

4-H Market Steer Handbook:

Training

Halter breaking and gentling your calf should be the first job after you get the calf home. Remember, the calf grows faster than you do and the longer you wait to break the calf, the tougher the job will be.

Sometimes it is easier to halter the calf and tie him on the trailer. The steer should have settled down and stopped fighting the halter by the time you get home.

Tie the calf to a sturdy fence or post in a cool, comfortable place. Never tie an animal to anything that will break or come loose. Be sure the halter is positioned high up on the bridge of the nose to prevent restricting his breathing. Securely tie the steer up high (3 to 4 feet) with only 12 to 18 inches of slack. The steer may get his feet over the rope if it is too low or too long. Also, always tie the rope with a slip knot which, if necessary, can be easily loosened. The "stall" or "manger knot" is the one most often used. This knot is good because it is:

- T simple to tie
- T simple to untie
- T the animal cannot untie himself

Stay with the calf at all times while he is fighting the rope.

Get your hands on the calf. Begin scratching around the tail head and down the back. Keep your hands away from the steer's head! This irritates the calf and may result in butting. Nothing you can do will help calm a steer more than scratching and brushing. Allow time for the steer to get used to and respect the halter.

After the calf has settled down and will allow you to scratch him, try leading him to water. It might be best to wait until the morning after you first tied the calf to do this, because his head will be sore and he will appreciate the water. Do not carry water to your calf -- to do so defeats your purpose.

Place a bucket or trough of clean, fresh water at the far end of the pen. Quietly untie your calf while talking softly and scratching him. Pull him toward the water. Most steers will probably balk, but keep steady pressure on the rope until he takes a step forward, then immediately release the pressure on the rope. Repeat the process of giving and taking. At the beginning, do not expect your calf to lead well. Leading is a process the calf must learn and you must teach.

When you reach the water, back away from the calf and allow plenty of time to drink. If the steer will not drink after five or six minutes, lead him back. The calf will probably drink the next time.

While leading the calf, have someone place some feed at the tie space. This way a reward is provided in allowing to be lead to and from water. Give your calf no more than 20 minutes to eat feed. After that time, take the feed away and give plenty of fresh hay.

Never leave buckets of any kind around where the steer can become entangled.

If you stick to this process and generously brush the calf, he should be settled enough to turn him loose at the end of three or four days. However, it is very important that you catch the steer, lead him and brush him at least once a day for the next several weeks. This is to make sure the lesson has been learned and is not forgotten. Halter breaking can be eased by taking the time and patience when your calf is young.