A SIMPLE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO GROOMING A HORSE

Grooming your horse regularly will enable you to keep his coat and hooves in good condition, as well as monitor his health. It’s easy, and should only take about 30 minutes.

Adapted from articles on EquiSearch.com by Jayne D. Wilson

Contents

3 ........................................... A Simple Step-by-Step Guide to Grooming a Horse
5 ........................................... Selecting the Right Shampoo and Bathing Your Horse
8 ........................................... Keep Your Gray Horse Gleaming
10 ........................................... Grooming for Show Day
13 ........................................... Mane ‘n Tail Grooming Product Guide
17 ........................................... Braiding Basics
20 ........................................... Horse Hoof Care Tips
23 ........................................... Healthy Horse Grooming Tips for Winter
26 ........................................... Equine Massage Therapy

Here’s How

1. Gather your grooming kit—containing hoof pick, curry comb, stiff- and soft-bristled brushes, comb and towel—and prepare a safe grooming area.
2. Put a halter on the horse and secure him in cross-ties or tether him in your grooming area using a quick-release knot.
3. Pick up each hoof in turn and, using a hoof pick, remove all dirt and debris, checking for loose shoes and lost nails.
4. With a curry comb in one hand and a stiff-bristled brush in the other, begin behind the ears and brush the entire coat to remove dirt.
5. After every few strokes with the brush, use the curry comb to remove loose hair and dirt from the brush.
6. Switching to a soft brush, begin behind the ears again and brush with the coat to remove any remaining dust.
7. Be sure to brush the entire body and use your hand while brushing to feel for lumps, bumps and cuts.
8. Using a small, soft brush, groom the face.
10. Use a brush, comb or fingers to untangle the mane and tail.
11. Use a towel to give a final polish to the coat.
12. Apply hoof conditioner recommended by your farrier.
Tips
1. When brushing, use the curry comb to clean dirt and hair from the brush in between strokes.
2. Get into a routine, covering every inch of the horse, to prevent areas being missed.
3. For hygiene purposes, each horse should have a separate grooming kit.

Every time you groom your horse, you have the perfect opportunity to assess his health, check him over for injuries and use your grooming techniques to help ensure that he stays healthy.

I always start with the feet because once, many years ago, I spent 30 minutes grooming a horse only to discover, when I was almost finished, that one of its hind shoes was dangling off its foot.

Starting with the near fore, pick up each hoof in turn, using the hoof pick to remove any caked-in mud, etc., and making sure to clean the crevices on each side of the frog. Once you have done all the feet, check the body and legs for lumps and bumps and heat using the flat of your fingers. Doing this on a regular basis will allow you to become familiar with what is normal for your horse.

If the horse is fairly clean, take a medium-soft body brush to the coat, using sweeping movements of the brush in the direction of the hair. If the horse is caked in mud, use the rubber curry comb in a circular motion, going against the direction of the coat to loosen the mud. (Of course, sometimes you have no choice but to hose the horse down.) Once the mud is loosened, use a dandy brush to remove the worst of it, following the direction of the hair and using the metal curry after each stroke to clean the brush.

Use the body brush again on the legs, the dandy brush around the fetlocks if they are muddy, and a bot knife to remove bot eggs (small yellow dots attached to the shafts of the hair) if you see any.

While brushing the fetlocks, inspect the horse’s back to make sure there isn’t any fungus or rain rot in that area. If you notice any, immediately begin the appropriate treatment.

Move on to the mane and tail, giving a few good sprays with a detangling product. Leave this to dry for a few minutes before separating the hairs of the tail, from the bottom up, using a comb with rotating teeth. Then comes the mane. After applying the detangling product, use a stiff brush to remove the scurf that collects at the base of the mane, followed by a quick once-over with a mane comb.

Next, use a kitchen towel (or an old retired hand towel) to wipe the neck, body and quarters and give them a final rub.

Once you’re done with the body, apply some hoof conditioner, massaging it into the coronary band, hoof wall and sole on each hoof to promote horn growth.

The final step, depending upon the season, might be a generous application of fly repellent.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SHAMPOO AND BATHING YOUR HORSE

In a lather over equine cleaning products? Wondering how best to bathe your horse? Follow these expert tips.

