



CURLY HORSE COUNTRY

Your Curly Horse Resource

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Buying your first horse, and it's a Curly

You have read all the articles about Curlies, have you? You read things like, "Puppy dog temperament, great for beginners, novices and kids". Maybe you have heard things like "Born Broke" for example. Yes, Curly horses are exceptional but they are STILL horses. I decided to write this article to distill myths and share some tips about buying your first curly and add some realism to this new adventure.

Over the past year or so, I have heard stories of some really sad situations involving first time buyers & green curlies. Before the breed gets a bad rap and people get hurt, I thought maybe if we educated the buyer a bit, we could create a good situation for both the buyer & the horse. The one thing that we probably have more than any other breed is beginner/novice buyers. Partly due to the fact that first time owners are drawn to that steady temperament, but the other factor is that people who would otherwise never be able to own a horse due to allergies, now CAN fulfill their dream. One allergic buyer said it well, "A childhood dream reawakened with the power of adult determination is a double-edged sword." They start with determination but little education. This enthusiasm rushes them into buying without a lot of thought. These buyers haven't had the opportunity own any horse, let alone get close to or take lessons on one before. This really spells disaster! I thought a page for suggestions & resources to the NEW horse buyer would be helpful. 1. Take a year to invest in an education. "A Year?" you ask. "But I have waited my whole life to own a horse, I can't wait a YEAR! Life is too short, I can learn as I go, can't I?" The answer is NO, not if you want to live your Dream and not a Nightmare. You may be forgetting that these are 1,000 lb. animals, not dogs. Many people I know take more time to buy their family dog, than buying a horse! Even the sweetest Curly can intimidate the unknowledgeable. Due to the breed's feral heritage, they tend to be very herd oriented. If you do not understand herd dynamics & behaviors you will never establish your dominance with your horse or respect. This is a very dangerous situation. Here are some basic areas that you will need to focus on BEFORE you buy your first horse.

A. Basic Care: Farrier, deworming, teeth floating, feed & nutrition, ([see feeding a curly article](#)) vaccinations as well as preventative care. The number 1 cause of death in horses is Colic, they have extremely sensitive systems. The tiniest bit of mold or bad hay can kill them. How do you prevent proud flesh, founder, thrush, rain rot etc. Learn how to prevent problems thru proper feeding schedules, proper fencing and environmental surroundings.

NEW! *In addition to this, it is important to understand ahead of time what sort of costs you could incur should you buy a horse of your own. [Click here](#) to see a detailed summary, sent to CHC by Michelle Ives.

B. Tack & Equipment: You should also have knowledge of tack you will need. What's the difference between a snaffle and a curb bit? If a horse is trained English verses Western, what does that mean? What type of saddle do you buy? Understanding how a saddle should fit so your horse doesn't get sores or gets pinched by too narrow of a saddle and bucks you off! What is a narrow tree compared to semi QH or Full QH tree? Find out!

C. Basic Training Techniques: Even if you buy a well trained horse, you still must understand the basics. Giving to pressure, approach and retreat methods, desensitizing techniques, disengaging the hind quarters, gaining a horse's respect by establishing your space and boundaries. Learn the way a horse thinks. He is a prey animal and they don't have depth perception - get into their mind and you will understand better how to work with them.

D. Learning to Ride! In order to have a happy horse, you must have a certain level of riding ability. Allergic folks will have to find a Curly to take lessons on or pound down the medicine and find a way to do this. Video can help but it's not enough. You need to learn to ride a horse like you learned to ride a bike. It takes balance, an independent seat so you are not bracing on the horse's mouth. You have to learn to relax and go with the movement of the horse. This takes practice and it takes time! Can you imagine what a horse must think when a beginner gets on him and they are like slop on their backs, lean on their mouth, give them mix singles to go by kicking yet are pulling back on the reins? What about that unbalanced rider bouncing on the horse's back to the point of getting sore? Even a well trained horse will not only going to get frustrated but gain a lack of respect and begin testing that rider.

Videos on A-C are a great option, especially for allergic folks. You could spend \$500-800 on a library of good video, but it is a must! Also, Take some time and visit curly breeders and owners in your area or out of state. Find out what works for them in training their curlies or working with them, about their bloodlines, feeding program etc. Make notes of which horses you liked best and what their bloodlines are -- this does make a difference when it comes to shopping for your Dream Curly. If you are not allergic, I would suggest you attend as many clinics as possible, and take lessons. The best option would be to lease a horse and really learn what horse ownership is all about. Pat Parelli says that 80% of new horse owners sell and get out of horses completely within the first year! Those statistics could be reduced greatly if a buyer invested that first year in an education first and bought that horse later.

