand on your stool and begin at the poll. For easy access, fold the yarn in half and slip the entire bunch through the top ring of your horse's halter. Take your braid-aid and comb off a section of hair. Put your hair clip in the free hair next to your section of hair (this keeps the rest of the mane from drifting into the section you're braiding).

Start braiding the section down, keeping it tight as you go. About halfway down, place a folded piece of yarn in the center of the braid, and continue braiding, incorporating the yarn into it. At the end, wrap the two pieces of yarn ends around the braid's tail and knot them. Continue down the mane until all the braids are finished. You will have a row of braids with about 4 inches of yarn hanging down.



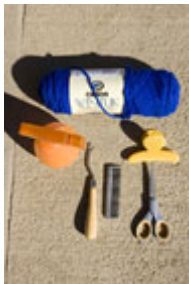
To finish them, slide the hook down the top of each braid, through the mane, and slip the loose yarn through the eye of the pull-through. Pull it up and out the top of the braid. The braid tail and excess yarn will now be through the mane and lying at the top of the crest. Crisscross the yarn under the braid, bring it back around to the middle of the braid and make a square knot. Clip the loose ends of the yarn. Remember to keep this all very tight or the braids will slip loose.



TAIL BRAIDING

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.

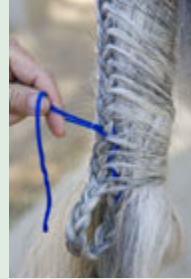
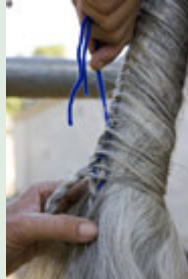
The Loop



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.



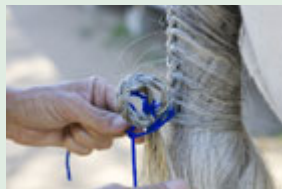
Roll the braid upward in a tight pinwheel, with each section of hair on either side of your coil.



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



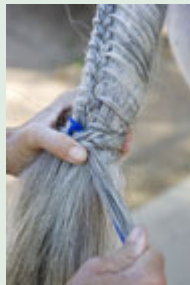
The most expedient finish is the trendy wrap technique.



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.



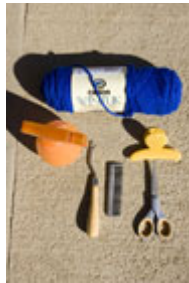
Horse Show Grooming and Braiding

Managing Mane Braiding

Beautify your hunter with this step-by-step mane braiding guide.

By Cindy Hale / Photos by Sharon P. Fibelkorn

If you grew up riding hunters 20 years ago, chances are you mastered the art of braiding a hunter's mane. It was simply part of a show horse's turnout. But with non-rated divisions allowing today's riders to forego braiding, the ability to braid well is disappearing. A beautiful coiffure on a modern show hunter is now often left to the skillful hands of a professional groom. However, you can still make your horse look like a national champion, even if you're competing at a schooling show. Just follow these step-by-step tips.



Assemble an assortment of braiding tools: 4-ply yarn cut into strips 12-inches long (for our photographic purposes, we're using a contrasting color), a latch hook (bought at any craft store), a plastic alligator hair clip, a mane comb, scissors and a spray bottle of water mixed with a styling gel or braiding solution.



Make sure you're braiding a mane that's freshly shampooed, free of coat polish—that'll only make it slick—and pulled and thinned to about 4 inches.



Thoroughly dampen the first third of the mane with the solution.



Using the comb, make a part about one-inch wide. Each braid needs to be the same width against the top of the horse's crest. Snap the clip on the neighboring hair to hold it out of your way.</TD< tr>



Begin braiding. Keep even tension on the hair, making sure that you pull down on the mane as you braid. If you pull the hair toward you, the finished braids will stand away from the horse's neck.</TD< tr>



About half-way to the end of the braid, add a piece of yarn that's folded in half.</TD< tr>



Meticulous braiders make a note of how many crossovers they make in a braid before they add the yarn. This adds a consistent look to the finished job.</TD< tr>



Split the yarn tails so that they each go in separate sections of the braid ..</TD< tr>



... then braid all the way to the end of the hair.</TD< tr>



Wrap both yarn tails around the braid and knot once. Make sure you pinch the end of the braid with the fingers of one hand while you knot with the other. This will prevent the braid from unraveling.</TD< tr>

Tying the Knot



For a secure knot, wrap both pieces of yarn around the



Then feed the yarn ends back through.



Pull taut, in a sort of half-hitch knot.

bottom of the pigtail while forming a small loop with your index finger.



This is what the braids will look like at this stage.</TD< tr>



Finish the entire mane in the same manner. There isn't any hard and fast rule about how many braids are required in a mane, but generally speaking, the more, the merrier. And the fancier.</TD< tr>



Now pull-through by inserting the end of the latch hook through the top of the braid.</TD< tr>



Once your tool has hold of the yarn tails, gently pull on the end of the braid until it butts up against the horse's crest.</TD< tr>



Be careful not to pull so hard that the end pokes up through the top of the braid!</TD< tr>



Continue with your pull-through down the rest of the braids.



This is what the mane will look like at this second stage. Now you are ready to knot the braids off.

Get Set to Tie Up Loose Ends



To knot your braid off, grasp the yarn tails you just pulled through.



Take one yarn tail in each hand ...



Cross the yarn ends under the braid once, then bring the ends back to the top side of the braid about halfway down, where you'll finish off with a double knot.

As you prepare to knot the braid, here's a little trick to make the braid lie flat against your horse's neck.



Tie the first part of your double knot, but before you snug it up, slip your thumb underneath. Press the braid against the crest with your thumb ...



Then push upward slightly, enough to form a little bump in the braid. Slide your thumb out from underneath as you snug up the knot.



Doubleknot (using a basic square knot) to secure the braid.



All knots must be dead center or your braids will slant to the side.



Snip off excess yarn, leaving about ¼ inch.

Braiding the Forelock



To finish the mane, braid the forelock. You can simplify things and braid the forelock like the rest of the mane, but if you want to be extra fancy, create a French braid.



Tie off the French braid, pull through,



and knot.

Now, wasn't that easy? If your horse tends to rub at night or between classes, you will need to protect your beautiful braids. Pull a stretchy hood over your horse's head and neck. Wearing some funky pajamas is a small price to pay for looking lovely.