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Answers To Your Mule Questions by Cindy K (McKinnon) Roberts

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YOUNG MULE STARTED NIPPING

Hi Cindy,

I just want you to know I am not going to be bugging you all the time with questions, I want your book to help me there, but I do have a small question about how molly is acting...When I scratch what I call her "Sweet spots", she shows she loves it by "Bobbing" her head up and down, or her lower lip hangs loose and quivers, but at times she will nip me, not hard, but it startles me, and when I startle then she jumps. It has only started happening recently and I keep an eye on her now, but like last evening she turned her head but each time seemed to stop herself, so I don't know if this is going to continue or has ended. What My question is, What is this she is doing, is it showing acceptance, is she trying to tell me something, or is it just a bad habit she has created during this time of her getting rubs and her back scratched by me...by the way she is not tied up during this, she is free standing and can leave at any time, but never does....

Thanks Cindy,
Scott Rong

Hi Scott,

Your young mule is communicating to you as a herd member. Mules and horses relate socially as members of the herd by rubbing their heads on each other, grooming each other and giving "love bites". However since you are not a walking chocolate bar, you cannot allow this behavior to continue. Do not "cuddle" your mule as this would encourage this type of behavior. You can scratch your mule and caress her on the neck, but do not allow her to crowd you or come into your space. Teach her to stand back about eighteen inches. Simply push her back with a tug on the lead rope. Now that you have been bitten, you will be prepared for your mule to make the same attempt again. Since you are no longer cuddling your mule - you are helping to eliminate this behavior. The moment she attempts to bite, quickly "elbow" her. **DO NOT USE YOUR HAND OR FIST.** The reason for this: the mule will see it coming and will resort to being head shy. Then they will be quicker to bite and retreat in the future. A jab with the elbow and move on.

Remember Scott, your mule is going to grow into a 1000 pound animal. You want her to be your partner and trusted mount on the trail, not a brat that you cannot control. Spoiled mules can easily become dangerous. Thanks for your email and keep in touch. Cindy K. Roberts

Warning! Under Missouri law, an equine professional is not liable for an injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities pursuant to the Revised Statutes of Missouri. Your participation in training your own mule or horse by following the advice given in this column and throughout Every Cowgirl's Dream web site is a risk that may result in permanent disability and even death to you and/or your animal. Advice in this column is given through 20 plus years of professional and private mule training experience. The unique personality of your animal and the individual reader's skill level will vary greatly. This column is not a substitute for a qualified mule trainer in your area. Always utilize a professional and knowledgeable trainer to assist you. The author asks each reader to evaluate his or her skill level, athletic ability and mule sense prior to attempting any training technique. By submitting your question, you agree to having your inquiry and answer posted on Every Cowgirl's Dream web site and possibly published in upcoming literature and books.

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