

Enrichment

There are so many enrichments we can offer to our equines and for us. Our horse Kez enjoys a variety and here I will share with you some enrichment ideas. I am by no means an expert on the topic. Here I just share some ideas that may inspire you.

APPLE BOBBING. We cut up apples into slices and drop them into a bucket of water. Kez is now so skilled at apple bobbing. A great activity on a hot day to encourage your equine to drink water.

BALL GAMES

We have taught Kez to target touch using positive reinforcement (check out the free resources on how to get started with positive reinforcement) and we have extended this to ball games. We have a large gym ball that Kez can push and chase. We have a smaller space hopper ball with a handle that Kez can pick up and carry. Kez will even fetch the ball with the handle. If you use positive reinforcement it is easy to teach your horse to play with a ball. Balls can be purchased via the internet. They vary in sizes and prices. There are very large purpose made for equines down to gym balls to smaller tough dog balls. It is strongly advised you supervise your horse with the ball.



BALLOONS

Balloons are a great training tool. We used some to help our horse deal with the farmer's bird scaring bird of prey kite that appeared in the crop fields we walk round. Using positive reinforcement we enabled our horse to feel confident to approach, inspect and learn that things that floated up in the air are nothing to worry about.



BROWSING



Equines love to nibble on hedges and browse for plants other than grazing on grass. Taking your horse out in hand for a nibble on what is safe for them to eat is an excellent enrichment activity. Or collect some browsing vegetation to give to your equine. Or if you are lucky enough to own your own land consider planting horse friendly vegetation for your horse to browse on.

BUBBLES

Blowing bubbles isn't just for children. Blowing bubbles can be an enrichment activity. Ensure you don't frighten your horse by first blowing the bubbles away from him and down wind, so he can see them drift away. Let him get curious and before long he may want to check them out.



CHECKING THINGS OUT



Our horse Kez is allowed to check things out (so long as it is safe to do so). It is great for mental stimulation and to build confidence in himself and to see he can take guidance from us that he is safe. In this photo left we have a large sack with some surface to put down in the gateway in Beau and Kez's field. Photo right a homemade road sign and some windmills. Kez enjoyed checking out the sack and the contents. He was a little disappointed they didn't contain food. The road sign and windmills he got plenty of positive reinforcement.



CLICKER TRAINING / POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Positive reinforcement is an ethical and compassionate way to interact with your equine. It is easy to get started, check out the FREE download on How to Get Started with Positive Reinforcement in Kez's Club. Once you have mastered the basics it can be embedded into any activity for example: handling, leading, play, obstacle challenges and much more.



CONES



You can use cones in many ways. To weave in and out of. To mark out a patterns for example: figures of eight, clover leaf pattern, squares, etc. If you have enough you can use them to set out a circle and you stand on the inside of the circle and ask your horse to travel round the outside of the circle. You can use them for hide the treat under for scent games as in the photo. They can be used to mark out a box for your horse to halt, and stand in. They are inexpensive and a really useful bit of kit for non ridden activities.

DOING OR BEING?

Our modern world is fast paced, often stressful and pressured. We rush about doing and have little time to just be. We are human beings not human doings. Check out the free download in Kez's Club on Relaxation. There are techniques in there that cross the species divide and tap into the language of the herd. Time chilling out together is an excellent enrichment activity.

ENVIRONMENT



Many of us are not lucky enough to own our own land. Those who do can design an environment with enrichment in mind. Horse friendly planting in the hedgerows and pasture to add variety to forage from. Different feeding and watering zones to encourage more movement. Sand rolling areas, safe access to water to paddle and play in, shade and shelter under mature trees and hedging. Environment enrichment placing items in the environment for the horses to enjoy for example scratching posts, massage mats, misting spray for hot days, logs or branches to step over, etc. If you livery at a yard these will not be possible however you can take your horse out of the field to find such enrichments or if the yard owner and other owners agree take some to the field. Photo Kez enjoying the gorse in his field.

FLAGS

A flag is an inexpensive item you can use for enrichment. Great for helping horses to be confident with objects that flap in the breeze. Use positive reinforcement to help your horse learn flags are not to be feared. Once you and your horse are established with positive reinforcement you can use it to teach your horse to target touch. Start by rolling up the flag so only a small bit of fabric is hanging down and ask your horse to target touch. Click and reward and take the flag away to give your horse time to process. If your horse is too worried to target touch walk away with the flag as a predator never leaves, give your horse time to think, process and reflect. Reward any try in being curious. As your horse grows in confidence you can gradually unfurl more of the flag and gradually add more life to the flag. It pays to work with a horsemanship practitioner to get your technique and timing right.