Adapted from articles in EQUUS by Eliza R.L. McGraw and in Practical Horseman by Sarah Dodds

Beyond basic bubbles, shampoos for horses offer many of the same cosmetic and health benefits that shampoos formulated for people do.

How do you choose? Begin by sizing up your horse’s specific needs.

Shampoo for Skin Challenges
Horses have notoriously sensitive skin, and some are more susceptible to irritation than others. If your horse has ever broken out in hives, you’ll want to be particularly careful when choosing his shampoo.

When introducing any new product, however, it’s wise to make sure your horse isn’t allergic to it. Cleanse a small area, such as a leg, with the new shampoo. If there’s no sign of a reaction after 24 hours, go ahead and give your horse a full-blow bath.

It’s not unusual for a horse’s skin to become a little dry for a time after he has been shampooed. It can, however, make the coat look dull and leave a horse itchy, which could cause him to rub his skin and tail. Using a shampoo that contains conditioners can help minimize dryness, as can a variety of “after-bath” products. It
will also help if you bathe your horse as quickly and efficiently as possible. One method calls for soaking and then rinsing one side of your horse at a time, rather than simply cleansing from front to back or top to bottom.

**Color Your Horse Clean**

If you are interested in a cosmetic—rather than a therapeutic—effect, consider one of the many color-enhancing shampoos on the market. Most of these products work in one of two ways. Some contain dyes to match and enhance a horse's natural coat color. Others contain optical brighteners; they are absorbed by the hair and increase the coat's ability to reflect light, making it appear brighter or shinier. Many whitening shampoos work by adding a bluing agent to the coat. In natural light, this blue becomes neutral, making the white seem even whiter.

**Tough Stains**

To help prevent spots from appearing in the first place, spray your horses with a detangler after each bath, as soon as they are finished drip-drying. The silicone in the spray coats the hairs and makes it more difficult for stains to set.

After you have selected your favorite horse shampoo, here are some basic bathing tips:

**Preparation for a Full Bath**

First, gather what you’ll need: a hose with an adjustable nozzle, a big tub of water you’ve warmed if there’s no running hot water, two buckets, several big half-moon sponges, an equine shampoo, a rubber mitt, a wooden scraper (gentler than plastic or metal ones), a couple of big towels, and a stepstool or ladder.

If your horse is at all nervous (or you are), recruit a helper who can hold the lead (attached to a halter with a break-away top) and soothe him with pats and quiet words.

**Wetting Down**

1. Wet your horse all over (except for the head). With the hose set on “shower” and the water comfortably warm, work upwards slowly from the front feet and lower legs, always pointing the spray away from his head. (No running hot water? Fill a bucket with warm water and sponge him generously, following the same sequence.)

2. From the neck, go down his back, down his flanks and hind legs, and under his body including the sheath and genital area (fortunately, most horses don’t mind a gentle stream of water here). Finally, lift the tail, spray well around the anus and down between the legs, and then hose down the tail itself.

**Shampooing**

1. Drop a sponge into an empty bucket, adding warm water, then pouring the shampoo on top of the sponge and adding more warm water at the same time to build suds. (Resoak the sponge and add water or shampoo as needed to keep the suds coming.)

2. Using a round-and-round motion, start soaping the neck, then the front legs, back, flanks, under the body (including behind the elbows, between the front legs and the sheath area) and down the hind legs.

3. Around the anus and between the hind legs, use a different sponge reserved for that area, with plenty of water.

4. Dump the tail in the bucket to rewet it.Soap it well and work the soap in thoroughly with your fingers all the way to the end of the tail, adding water to keep it sudsy.

5. Return to the mane and, making sure it’s good and wet, pour a little shampoo directly onto your hands. Using your fingers (and maybe your rubber mitt), work the suds in, right down to the roots. Then go over the whole body again, in the same order, with the mitt, rewetting it frequently and really scrubbing.

**A Thorough Rinse**

1. With the hose (or a fresh sponge and a bucket of clear warm water), go up the front legs to the shoulder. Keep the spray away from the head as you work down the neck and mane; then do the back, flanks, underside and legs, scraping with your free hand and applying more water until it runs off clear. Be particularly careful about rinsing the back (where soap residue could cause irritation under the saddle) and the stomach (where soapy water collects after running down the flanks). Also check the legs carefully to make sure the pasterns and heels are dirt-free.

