



No Eating That Grass!

By Heidi J. Potter

Have you ever led a horse through a gate and just as you turn to close the gate with your right hand your left arm is pulled out of its socket while the horse on the other end dives for grass? Or, do you not allow a child to lead the lesson horse because it is such a struggle to keep his head up when you pass grass? This behavior is not only disrespectful, it is dangerous. Many a toe has gotten stepped on during the process of either trying to prevent the horse from eating or trying to pull him up once his head is down.

Chances are that starvation is not the issue here. Your horse has just not been trained to stay focused and listening to you while on the leadline. Luckily, this is an easy fix. Here are the steps:

1. Put the horse in a rope halter and lead without a buckle on it.
2. Lead the horse to a grassy patch and wait for him to drop his head. Please remember that an important part of good training is allowing the horse to make the mistake so that you can fix it! If you do not allow this to happen you will forever be dragged to the grass or be constantly “nagging” at him to keep his head up.
3. Wait for the horses lips to just begin to touch the grass. ****Timing is everything! Do nothing until his lips just reach the grass****
4. At that precise moment send a quick, sharp coil down your leadline to the horses head. The knot or rope will come up and bump him under the jaw. He will likely pull his head up quickly and jump back as if to say, “What was that?” You should act like it was no big deal and you have no idea what happened.
5. Then, just stand there and allow him to try again. Some will drop their head right back down and you must offer the exact same response. Make your correction sharp, clear and without emotion. (However, you may chuckle just a little as you see his expression.)
6. Some horses will slowly lower their head and stop just above the grass line. Pay very close attention to exactly where his mouth stops. Do not apply a correction until he opens his lips and touches the grass. This is how he will learn where the boundaries are.

Consistency and correct timing will get this problem fixed quickly. You must get every horse handler on the same page to fix this annoying and dangerous behavior.

****Rope handling practice:** It is a good idea to first tie your rope halter to a fence rail and practice sending the coil to the fence. Hold the rope in your left hand. Grab the rope with your right hand just in front of your left, thumb pointing down and palm out. Give the rope a good clockwise swing with your right hand by flicking your wrist around. A nice coil should move quickly down the rope to your target.