

5 Backyard Drills for Awesome Mountain Bike Skills

Learn how to mountain bike better with these five backyard skill drills. They're fun to do and they'll boost your mountain biking skills fast. And you can do them just about anywhere, anytime: in your backyard, at the park or in the parking lot when you get to the trails.

They're perfect for those down days, too, when you can't get to the trails because you're too busy or the weather is bad.

Do one or do all of them, two to three times per week for 10 minutes and watch your skills and confidence soar. Next time you hit the trails you'll have so much more balance and control over, around and through everything. You CAN'T, not get better.

For All Drills: Relax your grip, drop your shoulders and settle into the bike. Ride on grass if you need a soft landing!

1. The Broom Trees Drill: This drill trains you to mountain bike through trees fast. It tunes your brain to your handlebar width to help you judge gaps with perfection. This drill gives you the confidence and skills to know exactly what you can fit through on the trail.

- Ride 50 times between broom handles or stiff rope hung from a horizontal line.
- Focus on the center of the gap, not the trees.
- Keep rope free from knots and hang the 'trees' only a few inches lower than your handlebar.
- Raise the challenge by going faster and slower, narrowing the gap, turning in and out and riding an obstacle.

2. The Figure 8 Drill gives you better balance and control on a mountain bike for switchbacks and S-bends. Pedal in the shape of an "8" at high cadence around two cones or markers 50 times, moving them closer to each other as you get better. Start with circles if 8s are too tricky.

- Lead the bike with your eyes, swinging your outside knee in and looking across your inside shoulder around the turn.
- Two-thirds around, boost your eyes forward to the next turn entry.
- The figure 8 drill helps you get used to clipless pedals (SPDs) very quickly. Simply clip out, then back in with your inside foot on each turn for 5 to 10 minutes, 3 times a week. After 2 weeks you'll have great clipless skills.
- Raise the challenge by going faster or slower, riding one handed, or pedaling out of the saddle.

3. The Rope Lines Drill helps you close out fear and develop your mental ability to focus only where you want your wheels to go, whether it be to avoid obstacles or ride a plank on a mountain bike 6 foot above a creek.

- Focus on the invisible line along the middle, not the ropes.
- Again, relaxing your body is the key to your success, so keep loose and be prepared to wiggle to maintain balance.
- Raise the challenge by going faster and slower, narrowing or turning the lines, riding out of saddle, adding logs, or adding a plank to simulate a creek crossing.

4. The Logs and Roots Drill develops your skill for riding over or bunny-hopping logs, roots and other obstacles.

- Ride out of the saddle and peg obstacles down so they won't roll.
- If you can't hop pedal lift the front wheel and soak up the rear wheel with loose legs and bent knees.
- Raise the challenge with bigger logs, by going faster and slower, or riding logs uphill, downhill or oddly spaced.

5. The Rock Garden Drill teaches you how to ride rock gardens on a mountain bike, as well as riding other odd and abrupt trail features. It is a really fun and challenging drill!

- Use anything you can't squash and peg it down.
- Drop your saddle and let the bike move under.
- Relaxing is key, but so is momentum, so don't ride too slow. You need some momentum to help keep your balance and help the wheels overcome the obstacles.
- Start with a simple creation, using small obstacles spread apart. Add more obstacles as your skills and confidence improves.