



The ApHC's arena manager, Jack Owen, ensures that the arena dirt is acceptable for the variety of classes held at the National and World shows.

Rut busters

Use these handy tips to keep your arena in tip-top shape!

A little routine maintenance in your arena will keep you and your horse on sure footing and aid in avoiding accidents. Put these handy tips into practice to make your arena the ideal spot for riding.

The once-over

Just like picking your horse's hooves should be part of your pre-ride regimen, a quick once-over of the arena should be done at the beginning of each arena riding session. While you may be eager to ride, just a few minutes of looking can help deter injury to your horse or yourself.

Make a habit scanning the arena floor for debris and small rocks that may have surfaced during prior use. If it's a shared or

public arena, you may find anything from bits of broken equipment to thrown shoes and even the occasional riding crop dropped and forgotten.

If it's a large arena, you may need to walk not only the perimeter, but also meander through the center as well. As you survey the periphery, be sure to quickly check the arena structure for any damaged or protruding areas that might snag you or your horse as you ride by.

Take a moment to note whether the actual riding surface needs to be groomed. Has the outer portion become compacted while the center is uneven? If so, take the time to drag, or if it's a shared arena, find someone to help you. Hard, compacted footing may result in joint or ligament injuries, while overly deep or uneven footing can cause missteps, trips, tendon strain and other injuries.

Arena ownership

If you're maintaining your own arena, you'll want to do both regular maintenance and occasional overhauls. Appaloosa National and World Show Arena Manager Jack Owen of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, suggests these arena care tips:

Work the arena surface after each day's use so it's ready for the next day of riding. "We find that, after testing many different types of ground implements, we prefer the Arena Werks H2O Pro," Jack says. "This unit rips, tills, finishes and even allows you to apply water while you work your arena."

Check lighting regularly. Replace worn or fractured bulbs. "People have a tendency to forget about lighting in the arena," Jack notes. While it seems obvious, it's not uncommon to suddenly realize you're riding around practically in the dark.

During the winter months, the arena should be worked every day with a rotary or similar implement. "Sand and compost will keep the soil from compacting during the winter months, and will help retain moisture," Jack advises.

Give it a yearly reconditioning

Completely overhaul your arena at least once a year. "This would require completely turning the soil and leveling the surface," Jack advises. "The arena *must* be moist when this is done." This is also the time to evaluate footing quality. Jack says an ideal surface would include good topsoil mixed with some sand and, in most cases, some compost. If necessary, add components as needed and rework the soil until you regain optimal footing.

Your annual overhaul is a good time to ensure you complete all the structural repairs that keep getting put off. Replace or mend broken rails, secure gates and hinges, and reinforce posts if needed. Walk along the structure and check for protruding nails, screws or other materials.

Finally, if you have any other structures that you use in conjunction with your arena—such as mounting blocks, tie rails, and bleacher or platform style seating areas—be sure to give them the once over as well. 🐾

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WITH JACK OWEN