2. After lifting the tail and hosing carefully between the hind legs, give the tail a thorough rinsing, checking with your fingers to verify that the tail hair is suds-free all the way to the roots.

3. To dry the horse, first use your scraper, starting on the neck and scraping downward in the direction of the hair, using a little pressure but not enough to be uncomfortable. Go along the mane, down the sides and front of the neck, then the shoulder, along the back (avoiding the spine itself), over the hindquarters, and down and under the barrel and flanks. In that part of the flank where the hair goes different ways, use the scraper in the direction of the hair.

4. Because a scraper would be too hard on the legs, wipe them down with a clean, wrung-out sponge, squeezing it out frequently. Then towel-dry the body, being especially careful to dry the stomach and all the way down the legs. (Damp legs seem to invite bacteria growth.) Then comb the mane and walk the horse to help him air-dry.

**Washing the Face**

1. Now, with the horse used to bathing, wash his face and head (standing on a stepstool or stepladder). Dunk your “rinse” sponge in fresh water, wring it out, and then go all over the face and head to wet it (being careful not to drip water into his eyes), as well as behind the ears, down the cheeks and under the head.

2. Wring out the soapy sponge and wash behind the ears, down over the cheeks and under the eyes. Then do the same in front of the ears, above the eye and down the nose, taking care that suds don’t get too close to the eyes.

3. If the face is really dirty, go all over the face, the cheeks, behind the ears and under the head with your rubber mitt, also using it in the chin groove and the area between the jawbones. Rinse with a bucket of clean water and a fresh, wrung-out sponge, starting up high and rinsing the sponge frequently as you go. Dump that bucket, rinse the sponge and squeeze out any remaining suds, refill the bucket, and go over the head one more time to be sure the soap is gone. Rinse and wring out the sponge until it’s as dry as you can get it, going over the head once more and then wiping out the nostril area. (Wash the sponge out well in hot water afterward.)

**Final Touches**

1. Finish drying the head with a big towel, getting rid of any remaining moisture—including on and around the ears.

2. Finally, with body and face both really dry, put leave-in equine conditioner on the horse’s legs, if need be.

3. Use equine conditioner on dry manes and tails.
Occasional pre-show baths aren’t enough to prevent a gray horse from yellowing—and if he does yellow, clipping is the only way to remove the stain. To make sure your horse never reaches that state, you need a daily routine for basic cleanliness and a weekly (or at least biweekly) bath and touch-up system that stops stains from setting.

Daily Routine
To minimize the amount of stain removal you have to do and the energy you have to expend, pick up your horse’s stall frequently (the less manure in his bedding, the fewer manure stains he’ll have). Also check for grass stains when he comes in from turnout (the longer they set, the harder they are to remove).

Groom your horse daily with curry comb and brush, finishing off with the towel.

As you curry, use extra elbow grease (or your vacuum) on any manure, mud or grass stains you find. Especially if his coat is toward the darker end of the “gray” range, that may be enough to get most stains out. But if, after currying, he still has a stain or two, what you do next depends on whether you’ve bathed him within the last couple of weeks.

If you have bathed your horse recently and he’s still clean, use warm water on the stain, apply about a teaspoonful of shampoo (more if the stain is large), scrub the area with your scrub brush (back and forth on the body, up and down on legs), and rinse. But if he’s dirty or hasn’t been bathed in a while, such spot-cleaning will leave him looking streaky; instead, you’ll need to work on the stain as part of a full bath.

Cold-weather modification: Substitute hot toweling for spot cleaning.

Weekly/Biweekly Routine
Ideally, you should bathe your gray horse at least every other week, following the procedure described below. But if your barn is cold, your water is cold, you don’t have bucket heaters, and you can’t bring yourself to do a full bath that frequently, at least shampoo the spots where stains tend to build up and set: hocks, elbows and tails on most horses. Be careful to scrub the tail all the way down to the roots of the hairs, because when you braid, any lingering dirt will be obvious.

Cold-weather modification: In the very coldest weather, your horse may object strongly to your washing the base of his tail. In that case, concentrate on his legs and the bottom of the tail, where most stains tend to happen.