2. Research the Breed: After you have an education on horses in general, you can now do some research on the Curly Breed. I have listed some resources for good information on different organizations. There are two Curly Registries: ICHO and the ABCR. The ABCR is a closed registry, meaning they no longer allow outcrossing. The ICHO is an open registry and they will registry any horse with curls. Some horses are registered in both registries. Depending on preference and what you plan to do with your horse, you may prefer one registry over the other. You will also find Gaited Curlies among the breed. These horses have a mix of Missouri Fox Trotter in them for the most part and would provide a smoother ride for those with bad backs or the older rider. However, in my experience I have found most curlies to be smooth and enjoyable to ride. I have also found them to be versatile no matter what your discipline, trail, western, english or show. They are truly a wonderful breed and offer great variety. Many breeders have strong opinions for what they are producing and rightfully they should - so don't let that intimidate you. Every breeder should have a program by which they are striving for, so look for common goals and seek those breeders out.

About The Curly Temperament: It is true that in general the Curly horse is extremely quiet, friendly, people oriented and extremely intelligent! My first Curly was a 3 year old halter broke Stallion, 15.2h. After just 30 days of Natural horsemanship training, I rode him out on the trail and he was amazing. I felt safer on him than any horse I had ridden before. But don't assume all Curlies are carbon copies of each other. A lot of it has to do with genetics as well as environment. The other attribute about some Curlies that not many people talk about is their innate desire to be a one-person type horse. In our years of breeding we found this to be true about 50% of the time. Some breeders and owners feel this is one of their best qualities. They also don't forgive as easily, so if you make a mistake or do them an injustice it will take a while to regain their trust again. This could be one of the problems we see with beginner buyers and Curlies. A trainer once told me a story that really made it clear to me, the difference between a QH for example and a Curly. He said when he was a child, he would go out and ride his QH like a wild kid and end the day with the horse stuck in mud up to its bellies...they would have to get a truck to pull them out. The next day, they would get up and that horse would be ready to go again. He said you could never get away with that, with a Curly. He said if you did that just ONE TIME with a Curly Horse, you would probably never be able to catch that horse again. Call it extreme intelligence or lack of forgiveness but either way Curlies are different and they can not be mistreated.

The other thing about Curlies is, they are well known for being non spooky type horses, they would rather plant their feet than turn and run. Yes, we have found this to be true - generally speaking. But part of that marvelous attribute can lead to one issue that many fail to talk about. Whether people realize it or not, planting the feet is also a form of instinctive behavior. If Curlies are not taught to think properly, and are pushed too hard to fast, they tend to use that "planting of the feet" instinct pretty well. Sometimes they just won't move but in some cases they do tend to buck more than a horse that would rather bolt. The Good news is that if you handle them right, build a relationship out of trust and respect, use natural horsemanship techniques with consistent daily handling, you will have a bond with your Curly you never thought was possible with any horse. When they give you their heart, they give 100%. That is truly the magic & wonder of the Breed.

3. What is your Dream horse? Okay, so you have your education. You have at least an advanced beginner riding ability and you are certain you are up for the challenge to buy your first Curly! The first thing you need to determine ahead of time is "What will I use my Curly for?" Trail horse, Show horse, (english, western or both?) Family or Youth horse? What level of training and what age? I realize there are very few well broke beginner-type curlies available, so if you absolutely have to settle for a fairly green horse - plan to work with a trainer for at least the first year. And for heaven sakes, do not buy a weanling! Yes, they are small but they

have the mind of a baby and will take more skill and patience than a 3 or 4 years old. Take into consideration if you are buying a fairly green horse, the temperament of that animal. If you are the boss in the herd and you are more timid, that will not be the horse for you. It is always best to pick a horse that 'gets along' in the herd because that tells you they have an easy going personality. They have confidence but yet not a bully.

