

Gelding your horse by Ann E. Bastian, V.M.D.

Gelding or castration is the surgery where a veterinarian removes a horse's testicles. This procedure is done either with sedation and the horse standing, or with the horse anesthetized and laying down. If the horse has a retained testicle (a testicle that did not descend fully into the scrotum), the procedure is more involved and will probably require referral to a hospital setting. These horses are referred to as cryptorchid. It is essential to castrate (geld) these horses as the condition is genetically based, and the retained testicle can have problems from being in an environment where it is warmer than the normal testicle in the scrotum. Once gelded, horses should still be kept away from mares for up to one month, as they still may have viable sperm in their vas deferens.

There are several reasons why you should consider gelding your horse. To be considered for breeding, your horse should exhibit the best qualities of the breed in temperament, health, conformation, and gait. Only the best should be used for breeding. Geldings are usually more manageable and easier to train (they aren't distracted). If gelded before behavior problems develop, you can avoid some of the undesirable traits some stallions exhibit such as aggression. Geldings can be integrated into an existing herd and allowed to interact with other horses without the issues that stallions pose. Some farms will not except a stallion for boarding or may charge additional fees due to the challenges of housing a stallion. Stallions may be prohibited from attending group activities, rides, or clinics.

Gelding should be performed as a young horse or before they are bred, as older horses may maintain some stallion behaviors. Typically, this is done after 6 months of age, although any age horse can be gelded. There are some studies that suggest gelding at a younger age can add to the overall height of the horse.

Of course, the continued epidemic of unwanted horses in the United States (over 100,000 horses shipped annually for slaughter) is another compelling reason to limit the breeding of horses.

Please consult with your veterinarian and an experienced trainer or judge as to whether your horse should remain a stallion to be used for breeding or is a good candidate for gelding. Geldings can be wonderful companions and are a great representation for our breed. A breed can truly be judged on how good their geldings are.