Regular Bathing
Wet your horse’s whole body with warm water. Put about half a cup of shampoo in a full-size bucket and fill with warm water; then sponge the liquid on and lather his whole body. Use the scrub brush to remove ground-in dirt. Don’t forget his ears and the base of the mane, both places where dirt builds up, and where left-on dirt will really stand out against a sparkling white coat. (To clean the ears, wet them first with the sponge; then apply a small amount of shampoo to the outsides with your hands and scrub with your fingers. Be careful not to get any water inside the ears when you rinse.)

Rinse your whole horse thoroughly. If you let the shampoo dry on his coat, he’ll look dull instead of shiny.

Cold-weather modification: Take advantage of any unseasonably warm days to bathe your horse. If you must bathe him on a colder day, wash just one area at a time. Start with the legs, tail and hindquarters; when they’re finished, cover the quarters with a cooler. Next do the neck and mane, and finally the midsection (the most important part to guard from getting chilled). When you’re finished there, cover his whole body with several dry coolers and walk him to help his body temperature stay up.

Pre-Show Preparation
The two-bath routine I use is a modification of my regular bathing technique. If you’re not bathing your gray horse regularly in cold weather, I suggest you do this variation a week before he competes, so that you get out most of the built-up dirt, and again on the day of the show.

As a final touch, after the horse is dry, use spray detangler on his tail. It works a little like floor wax, helping to keep dust from settling on those clean tail hairs. If the tail doesn’t get braided, I comb the detangler through the whole tail; with a braided tail, I just use it below the braid.
GROOMING FOR SHOW DAY

Make your horse stand out with this former US Equestrian Team groom’s time-tested techniques.

Adapted from an article in Practical Horseman by Laurie Pitts

To me, trying to revive the classic American look and attention to detail, not only in the hunters—where stricter rules still require some conformity—but in other divisions as well, might help bring a revival of our international successes, while producing many more happy horses in our country at all levels. Horses love the grooming techniques my peers and I have been using since the ’70s. Learning to use them on your horse will provide valuable bonding time, while improving your ability to evaluate his health and well-being.

It’s Simple!

You don’t need fancy equipment or products to create this clean, elegant look. Between shows, horses only need thorough grooming once or twice a week, which should take no more than 30 minutes. During the winter, I do minimal grooming on my young hunter breeding show horses. It takes only a week of more intensive grooming in the spring to get them looking fabulous again—because they’re in such excellent health.

Here’s what you need for your Everyday Grooming Kit:

• Flexible, round, black curry comb
• Grooming mitt (rubber, pimpled)
• Dandy or stiff brush (natural bristles only—synthetic bristles don’t lift the dirt off of the coat as well, and create more static electricity)
• Soft body brush—can be the round, short-bristled type with a leather backing or the regular longer-bristled type with a nylon or wooden backing (natural bristles only)
• Rub rags—hand-towel-sized terry cloth towels
• Large, plastic wide-toothed comb
• Mane brush (I prefer the traditional English water brush, which has short, dense bristles. If you can’t find that, a rice root brush—with extra-stiff bristles—will do.)
• Ace bandage to wrap a pulled or braided tail
• Damp sponge: Clean, damp sponge:
• Fly spray
• Sweat scraper
• Hoof pick

Different Strokes

Maximizing coat shine is all about smoothing down the hairs as much as possible in the direction of natural growth. The closer attention you pay to these patterns, the more shine your grooming will create.

Curry comb: Use with vigorous, circular motions all over his body, avoiding the face and lower legs. Loosen dirt on these more sensitive areas with a grooming mitt, in a scrubbing motion.

Stiff/dandy brush: Use short strokes in the direction of hair growth, applying as much pressure as your horse comfortably tolerates. End each brush stroke with a brief flick up and away from the coat to whisk the dirt off the body.

Body brush: Use longer strokes to smooth the hairs down. Pay close attention to areas where the natural hair growth changes direction, such as the “wheat-ear” pattern over the flank.

If your horse is particularly dusty, carry a damp sponge in your free hand during the body-brush grooming step. After each stroke with the brush, slightly dampen the ends of the bristles by running the brush across the sponge. This will help to remove the dust from the coat and the brush.