GROOMING



If you watch equines you will discover that equines love to bond and form strong friendships. A very natural activity pair bonds engage in is mutually grooming each other. We can engage in a similar activity with our horse. It is an opportunity to discover how a horse likes to be touched. Each horse has a preference, some love gentle soft stroking, others a good scratch. Humans get busy with dirt removal when grooming. How about instead asking your horse how he likes to be groomed? Look for feedback from your horse, if he's happy he will be blissed out. Your horse may offer to groom you in return. Some horses are careful and mindful and gentle, others are rough. It can hurt, so you can provide an alternative by placing an old jacket

or a towel over a stable door and encourage your horse to groom that instead of you. Knowing what type of touch your horse finds pleasurable can also be used as a reward. Sweet spot scratches are something your horse will really enjoy.

GROUNDWORK & HORSEMANSHIP

Good groundwork sees the horse as sentient, a partner and uses positive reinforcement and ethical and compassionate methods. There are groundwork activities for helping a horse to be flexible, have core strength, good balance and rhythm. There are groundwork activities that encourage the horse to think rather than react and to look to the handler for guidance. There are exercises on the ground where horse and handler use a shared language to communicate in dialogue. Good groundwork never punishes a horse, or uses gadgets, or uses force or intimidation. Good groundwork builds confidence, trust, rapport, empathy, and is joyful and fun for both horse and handler.



HERD WATCHING



Why not just hang out with your horse and the herd? You can learn a great deal about your horse by quietly observing. It is an opportunity for you to learn about equine language and communication, social bonds and herd etiquette. You will be given the chance to see how your horse connects with others in the herd, and see the personality and character of your horse. This activity is a great enrichment for us humans as we live in a fast paced world. So sitting quietly, simply observing gives us a golden gift of slowing down and the chance to see the world from the horse's perspective.

HAY BALL

In the photo (right) Kez has a dog toy ball. It is flexible with holes. It is great for stuffing hay or haylage in. Kez enjoys rolling it round the floor, pulling bits of hay out and flinging the ball about in the process. This ball Kez will also play with without hay in and will pick it up and carry it because it is soft and bendy.



HEALING



We can share profound healing with our equines. It is certainly an enrichment for minds, bodies and souls. I am a reiki practitioner and I offer reiki on a regular basis to Kez. I also share healing with Kez. My interest is now on the heart to heart and soul to soul connection with my horse. This is something I help others with who are seeking this journey. Kez and I have both been on profound healing journeys. Kez with his health issues and his past. Myself with cancer treatment. Check out in Kez's Club the resources on healing.

HOOP

A great activity is to see if you can ask your horse to accurately place his front hooves in a hoop. It is essential you select a hoop that comes apart, like the one in the picture. Just in case your horse gets his legs caught. Kez enjoys playing with a hoop, he will pick it up or if we roll it along the ground he will chase it.



LIBERTY



Liberty is about giving horses the choice to engage with us and to be a liberty in activities we both enjoy. True liberty is without tack and gives the horse the choice and permission to leave. Then what you are left with is the truth, the connection, mutual trust, play, joy and fun. It is a showcase of your communication and your relationship. It will teach you many skills when working at liberty: Patience, flexibility, compassion, empathy, how to ignite self-motivation in your horse, kindness, creativity, great timing, a full grasp of equine language and etiquette, and knowing your horse as an individual. When getting started with liberty training it really helps to have support of an equine professional who specializes in liberty training using positive reinforcement.

(Photograph: Kez and Ringo at Liberty with the podium. This activity took place in their field so they were free to leave at any time.)

LONG REINING



Long reining may be seen as old fashioned. It has more uses than be part of training for starting a young horse for riding. It is great for building a partnership, bond, confidence and trust in any horse and handler. It teaches your horse to listen to your cues to and to take direction. You can use long reining to manoeuvre round or over obstacles. Check out Kez's Club for free resources on long reining. It pays to get professional guidance when starting out with long reining. Even have lessons with a tutor and an experienced horse. Not many people regularly long rein, it is becoming a dying art.

