Good equipment is a basic necessity. Equipment should be well made and fit both you and your horse. Fancy equipment is not necessary for your 4-H project.

**Western**

You will need a saddle, saddle pad or blanket, bridle with a good bit, halter and lead rope for your 4-H project. Other equipment, such as chaps, splint boots, spurs or lariat may be needed, depending on the type of riding you do. Do not use spurs until you can use them correctly, as aids, not punishment.

**Bridle**

The bridle consists of three parts: the headstall, bit and reins. Western headstalls usually come in several styles: browband and split-ear are examples. Western reins come in three varieties: split, romal and mecate. The headstall should be of strong, narrow leather. The bit should be as light and as mild as necessary while still allowing you to maintain control of your horse. Too often severe bits are used as a substitute for good training. Do everything possible to keep your horse’s mouth soft and responsive.

![Figure 39. Three main styles of bits.](image)

A) a spade bit with spoon port, braces, roller, slobber chains and rein chains;  
B) a sweetwater copper mouth piece curb bit;  
C) shanked sweet iron snaffle with two rein rings;  
D) high copper covered port with cricket roller, decorative silver shanks;  
E) medium port sweet iron curb bit;  
F) low port grazing shank curb bit.

The bit is used to communicate with the horse, not control it. Western bits fall into three main categories: snaffle, curb and spade. A snaffle bit is a non-leverage bit while curb and spade bits are leverage bits. The bit should fit the width of the horse’s mouth and be properly adjusted to the horse’s teeth, lips and tongue. Snaffle bits are usually correctly adjusted if they make one or two wrinkles in the corners of the horse’s lips. Curb bits are usually fitted with one wrinkle or just moderate contact with the corners of the horse’s mouth. Consult with your leader or riding instructor to learn more about proper bitting.
The hackamore is a bridle without a bit. Hackamores come in two styles, bosal and mechanical. A bosal is made of braided leather or rawhide and can be a valuable training tool. Mechanical hackamores are a leverage device that creates pressure on the bridge of the nose and on the chin. Mechanical hackamores are not acceptable in western performance classes, but are often used in timed events and trail riding.

Curb straps are necessary on all leverage bits and mechanical hackamores. Some curb straps are made of leather and some include a flat chain. All curb straps must be at least ½ inch wide to lay flat against the horse’s chin. Adjust the curb strap so it is tight when the bit shanks are a 45–50 degree angle to the mouth.

**Figure 40.** Browband headstall with curb bit on left; hackamore headstall with a rawhide bosal on right. This is an excellent training tool that eliminates pulling on the mouth of the horse being trained.

**Saddles**
The western saddle was developed for working cattle and riding long distances. It has a horn, cinch, wide-stirrup leathers called fenders and often a rear cinch. Designs are often tooled into the leather to decorate western saddles. The rear cinch helps keep the saddle in place when roping and working cattle. Wide fenders protect the rider’s legs from horse sweat and thorns. A western saddle is designed for use with thick saddle blankets or pads.

Saddles that receive proper care will last a lifetime. Store them in a manner that supports the correct shape. Clean the saddle regularly with a leather cleaner and conditioner and use a saddle
oil to keep the leather pliable. Replace worn or broken parts before they affect the function of the saddle. Always use a clean and dry saddle pad on your horse. There should be enough pad thickness to keep the gullet of the saddle above the withers. You should be able to place your fingers between the withers and the saddle gullet.

Store your equipment properly. Keep it out of the dirt and weather. A saddle rack will help your saddle keep its shape during storage.

Figure 41. Western Saddle

Figure 42. Saddle rack.
CHAPTER 11: EQUIPMENT (Tack)

English

The English riding styles are the hunt seat, saddle seat and dressage.