Rub rag: Many people conclude a grooming with a quick “going-over” with the rub rag. I spend at least three to five minutes rubbing each side, more time than with any of my other grooming tools. Apply quite a bit of pressure with each stroke of the rag, always following the direction of the hair growth. Your horse will love it!

Clean, damp sponge: Wipe over his eyes, muzzle, insides of ears and under his dock—always finishing with the dock.

If you need to untangle his tail, spread the hairs on your thigh and, with a wide-toothed comb, start at the ends and work up.

Trimming

The classic American look is a very clean outline, with no “fuzzy edges.” You’d be amazed how dramatically a horse’s appearance is changed by trimming a few areas on the body. Using a Size 10 clipper blade, trim under his jawline, along the backs of his lower legs, his fetlocks and his coronet bands. Use this blade, too, to trim his bridle path and remove long hairs from his throatlatch area. Use the finer Size 30 or 40 blades on his muzzle, eye whiskers, and insides and edges of his ears. Your horse may need a twitch to trim his ears, because he must be absolutely still for you to do the edges without making gouges.

Mane and Tail Care

At home, the most you need to do to your horse’s tail before a ride is shake out the shavings. If it’s absolutely necessary to tidy a tangled tail, say before a lesson or clinic, use a detangling product on it. Allow it to...
TREATMENT

Dawn Samuelson
Equine Behavior Specialist
“Through the Horse’s Eyes”

“As an Equine Behavior Specialist, I admit that I do not have a ton of time to spend on bathing my horses, so I’m always looking for a quicker way to speed up the grooming process. Spray-Away is my secret for a complete and time-efficient bath. Since my horse is ‘follicly’ challenged in the mane and tail, I also depend on Concentrated Detangler’s Shine to increase the volume and thickness of his mane and tail. It works wonders and he looks healthy, glowing and well-groomed in this quick, two-step process.”

GROOMING

TARA AND PJ CROWLEY
Owners and trainers, Kendalwood Farms
“Shine-On from Mane ‘n Tail gives us a variety of benefits in our grooming routine. We want our horses to feel good, calm and well-rested and encourage them to lay down the night before a show. After their bath, we spray Shine-On so bedding does not stick to their freshly cleaned coats and tails. It helps to repel any sawdust or dirt collected overnight. Plus, it keeps their coats, manes and tails shiny and show-ready for the next day’s events. Shine-On conditions their coats without harmful and damaging chemicals found in other conditioners, which dry out the hair follicles. In addition to our training horses, we use Shine-On for our conditioning and rehabilitation horses as a finishing spray to protect the horses against blanket rubs.”

SHAMPOO
• An exclusive micro-enriched protein formula that cleans and fortifies with moisturizers and emollients, leaving coat soft and shiny
• Gentle pH-balanced formula for everyday use
Available in: 12 oz. and 32 oz. Bottle, Gallon

CONDITIONER
• An exclusive protein-enriched amino acid formula with a unique action that helps to maintain and achieve longer, thicker and healthier looking manes and tails
• Constant use will maintain, nourish and condition hair and skin to aid healthy hair growth
• Results can be seen after one application
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SPRAY AWAY® HORSE WASH
• Contains natural plant esters that condition coat, adding body and shine
• Cleans without scrubbing; safe and gentle enough to use everyday
• Thorough cleaning eliminates fungal and bacterial food sources for healthier skin
• pH-balanced for sensitive skin; can be used over cuts and scrapes
Available in: 32 oz. Ready-To-Use, 16 oz. Concentrate – Add water to make 4 Quarts of Spray Away®

EQUINE SPRAYER
• A 4 cleaning settings plus rinse and an on/off valve
• Metered for efficient application

SPRAY ‘N WHITE® SHAMPOO
• Deep-cleaning, color-enhancing shampoo and conditioning spray
• Even application penetrates for increased whitening and brightening in less time
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Available in: 32 oz. Spray

HOOFMAKER®
• Exclusive protein-enriched formula will maintain strong yet flexible hooves
• Moisturizes to help reduce the incidence of dry, brittle and inflexible surfaces when used regularly
• Non-greasy, pleasant fragrance
• Convenient pump top applicator
Available in: 32 oz. Pump

MINERAL ICE®
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• Use to relieve muscular soreness and joint stiffness; reduces inflammation
• Mix with water for a sponge-on liniment
• Use regularly before and after workouts
Available in: 16 oz. and 78 oz. Jar

TIPS:
• A medium to thin mane can be trimmed with scissors instead of by pulling. To avoid the look of a cut mane, back-comb a small section of hair as if you were going to pull it, and then, with the scissors held vertically, cut the longest strands.
• Even the most unruly mane can be trained to lie flat on the right side of the neck. Braid the mane down and leave the braids in for several days. Then wet the mane daily with a water brush or braid spray, brushing it across from the left side to gather the smaller hairs, then brushing it down flat on the right side.