LOVE

Horses are sentient creatures that feel a wide range of emotions including love. Unconditional love is an essential element in every aspect with our equines. Horses and people thrive in loving relationships. Being able to read emotion in horses is equine empathy. Being appropriate is to use compassion in our interactions with the equine. Watch the herd and you will see horses communicate with a wide range of emotions. For example love. They form bonds and express love to one another. Love between horses can be witnessed in many situations. Notice how a pair bond can be perfectly happy standing side by side doing nothing, peaceful and content. Horses grieve the loss of a loved one. Love can be seen in joyful play. Shared love brings peace of mind, harmony and awakens the soul. In the herd love brings balance, stability, harmony, and order. Look closely and you will see love in the herd in so many ways along with a huge range of other emotions. Check out Kez's Club for free resources on Equine Communication and The Power of Love.



MAT

A mat is another inexpensive item that can be used for enrichment activities. Kez will happily park on the mat. He also likes to pick the mat up and wave it about like a cape.



MASSAGE

Massaging your horse is a wonderful activity. It enables you to feel your horse's muscles. It can be very pleasurable for the horse. And a wonderful way to connect with your horse. However if there is any tension, areas and of discomfort your horse will not enjoy being massaged. If you do discover any discomfort or pain contact your vet. If you want to learn how to massage your horse there are plenty of courses you can study or books you can read. If you want to treat your horse to a professional massage there are professional equine body workers and professional equine massage specialists.

MENTAL WELLBEING

It is well known that having equines in our lives is great for our emotional wellbeing. Many equine therapy centers provide services to support people with mental health issues with equine-assisted psychotherapy. People can learn and understand by working with a professional and an equine about their condition and what triggers or causes it. Those of who own an equine know first-hand the many benefits equines bring to our emotional wellbeing. Horses rely on us for their care. So it gives us focus, a reason to get up and get going each day. We must be reliable. The link between physical and mental health is well documented and looking after an equine gives us exercise and keeps us active. If you are struggling emotionally and own a horse, your horse will know. Horses are very astute and trying to disguise your feelings or wear a mask with rattle them. They see the incongruence. Horses need us to be authentic and to address our issues. They will often reflect back to us the life issues we need to examine and the work we must do from within. Being with our horses can be very therapeutic. Activities such as caring for your horse, grooming, feeding, and enjoying activities with your horse can reduce stress and anxiety. The friendship, companionship and partnership we share with our equines can be a deep meaningful relationship that for some people is lifelong. Spending time with your horse is enrichment in our lives. It can lift your spirits and is a natural mood enhancer. Research has shown that spending time with animals can help reduce stress, anxiety and depression. It can help you to feel calmer, happier and feel more positive about life.

Mental wellbeing for our equines is essential, enrichment activities alongside their needs met certainly goes a long way to help. Many equines suffer mentally and I have seen how it can take industrial amounts of time, patience, love and ensuring the horse feels safe, secure and listened to before they can start to unpack.

MUD

Equines love mud. Humans are not so keen on mud. Allowing your equine to enjoy the delights of mud is very enriching. Our Kez loves the hollow in his field which provides in the summer a lovely dust bowl to roll in. In the wetter months it provides a spa facility to fully enjoy. Kez has even won prizes with online showing for his talents with muddy body art.



MUSIC

Music or sound are another area to consider for enrichment. Also consider the lack of human made sound. The sounds of nature. Everything from bird songs, to running water to the breeze in the trees. To drumming, singing, classical music, pop music, each of us has a preference.

NOODLES



Pool noodles are inexpensive and very versatile. They can be used to make obstacles.

OBSTACLE CHALLENGES

Obstacle challenges are great fun for equines and humans. It can be done ethically using positive reinforcement. It provides enrichment, mentally and physically. It is easy to get started and in Kez's Club you will find a free to download resource to help you get started. Most of the obstacles we have made ourselves. Kez has certainly tested their durability and with a few minor repairs over the years they have proven to be cob proof.



PICNIC

Going on a picnic can be great fun. You could take your horse out in hand to picnic, or bring a selection of treats for your horse to enjoy in his field, yard or stable. A picnic can be a wonderful social activity for you and your yard friends to enjoy while out in the sunshine. It is a fun activity to sit together and talk about your horses, and what you love to do.



