

How to Clean and Care for Your Saddle

by Michelle Drum January 24, 2021 5 min read

[Equestrian How To Guides Saddles](#)



Your saddle is an investment that should last for years with proper care and maintenance. Every time you ride, your saddle is exposed to dirt, sweat, and the elements. The more often you ride, the more frequently it will need to be cleaned. This guide will walk you through the process of cleaning your saddle, storing it, and how to know when it's time to invest in a new one.

Saddle Cleaning Supplies

It's a good idea to check with the saddle manufacturer to see what products they recommend using for leather cleaning and conditioning. By following the manufacturer's guidelines, you should improve the longevity of your saddle.

Here are the items you will need to clean your saddle:

- Sponges

- Towels
- Leather cleaner, saddle soap, or glycerin soap
- Leather conditioner
- Bristle brush
- Accessory cleaner
- Small bucket of water

Some manufacturers make a [combined leather cleaner and conditioner](#) that you can use if recommended.

How to Clean a Saddle

Regular cleaning is an important part of saddle care. Ideally, you should clean your saddle every time you use it. At a minimum, keep an eye on it for signs of accumulated dust and dirt, and make sure to clean it then. Here are five simple steps to thoroughly clean your saddle.

1. Prepare the Saddle

The first thing you should do is get your saddle prepared for cleaning. Unfasten buckles and remove fittings so you can access all parts of the saddle. Use a lightly-wet towel and remove dirt, dust, hair, mud, and anything else that may have collected on the saddle.

2. Clean the Saddle

Using a damp sponge, apply a thin layer of [saddle soap](#), glycerin soap, or leather cleaner to your saddle using a small, circular motion. Make sure you cover the entire leather area of your saddle while avoiding any suede areas. Include the undersides of the leather and between the flaps. This seals the pores and cleans the saddle.

If the saddle is very dirty and the sponge gets soiled, you may need to rinse and reapply several times. You want to continue rubbing a cleaner into your saddle and not the dirt.

3. Remove Excess Soap Residue

Using a lightly-damp towel, wipe the saddle down to remove excess soap residue. Don't forget to clean the crevices and folds where the residue can accumulate as leaving it on your saddle can damage it over time. If there's a tight, hard-to-reach area, you can use a cotton swab.

4. Apply Leather Conditioner

Use a non-detergent [leather conditioner](#), and make sure you don't over-apply. Using too much conditioner on your saddle can penetrate through to the padding or the tree which can cause damage over time. Use leather conditioner sparingly and be sure to follow the directions on the label for guidance from the manufacturer.

5. Clean the Metal Fittings

Once the leather is taken care of, you want to then clean the metal fittings and wipe them with a dry cloth to remove any excess cleaner. If your saddle has silver buckles or trim, apply a quality silver polish making sure you don't get any on the leather.

Quick Tips

- If the leather on your saddle is very dry, you may want to consider some additional treatment including [Effax Lederbasalm](#) or [Neatsfoots oil](#). You can warm this and apply a thin coat on the underside of the saddle.
- You can use warm water with a soft brush to clean a saddle that is extremely dirty or neglected over time. Warm water is very drying to leather, so make sure you immediately follow the above steps to clean and condition the leather.

- For synthetic leather saddles, use warm water mixed with a gentle soap. If you find thick, stuck-on dirt, you can use a soft brush and warm water to remove it. Make sure you rinse thoroughly and allow the saddle to dry in the sun.
- Be sure to carefully clean your saddle in the curves near the buckles and trim and areas where sweat can gather. This is also a good time to inspect the stitching and the state of the leather.

How to Store a Saddle

It is best to use and clean horse tack daily to maintain it. If you do need to store it for a period of time, make sure you thoroughly clean and moisturize it first. It's best to keep your saddle in a temperature-controlled environment as extreme heat and cold are detrimental to leather.

Cover your saddle in fabric or newspaper to enable the leather to breathe while keeping it free of dust and dirt. And be sure to check it occasionally for mildew. It's a good idea to condition it regularly to make sure it doesn't dry out. Also, leather can attract rodents when food is scarce, so be sure to secure your saddle in a safe place.

How to Know When to Replace Your Saddle

When you regularly clean your saddle, take the time to inspect it to make sure it's wearing well. If you find the stitching is loosening or popping, it's time to consider repairing or possibly [replacing your saddle](#). Here are a few other things to look for:

- **Wear on the seat** — Inspect the area where your pelvis and thighs meet the saddle seams. This area holds the seat onto the skirts and is a common area for wear.
- **Worn-out panels** — Padding, including foam and wool, degrade over time. Foam loses its support, and wool flocking can get lumpy and compressed. Poke the saddle's panels and look for areas that are uneven, soft, or lumpy.

- **A compromised saddle tree** — If you hear suspicious squeaking or your saddle seems to throw your body around a bit, it's time to repair or replace your saddle. If the tree is broken, you may likely need to replace it.

Depending on the repair cost with a saddler and the age and state of your saddle, it may make more sense to replace your saddle than to repair it. You have the option to look for a [new saddle](#), or if you are on a budget, you can look around to [buy a used saddle](#).

When you clean your saddle correctly and regularly, it gives you the opportunity to inspect it for damage early to help save on costly repairs. Proper care, maintenance, and storage of your saddle will increase its longevity, providing for many years of enjoyable and safe riding with your horse.