A strong word of caution! Please, please don't consider breeding until you have at least 5 years of horse ownership under your belt! Breeding and producing Curlies should be left to people that not only understand conformation, genetics and care of handling a mare & foal, but more importantly the marketing & selling of those horses. Anyone can put a mare and stallion together, but the last thing this breed needs is random, careless and casual breeding practices. Those that take on the responsibility of breeding Curlies should be ready to invest a huge fortune to make a tiny one. I see more new buyers distracted into breeding simply because they buy young colts and don't have the heart to geld them...so they think, "Hey! why not breed??" I can make some money and recoup some costs! Wrong, wrong, wrong! In my opinion, if you don't have the education, experience and the marketing skills to raise & sell a foal, leave it to the professionals or get 5 years under your belt before you do.

4. Your Experience: Secondly, be realistic about your experience and knowledge of horses. If you have worked with a trainer, ask for an unbiased opinion. You are setting yourself up for disaster if you overstate your ability. Be clear to the seller what your level is and what you want in your first horse. Check references on the seller if it's a breeder to be sure they take the time to match rider to horse.

5. List Priorities in your future Curly : Make a list of qualities you want in your Curly. Start with the most important traits and end with the things you can live without. BTW, Color should be the last thing you consider...a great horse is never the wrong color. Also be mindful that if you are looking for a reliable rideable Curly, plan to spend a minimum of \$5,000. Save ahead of time if need be and wait til you can afford it. Do not settle for a horse that is unsuitable due to price because in the end you will end up paying more in the long run and cause yourself years of grief. You will end up being one of the statistics that Pat Parelli talks about.

6. Finding Curlies for sale:
The best resources to shop for Curlies are:

[Curly Horse Country's Classifieds!](#)

<http://equine.com>
<http://dreamhorse.com>

REMEMBER: Don't judge a horse by one photo. Even when a seller tries, it's very hard to get a photo that portrays the horse accurately. Ask for several pictures - the seller should be able to do this without issue. If the description of the horse suits what you are looking for, it's worth it!

7. Other Resources: You may also be a bit more resourceful and contact the ABC registry for their stud books. If you have done your homework, you should have a favorite bloodline that interests you. It can be fun to dig and find horses that have those bloodlines and contact the owners. There are MANY awesome Curlies that could be for sale if a person approached the owner. This happened to me when we were shopping for my daughter's horse. I found Cheyenne in the stud books, loved his bloodlines and saw he was registered as a gelding so I knew he was gelded at a young age. I contacted the ABCR for the current owner and wrote her a letter stating my interest in her horse. She told me she had considering selling him and sent me pictures. He was PERFECT! We flew to WA to see him and bought him before she could change her mind. Sometimes the best ones sell long before they hit the internet sales pages. So dig a little deeper and you may find that diamond hiding in someone's back yard!

8. Asking Questions/Video: Be sure once you found a horse you are interested in to ask as many questions as you can dream up. A good seller shouldn't mind answering any of them. If you are buying a riding curly and can't make the trip to see the horse in person, ask for a video. The video should consist of everything from the horse in the pasture/corral with other horses and how they interact, being caught, handled, lunged, tacked up, ridden and anything else they claim the horse can do. (within reason of course :-)) I would strongly recommend if you are buying a horse that you want to be your lifelong buddy, that you spend the money and see the horse in person. You will want to know that you connect with that horse. Once you have owned horses for a while, you can make judgments abit better and may find video & pics adequate enough for a purchase. Be sure to set yourself up for Success!

9. Deposit & Purchase agreement: After doing steps 1-6, you feel you have found the horse of your dreams! What now? The first thing you want to do is put down a deposit and get a signed purchase agreement. Be sure that the seller agrees you are a good match. Be sure to work out any details such as who pays for transfers, transportation papers etc. Work out all the details and work together with the seller for a win-win situation. Remember it's hard on both of you - and coming from both sides of the fence, I enjoy being the buyer much better than being the seller! Selling a horse is very stressful, not just in being responsible but in emotionally letting the horse go. At the point of the sale, is when it becomes real that the horse is leaving and you have to come to terms with it. It is time for you, the Buyer to now reassure the seller that you will provide the best home for their horse. For many breeders their life blood is poured into their foals and horses and for a buyer to appreciate that means alot.

10. Living your Dream: Now it's time to actually live out your dream of being a horse owner. Keep in mind that the first 30 days are your adjustment period. The horse needs time to settle in, so don't expect him/her to act exactly like they did when you saw them at the sellers' farm. There will be a time of testing as to who is in charge - some horses test more than others, but you will need to set those boundaries. Until that horse understands the pecking order, he/she will be frustrated. Recall your videos/clinics and lessons because you will need that foundation to feed upon everyday for a while. Even with all your preparation, it still could be 6-12 months before you feel a real bond and true partnership with your horse. I suggest that first-time horse buyers work with a trainer for the first year, so they are reading their horse correctly and nip bad habits in the bud. Horses are large animals and we can feel intimidated by them easily - but I do believe with preparation and with some foresight, you can eliminate the hassles, frustrations and financial woes of finding the horse of your dreams.