Ready to Show
“Clean” is always the name of the game. The day before a horse show, I bathe my horses in a simple equine shampoo. To remove really stubborn leg stains, run the Size 10 clipper blades down the leg in the direction of the hair growth, trimming off the ends of the hairs. Follow this with a good scrubbing. After your horse dries, preserve all of your hard work by covering him with a sheet—or if the temperatures are higher, a fly sheet or light scrim—overnight and in the trailer on the way to the show.

Finishing Touches
Just before you go to the ring, complete the picture with these final touches:
• Brush hoof dressing over your horse’s hooves. (This may need to be touched up again at the in-gate.)
• Smooth his coat one last time with a rub rag. It goes without saying that your tack and equipment should be as clean, elegant and polished as your nicely groomed horse.

In the 1970s and ’80s, Laurie Pitts worked for some of the top professionals in the country, including Joan Boyce, Frances Rowe, Rodney Jenkins, Joe Fargis and Conrad Homfeld. She traveled with the US Equestrian Team to the 1978 World Championships in Aachen, Germany, and the first World Cup in 1979 in Sweden.

Dry before carefully combing with a plastic, wide-toothed comb.

The classic American tail is long and natural-looking—not banged or enhanced with a fake tail attachment. It’s OK to trim the longest hairs, but I never shorten them by more than an inch at a time. Ask a friend to put an arm under the top of your horse’s tail to simulate its natural carriage, while you trim the hairs at the bottom.

If you plan to braid for shows, pull your horse’s mane to a length of three to four inches. If you don’t plan to braid, let your horse’s mane grow slightly longer—five to six inches—so that it will lie down more easily.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION/PROBLEM</th>
<th>GROOMING</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
<th>FIRST AID</th>
<th>FINISHING</th>
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Routine Hair Care

Both the mane and tail benefit from regular, careful detangling, ideally done by hand. Any tool—including combs and brushes—will pull out or break off hair each time it is used, ultimately diminishing the length and fullness of a mane or tail. The most effective approach to detangling is to begin at the ends of the hairs and carefully work toward the roots. Here is how to proceed:

1. Start at the edge of the mane or tail, holding the hair loosely in one hand.
2. With your other hand, gently separate a few hairs and carefully work them free from the rest for their full length.
3. Continue through the mane or tail until all the hairs have been separated and hang straight and free.

Prior to trying to separate tail hair that is particularly snarled or full of bedding or burrs, spray it lightly with a conditioner or detangler. Avoid brushing the hair while it is wet because it will stretch and break.

In addition, keep the skin and roots of the mane and tail clean and healthy. Use a short-bristled body brush to part the hair along the crest and on the dock into small sections to get down to the skin. Those areas can also be cleaned with a damp sponge and a towel.

When braiding manes and tails, horses do not need their hair shampooed, but their manes and tails get dirty and stained, and sometimes the skin of the tail becomes irritated, especially with detergents, which can remove natural oils and result in dry skin and hair. However, you can wash...
a tail when it is too cold to bathe the whole horse. You will need a hose with warm water or two large buckets of warm water, a large body sponge, shampoo and conditioner, a detangler, a coat shine product and a towel.

1. Wet the tail, including the dock, with a hose or wet sponge, or lift up the bucket and dunk the “skirt” (bottom of the tail). Be careful—when the horse feels water on his dock, he may squat and try to kick.

2. Apply shampoo to the skirt and rub it into the whole tail, working up a lather. Use the sponge to wash the skin of the dock.

3. Rinse the sponge and use it or the hose to rinse the tail from top to bottom. Dunk and swirl the skirt in a bucket of clear water until no soap remains and the hairs “squeak.”