Hunt seat
Acceptable bits include snaffles, pelhams, kimberwicks or full bridles. All bridles must be fitted with cavesson nose bands. Martingales, either running or standing, are permitted in classes over fences. Martingales are training equipment not allowed in flat under saddle classes. Correctly adjust the bit to the horse’s mouth. Snaffle bits are usually correctly adjusted if they make one or two wrinkles in the corners of the horse’s lips. Consult with your leader or riding instructor to learn more about proper bridle fitting.

The snaffle bridle uses a non-leverage bit and is the most commonly used bridle in hunt seat and dressage riding. The bridle is made of plain leather (raised or flat) with a browband, cavesson, throat latch and a single set of closed reins. A dropped noseband, figure eight noseband and flash noseband are all training devices that fit below the snaffle bit and keep the horse’s mouth closed.

Figure 43. Snaffle bits:
A) full cheek snaffle 4 1/2 inch mouth;
B) eggbutt snaffle 5 inch mouth with a slow twist;
C) D-ring snaffle with copper rollers;
D) mullen mouth spoon cheek snaffle;
E) fulmer snaffle;
F) eggbutt bridoon;
G) O-ring snaffle large diameter hollow mouth piece;
H) western D-ring, decorative rings.

The pelham bridle uses a leverage bit, called a pelham. This bridle is different from the snaffle because it has two sets of closed reins attached to the curb bit. The pelham also has a curb chain. When the top rein, or snaffle rein, is pulled, it puts pressure on the corners of the horse’s mouth, lips and gums. The curb rein, or lower rein, puts pressure on the poll, mouth and chin groove. Correctly adjust the bit to the horse’s mouth. Pelham bits are usually fitted with one wrinkle or just moderate contact with the corners of the horse’s mouth. Adjust the curb strap so that it comes tight when the bit shanks are a 45 to 50 degree angle to the mouth. Consult with your 4-H leader or riding instructor to learn more about proper bridle fitting.
CHAPTER 11: EQUIPMENT (Tack)

The full bridle, or weymouth bridle has two bits (a snaffle and a curb), two reins, two cheek pieces, a browband, cavesson, throatlatch and a curb chain. The curb rein puts pressure on the poll, mouth and chin groove. The curb should fit just below the corners of the horse’s mouth without pinching. The snaffle puts pressure on the corners of the mouth and should rest just above the curb on the corners of the mouth. The curb chain must be twisted flat and rest below the snaffle. The curb chain should be loose at rest and tighten when the curb rein is pulled. There is a lip strap attached to the bit shanks and through the curb chain (see figure 44, E). The lip strap keeps the curb chain in place.

The browband of the bridle keeps the headstall in place and should not pinch the ears. The cavesson encourages the horse to keep his mouth closed. It fits between the cheek pieces and the horse’s cheek. The cavesson should be adjusted to fit so that it lays approximately two fingers below the cheek bone and be neither too tight nor too loose. The throat latch adjustment should allow two to three fingers between it and the throat of the horse to permit the horse to flex its neck.

**Saddle seat**
Full bridles are required in saddle seat. Martingales are not allowed. A flat English-type saddle is required.

**Dressage**
Snaffle bridles are used in all lower levels and training while full bridles are used in upper levels.

**Saddles**
The English saddle is made in many styles. The girth is attached to two or three billet straps which are under the flaps. English saddles are designed to conform to the horse’s back and fit very closely with a minimal amount of padding. It has metal stirrups and is lightweight. The flaps protect the rider from the horse’s sweat. Some saddles have knee rolls to help riders keep their legs in place. The skirt of the saddle protects the thighs of the rider from the stirrup bars and buckles.
CHAPTER 11: EQUIPMENT (Tack)

When you purchase a new saddle, whether English or western, make sure the seat fits your body. The length and depth must be suitable to the rider; you cannot ride well if the saddle does not fit properly. The saddle also must fit the horse properly.

Figure 45. Three types of bridles: A) Full or Double bridle; B) Pelham, double-reined bridle; and C) Split-eared western bridle with curb bit.

Figure 46. English Saddles.