In closing, It is also important to understand when taking on ownership of a horse just what your average costs may be. This will help in deciding ahead of time if owning a horse is for you and if you can afford proper care. Michelle Ives prepared the following detailed costs list which I found extremely beneficial.

THE COST OF HORSE OWNERSHIP

(These cost are from 2011. Soon to be updated, but it will give you an idea)

First of all, an average 15H, 1100 pound saddle horse in light work should be fed at least 2.5% of their body weight per day in forage, on average. That can be a little less in summer, and a bit more in winter to keep them warm.

Assuming that average 15H 1100 lb. horse eats 27.5 pounds of hay per day. An average 50 lb. bale of Timothy/Orchardgrass hay, which is common in the Northeast, is around \$5.50 picked up (add \$1.00 or more per bale for delivery, and add \$2 or more per bale at the feed store). That equals .11/lb. 27.5 lb. x .11 = \$3.03 per day for hay.

Grain averages between \$12.00 and \$18.00 for a 50 lb. bag. I have priced and found the feeding requirements for some popular brands in my area of Connecticut.

Triple Crown Senior @ \$17.90 + .06 tax = \$18.97 / 50 lb = \$.38/lb
Feeding rate: 6-10 lb/day = \$2.28 - \$3.80/day

Triple Crown Lite \$ 17.55 + .06 tax = \$18.60 / 50 lb = \$.37/lb
Feeding rate: 2-4 lb/day = .75 - \$1.48/day

Triple Crown Low Starch \$17.55 + .06 tax = \$18.60 / 50 lb = \$.37/lb
Feeding rate: 6-10 lb./day = 2.22 - \$3.70/day

Blue Seal Pacer \$15.07 + .06 tax = \$15.97 / 50 lb = \$.32/lb
Feeding rate: 4-15 lb./day = \$1.28 - \$4.80/day

Blue Seal Charger \$14.29 x .06 tax = \$15.15 / 50 lb = \$.30/lb
Feeding rate: 4-15 lb/day = \$1.20 - \$4.50/day

Blue Seal Trotter \$12.00 x .06 tax = \$12.74 / 50 lb. = \$.26/lb
Feeding rate: 5-10 lb/day = \$1.30 - \$2.60/day.

So, your daily feed for the care of one healthy 1100 lb. horse will average between .75 and \$4.80 per day for grain and will be around \$3.00 per day for hay. That total is \$3.75 to \$7.80 per day. Multiply by 30 days per month, and your average cost to feed a healthy 15H horse is a minimum of \$112.50 and can easily go as high as \$235.00. That cost can increase easily depending on the amount of work your horse is in, as well as its breed. Thoroughbreds, for example, are known to need a much higher amount of feed in relation to their body weight than the average Quarterhorse.

These figures do not include the cost of farrier visits, which average approximately \$40 for a pasture trim with no shoes and is necessary every 6 weeks, which calculates to a cost of \$30.00 per month. Deworming should be done every other month and you should rotate dewormers with Ivermectin and Strongid at a cost of approximately \$5-\$10 per dose, which would come out to approximately \$7.00 per month.

Hay = \$303.00
Grain = \$22.50 - \$144
Farrier \$30.00
Deworming \$7.00

\$332.80 to \$484.00 per month for one horse

Don't forget yearly vet visits for about \$200 (\$100 farm call plus vaccinations and Coggins), and any veterinary care for illness or injuries, which averages to about \$18.00/month not including emergencies, which you should keep a couple thousand put away in a savings account specifically for equine emergencies. Add in a dental visit at \$100 per year if your horse has no tooth or mouth problems, for another \$8/month.

We have now brought our cost up to \$350 - \$500 per month for one average, healthy horse.

Of course, this does not include tack (bridle, bit, reins, saddle, girth, stirrups, saddle pad), supplies (halter, lead, buckets, deicers, salt block), fencing materials, barn or shelter and repairs to each, or any health supplements your horse may need.

Sent to CHC by Michelle Ives. Thanks Michelle!

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