4. Wring the skirt gently and blot with a towel. Apply conditioner, according to the product’s directions, or coat the damp tail hair with a detangler and a shine spray. Don’t brush or comb the hair while it is wet, as it will stretch and break easily.

To Train a Problem Mane
Pull the hair across the crest of the neck so it all lies to one side. Wet it and braid it—starting on the side, not the top—into small, tight pigtails no more than one inch wide. Fasten the braids with wrapped elastic bands or turn them under and tie. Now saturate with a braiding spray product. Leave the braids in for several days; apply a braid spray daily. When the braids are undone, dampen the hair and brush it to the correct side of the neck.

Protecting a Long Mane
A long, heavy mane is sometimes braided to keep it off a horse’s neck to facilitate cooling and protect the hair from sweat, tangling, breakage and other damage. Sometimes the forelock is braided to keep it out of the way of the bridle.

The simplest way to braid a long mane is to part it into three- to four-inch sections, braid them into a long pigtail and fasten it with a wrapped elastic band. Braids such as these may be left in for as long as a week. This will also help train the mane to lie on the correct side of the neck.

Braiding the Mane
Braiding a horse’s mane prior to a show or event not only spruces up his appearance, but is, in fact, necessary in some disciplines. In most cases, the braid is required to lie on the right or “off” side of the horse’s neck. The following strategies can make the job easier:

   - Dampen the mane with water before you begin, but don’t shampoo, as this softens the hair and the braid will not hold as well.
   - Work with small sections of hair, starting close to the horse’s head and moving down.
   - After you have separated a section of hair with a mane comb or a specially designed braiding comb, secure the rest of the mane with the comb, a clip or a clothespin to keep it out of your way.
   - Divide the section you’re working on into thirds, spray with a braid spray and begin to braid, keeping steady tension on the hair as you go. The braid can be secured with yarn that has been braided in (start it about midway down the braid’s length) or with a small rubber band looped onto the very end. Use a braid spray to tame the loose hairs.
   - Finish the braid by pulling it up with a specially designed braid pull or a thin wire that has been bent to resemble one. Tie off the braid with a second rubber band or the yarn ends knotted neatly underneath the braid.
   - If your horse is really tidy in his stall, it’s OK to braid his mane the night before a show or to leave mane braids in overnight between two days of showing. (Don’t leave them in for more than one night, though.)

   The classiest forelock braid is a French braid. This catches all of the loose hairs and creates a really attractive look.
other wet, filthy conditions) is a foul smell and dark ooze from the cleft of the frog. Later, the frog becomes cheesy in texture. Although thrush can eventually cause lameness and significant hoof damage, its early stage is simple to treat.

Just pouring a thrush remedy over the frog will not get the job done. Packing a hoof is potentially dangerous because excessive pressure can kill sensitive frog tissue. Instead, follow this daily routine: Make your own cotton swab by wrapping a wisp of loose cotton around the end of a hoof pick. Soak the cotton in treatment solution and swab down the sides of the frog as if you were picking out the hoof. Swab the cleft of the frog and any other crevices. Repeat the process, using fresh cotton.

When treating thrush, modify the affected horse’s living arrangements by keeping cleaner, drier stalls and increasing your horse’s exercise time.

THE CANADIAN COWGIRLS

“We are on the road with our horses the majority of the time, all over Canada and the United States. That much travel to different climates, terrains, etc. makes for excessive dry skin and coats. A great little hint and quick fix we have discovered is to mix the Original Mane ‘n Tail Conditioner with water in a bucket and then either sponge down the horse or spot treat with a spray bottle for dryness relief. It works wonders! Hoofmaker is our other saving grace in the battle against dryness, this time targeted to our horses’ dry cracked chestnuts and hooves—not to mention, if hand applying, how incredibly soft it makes our hands!”

HORSE HOOF CARE TIPS

Help keep your horse’s hooves healthy and strong.

Adapted from an article in Practical Horseman by Chris Volk and an article on EquiSearch.com.