PLAY



Play is not just for the young, play is a lifetime gift. Play is not frivolous. There is far more to play than first meets the eye. Play provides us with an excellent opportunity to fully engage with our horses on many levels: cognitively, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. It teaches horses and humans about sharing a learning experience. In horsemanship play is a wonderful tool in development of a shared language as it opens up two way communication. It builds self-esteem and self-confidence in both equine and human participants which enriches a shared supportive relationship. Play is wonderful for building mutual respect, trust and bonding. If you want to ignite cognitive development in your horse

play is a great way to encourage your horse to think. Horses are very able to cognitively process, problem solve and think things through. Play allows horses to explore the world and is fabulous for conquering their fears. Using play you can help your horse think, to look to you for guidance rather than react. Play in horsemanship teaches humans about patience and understanding. As for true horsemanship play should be 50 / 50 with the horse. So here it is essential we listen to the horse, as to what type of play an individual enjoys. Through play horses develop emotional maturity and the ability to concentrate. Exploration is the heart of play and it is the ignition to curiosity and problem-solving skills. Too many of us get hung up on being serious with our horses. Letting your hair down, laughter and joy in play is a wonderful way to spend time with your horse. Play should be a cherished part of horsemanship. It sets you up for a meaningful close bond and friendship with your horse. It is sociable, rewarding, motivating and sets us up for success mentally, physically, socially and emotionally. Most of all play is fun. For more information on play check Kez's Club there are free resources to enjoy to help you get started.

PODIUM / PEDESTAL

A podium or a pedestal is a great piece of equipment to have for non ridden activities. Teaching your horse to be confident standing on a podium has many benefits. These include confidence putting their feet on a surface that makes a noise. Coordination and body awareness stepping up and down. Accuracy of hoof placement. You can also use a podium to help prepare a horse for loading training. They are easy to make from a strong heavy duty pallet, reinforced with marine ply with an anti-slip mat on the top. You can see from the photograph Kez has quality control tested if the matting was well attached and pulled part away with his teeth.



POLE WORK



A few poles can be used in many ways for in hand activities. They are great for exercises to build core strength, regulate stride length, improve flexibility and encourage a horse to become more aware of hoof placements. You can ask your horse to step over poles. And there are so many possibilities of how you can lay them out. You can raise them at one end or both (we use child potties). You can make a box and use it as a stay box. Or a walk in and out box. You can build mazes and corridors with poles. Pole work can be hard work, so it pays to get advice and guidance from a physiotherapist or vet regarding suitability for your horse.

RAKING LEAVES

Kez enjoys watching us when we are doing any work in his field. He will come over to check out what we are doing. It is a great form of enrichment when we rake the leaves up and Kez discovers the grass that has been under the leaves. So long as our field maintenance is safe for Kez to stay with us, we allow him to check out what we are doing.



RELAXATION



There are lots of relaxation techniques that cross the species divide into both worlds of horses and humans. Horses have relaxation down to a fine art. They enjoy being together chilling. One to ponder: It is impossible to be tense, anxious or fearful at the same time as relaxed. They are polar opposites. So if you and or your horse feel tense, anxious or fearful then learning how to tap into relaxation is for you. Relaxation is a technique you can learn and master. Check out in Kez's Club a free resource you can download. There are many different techniques you can try.

SCENT GAMES

Horses love to explore and discover new things, using all their senses. A horse has a wonderful sense of smell. I am sure you have seen a horse tilt up his head and curl up his top lip. It is called flehmen and has a purpose. Horses do this to trap a scent so they can analyze the smell. We rarely think about scent when planning an activity for our equines. So why not set up some fun for your horse to use his nose to sniff out some rewards. You could play a game called find the food, leave your horses food in different places in the field, yard or stable and let your horse enjoy the fun of finding it. You could hide treats in a pile of hay, or under a bucket, or scatter small bits of treats in random places in the field. You could set out some cones and under some place a treat so your horse has to investigate which ones have treats. You could select some of your horse's natural hedgerow treats and place towels over them, so your horse has to sniff out the treats to get to them. You could book a session with an equine aroma therapist or equine herbalist to discover which essential oils or herbs your horse would self-select.

TARGET TOUCH

Teaching your equine to be able to target touch objects is a useful skill. It has many practical uses. For example for a horse to feel safe with a new object after visually checking and sniffing the next stage is to touch. And horses check out new objects touch wise with their nose. So how cool to have a way of asking your horse to touch any object. Such as the ramp of the lorry before any loading practice. Or touch something so it can be reassured it is not scary. Or to follow a target such as in the photo, Kez is following a piece of pool noodle attached to a stick. Target touch is an extension of positive reinforcement training. There is a free download on Kez's Club to show you how to get started with positive reinforcement and how to use target touch.