---

Crown Piece or Headstall
Browband
Cheek Piece
Throat Latch
Cavesson or Noseband
Snaffle Bit
Weymouth Curb Bit
Curb Chain
Lip Strap
Curb Rein
Snaffle Rein

Crown Piece or Headstall
Browband
Cheek Piece
Throat Latch
Cavesson or Noseband
Pelham Curb Bit
Curb Chain
Lip Strap

Headstall
Cheek Piece
Curb Bit
Curb Chain

Pelham Curb Bit
Lip Strap

Saddle Seat
Hunt Seat
Dressage Seat

Pommel
Skirt
Stirrup Iron
Tread of Stirrup Iron
Flap
Stirrup Leather
Panel
Sweat Flap
Billets
Knots

Proper knots are important to your safety and appearance of your gear. Knot tying and braiding is fun to learn, does not take long and makes your equipment look neater.

Develop safe habits when saddling and bridling your horse, and always consider the horse’s behavior and reactions.

Figure 47. A variety of knots are used with horse equipment: the cinch knot on a western cinch; a manger tie to tie your horse; and the bowline as an emergency made harness that won’t slip.
Develop safe habits when saddling and bridling your horse and always consider the horse’s behavior and reactions.

When you catch your horse, it is best to use a halter rather than a bridle. Let the horse know of your presence by speaking softly to him and gently touching him on the shoulder. Always approach from the left side and slip the lead rope around the horse’s neck. This gives you control of the horse until you have the halter in place. After you catch and halter the horse, give the horse a small reward — a pat on the neck or some rubbing will do.

Tie the horse with a quick release knot or cross ties with panic snaps and give him a thorough grooming before you saddle and bridle him. Pay extra attention to cleaning the areas covered by the bridle, saddle and cinches or girth. Check his feet.

Many people leave the horse tied while they saddle, but it is preferable to untie the horse and have someone hold it by the lead shank while you saddle it. This gives you control of the horse.

If the horse is tied and you move from one side to another, walk behind the horse a safe distance away from his back legs. Never cross under the lead rope between the tied horse and a fence or post. If you untie the horse and hold the lead rope as you saddle, get a short, light hold of his head as you cross back and forth.

When you are ready to saddle up, make sure the saddle blanket is free of burs, straw or debris. Lay the saddle blanket or pad on the horse’s back. Be sure it is even on each side. Always lay the blanket or pad several inches forward and slide it back into place. This makes the hair under the blanket or pad lie smooth. Remove all wrinkles.

**Tacking up the western saddle**

Fold the off stirrup, cinches and saddle strings over the seat of the saddle. If the stirrups are short, hook the stirrup tread over the horn. Slip your right hand into the hole formed by the fork in front of the seat and lift the saddle over the horse’s back. Lift just enough to clear the withers and hold the saddle steady at the top of the lift so it will settle easily on the horse’s back. You can steady the saddle at the top of the lift by placing your left hand on the edge of the front skirt. Smaller riders will find it necessary to use both hands and hold the saddle under the gullet with the left hand while grasping the rear skirts or cantle with the right hand. Many western riders have the habit of swinging the saddle up with the off stirrup and cinches flying. Stirrups are heavy and cinch rings are hard; a horse flinches to absorb these hard knocks when stirrups hit (see figure 48). Do not get into this habit. Instead, lift the saddle and settle it on the horse’s back. Next ease the off stirrup and cinches from the seat or go to the off-side to let them down. In either case, you must move to the off-side to check the stirrup, cinches, saddle strings and blanket to ensure they are straight and a correct length. Return to the near side. Check the position of the saddle, raise the blanket edge where it lays over the withers to allow air space, swing the near stirrup over the seat and thread the latigo through the cinch.
Several safety precautions should be followed when cinching. As you reach for the front cinch, watch both ends of your horse. Fasten the front cinch first. Pull it up smoothly and slowly — do not jerk it tight. Fasten it snugly but not tight. Then fasten the rear cinch. Finally, fasten the buckle and breast collar, or martingale straps. Remember on double-rigged saddles, saddle the front cinch first, then the back cinch; unsaddle the back cinch first, then the front cinch.