TARP



A tarp is a useful bit of kit for non ridden activities. It can be set up for your horse to walk on hold it down with poles to stop it flapping. It teaches your horse to be confident walking on a surface that makes a noise. You can set it up to use as a parking spot to halt your horse. Tarp can also be over fencing and secured like a banner. It can be used secured over a frame to create a tunnel. Once confident with tarp and it not moving you can extend the use by moving the tarp. Your horse may decide to play with the tarp. It pays to get professional tuition to make sure you are doing it correctly and safely.

TREATS

Treats come in many forms. And when it comes to enrichment it is certainly something to get creative with. Here are just a few examples. On a hot day why not offer your horse a fruit ice treat. Equines that are on diets it is a good idea to use low calorie treats, such as hay cubes, vegetables cut up small, low calorie chaff, etc. Treats can be hidden in the environment so your equine has to spend time walking about to find them. In the winter we sprinkle hay cubes and thin slices of carrot across the field, so they have to walk about to find them. Or you can bring in browse materials as a treat. Or offer a selection of herbs. One treat Kez likes is to find treats hidden in a sturdy cardboard box, with crunched paper so he has to snuffle through to find the treats. Different types of forage put out in different places. Free access to mineral and salt licks. On hot days offer cold tea or dilute fruit juice.

TRICKS

If you have mastered play as a form of enrichment you can extend it into teaching your horse tricks. For example Kez has learnt to pick up and fetch the ball with the handle, he also is very happy to stand on his podium. So he has been able to put together the two activities.

Trick training can have some very practical uses. For example teaching your horse to lift up his hoof on a verbal cue so it is easier for hoof care. It is a fun way to engage your horse's mind.

Horses are very intelligent and able to learn, reason and problem solve. Trick training done ethically with positive reinforcement is a great way to strengthen the bond with your horse. You have to work together as a partnership with ethical trick training tapping into what your horse finds fun and interesting. Tricks you could teach are endless, here are just a few examples: touch an object, pick up an object, bow, give a kiss, come when called, park and stay, move backwards, move sideways, fetch a ball, etc. If you want to get started with trick training research for a local practitioner who specializes in liberty and trick training.



TWO BARRELS



Barrels are readily available and cheap to acquire. You may even have some about the place. They can be used in many ways for non ridden activities. As a squeeze as in the picture of Drum and Craig. This teaches horses to be confident in small gaps and spaces. Laid end to end flat they make a great jump. End up with the top open you can put flags in and decorate them to make up a corner for exploring. Our horse Kez likes to nudge and roll the barrel about too. If you have more than two barrels you can use them to weave in and out of. Or set them out in patterns.

WALKING AND HIKING



Wild horses roam over vast distances. It is a natural activity for your horse. Walking has many physical and emotional benefits. Walking with your horse is a completely different experience than riding. It gives you the opportunity to connect in a different way. Great for building a partnership bond and chilling out together. There is a free resource in Kez's Club to help you safely enjoy walking and hiking with your equine.

YOUR HORSE'S WORLD



Horses have their food, water, shelter, environment and herd buddies provided by us. Their physical needs and mental needs are just as important. It is our responsibility to keep our horses mentally active too. This is where the role of enrichment comes in. Horses enjoy activities they find entertaining or challenging. Enrichment comes in many forms and we have given just a few suggestions on activities you can do together with your equine in this resource pack. Certainly we are not experts. So what we have suggested here please use alongside professional guidance.

Sensory enrichment is about the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Sight can be as simple as placing horse safe objects your horse can visually check out. A plastic equine mirror is another great visual enrichment. We discussed earlier how important the sense of smell is. You could scatter some herbs on the ground for your horse to enjoy smelling. Or dotting a few drops of essential oil onto fence rail. How we provide food can be an enrichment. You could place hay in lots of small piles across the field so the horse has to walk about more. Or prolong eating time by using small hole hay nets, so long as it doesn't frustrate your horse. You could cut up fruit and vegetables into very small pieces and scatter them across the field or hide in a horse safe container. Cognitive enrichment is about providing novel objects that a horse can safely investigate. These can be anything from a paper sack (make sure no metal staples), a cardboard box (again select one with no staples), a sturdy dog toy, horse ball, a mat, cone, branches (off a tree that is safe for horses to eat), etc. The key here is not to leave the objects in the environment. Let the horses enjoy the object and once they have lost interest remove it and store it away. That way you can use it again in a few weeks and it will come out as something of interest. Anything that lives in their environment they will become familiar with and lose interest in. Social enrichment involves allowing our equines to live with other equines, and other species they may naturally encounter with similar needs.

Photo above left: Kez investigating a cardboard box