Tighten the front cinch just enough to allow your hand, with the fingers held flat, between the horse’s body and the cinch. The rear cinch should not be tight but should be against the skin or just an inch or two below the horse’s belly.

**Tacking up the English saddle**

Lift the saddle and the attached pad up and over onto the horse’s back. Attach girth to the off side billet straps. Slide girth through the martingale loop if you use one, and pull the girth up and attach it to the near side billet straps. Do not pull up tight. Recheck the girth after you walk your horse to the mounting area. Pull stirrups down just before you mount. Always put stirrups up after dismounting. Remove the girth from both sides of the saddle when untacking.

**Bridling**

When bridling a horse with a western bridle, untie the halter from the tie rail, fasten the crownpiece around the horse’s neck, or loop the bridle reins over its neck so you can hold them if the horse pulls away. Loop the reins over his neck to keep them off the ground and from being stepped on by the horse. Follow the steps shown in figure 49.

When you bridle for English riding, put the reins over the horse’s head onto the neck. Place the headstall or crownpiece in your right hand. Continue as shown in figure 49. When bridling, the rider must stand close to the horse’s neck, just behind its head. This position is safe since the horse cannot throw his head and hit your face. Holding your right arm over his neck and poll will help keep his head down and may be dropped around the neck to help hold the horse. Work firmly but gently. With your right hand, pull the headstall up so the mouthpiece of the bit is pressing against the horse’s teeth. When bridling with a cavesson, hold the cavesson in your right hand with the crownpiece. Use your left hand to guide the bit between the horse’s lips. When his jaw relaxes and the mouth

**Figure 48.** Do not throw the saddle onto the horse’s back. Loose cinches can hit the horse’s legs and startle it.
CHAPTER 12: SADDLING AND BRIDLING

opens slightly, pull up with your right hand. The bit will slide smoothly between the teeth. If the horse is stubborn about opening its mouth, press the lip against the jaw bone with your left thumb at the gap between the incisors and molars. Do not jerk or pry at the mouth with the bit. Move your left hand to hold the crownpiece of the headstall above and in front of the horse’s ears (see figure 49). Now you can lower the cavesson with your left hand. Be gentle as you bring the headstall over its ears. Use your right hand to protect and guide the ears under the crownpiece. Use caution when bridling horses, especially those you are not familiar with, since some are extremely shy about their ears and will resist by slinging their head.

After one more step, you are ready to ride. Lead your horse for a few steps. Then check your front cinch or girth again. You may be able to tighten it a few more notches. Check the front cinch or girth again after riding a short distance.

Untacking your horse

When your ride is over and you are ready to unbridge, fasten the loose halter around the horse’s neck first. Undo the bridle throatlatch and cavesson, remove the bridle, taking care not to hit the horse’s teeth. To properly remove the bridle, slide the crownpiece forward over the ears with your left hand. When free of the ears, hold the headstall loosely for the horse to spit out the bit. Then lower the headstall to allow the bit and curb strap to fall freely from the mouth and chin. Continue holding the horse and rub its head and poll where the headstall rested. Your horse will soon learn to expect this rubbing and will wait patiently instead of trying to break away. Halter the horse and hold the lead rope as you unsaddle.
Be sure to tie up the cinches and breast collar before pulling the saddle off. When unsaddling, lift the saddle slightly before pulling it off. This loosens the grip of the sweaty leather and blanket on the horse’s hide.

Wet saddle blankets should be placed in the open, or on top of the saddle to allow them to dry completely before the next use. The bit should be rinsed to remove slobber and feed particles. A quick wipe down with a damp cloth will remove mud and sweat from your tack.