Pick out your horse’s feet. This may sound pretty basic, but it’s the single most important thing you can do for his hooves. It also gives you a chance to take early action on many common hoof problems. Do this:

• before each ride, to remove any stones or small objects before you add your weight to the situation, and to check on the condition of his shoes
• after you untack him, in case something has gotten stuck in his feet during the ride
• when you bring him in at night, to check for objects in his feet or for turnout injuries
• before turnout the next morning, to check for heat and pulse, remove manure, and check for signs of thrush.

Each time you clean your horse’s hooves, take an extra couple of minutes after you’ve pried out any packed debris to gently clear the crevice of the frog and scrape any remaining bits of matter off the sole with the tip of the pick. Finish the job with a stiff brush.

Establish what’s normal. While handling your horse’s feet to pick them out, notice their temperature; when everything’s OK, they’ll feel very slightly warm.

• Check the frog, which has about the texture and firmness of a new rubber eraser when it’s healthy. Don’t be alarmed, though, if the frog appears to be peeling off—most horses shed the frog at least twice a year. Your farrier’s regular trimming of the frog may have prevented you from noticing this natural process.

When picking out the feet, look for signs of...

• Thrush. The first clue to this bacterial condition (usually caused by prolonged standing in manure, mud or other wet, filthy conditions) is a foul smell and dark ooze from the cleft of the frog. Later, the frog becomes cheesy in texture. Although thrush can eventually cause lameness and significant hoof damage, its early stage is simple to treat.

If your horse is shod, check his shoes each time you pick out his feet. Look for:

• Risen clinches. This is a sign the shoe is loosening, probably because it’s been in place for several weeks; he can injure himself if the risen clinches on one foot brush the inside of the other leg.

Schedule regular farrier visits according to your horse’s individual needs. Although six to eight weeks is the average, there’s really no standard interval for trimming and shoeing.

If your horse is shod, check his shoes each time you pick out his feet.

Look for:

• A sprung or shifted shoe. If the shoe is pulled away and
perhaps even bent, it's sprung. If it's moved to one side or the other, it's shifted. In either case, the nails in the problem shoe can press on sensitive hoof structures when he places weight on the foot.

**Learn how to remove a shoe — yes, you!** Many farriers are glad to teach clients how to do this. If you can remove a sprung or shifted shoe, you may save your horse unnecessary pain and hoof damage.

**Help your horse grow the best possible hooves.** Some horses naturally have better hooves than others. Your horse may already be producing the best hoof he's capable of, or the following steps may enable him to do better:

- **Fine-tune his diet.** Ask your veterinarian whether your feeding program is appropriate for your horse's nutritional needs.
- **Give him consistent exercise.** Work on good surfaces, especially at the walk and trot, increases circulation to your horse's hooves and promotes growth.

**Try not to turn out in deep, muddy footing.** Hours of standing in mud may encourage thrush or scratches (a skin infection in the fetlock area that can cause lameness). Mud is hard on shoes, too: The suction of deep mud can drag off a shoe already loosened by alternating wet and dry conditions.

**Protect your horse's hooves during hauling.** Without covering for his heels, he can easily step on the edge of a shoe and pull it partially loose. Another vulnerable area is the coronet band: the rim of tissue at the top of each hoof that generates new hoof-wall growth. Injury to this area can interrupt hoof growth in the area below the affected spot. The solution: Either old-fashioned shipping bandages and bell boots (large enough to cover the bulbs of your horse's heels and the backs of his shoes) or good-quality, full-coverage Velcro-fastened shipping boots.

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**MATT PALMER**  
Two-Time NRHA World Champion,  
Two-Time USEF Gold Medalist (Reining)  
"I wash my horses with Spray-Away Horse Wash because it cleans quickly and thoroughly, while easily removing deeply embedded dirt from common maneuvers in the reining world. This saves me more time to devote to my riding and training program. Often, I follow-up with the Pro-Tect products to help alleviate skin irritations such as scratches, hot spots and girth itch. I find they are the best antimicrobial relief solutions available. For immediate relief of inflammation from scratches, I rely mostly on Pro-Tect Skin and Wound Treatment Spray to do the job!"

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**HEALTHY HORSE GROOMING TIPS FOR WINTER**  
Maintain your horse's health and hair coat in winter with these cold-weather grooming tips.

Adapted from an article in *Horse&Rider* magazine by the editors and an article in *EQUUS* by Matthew Mackay-Smith, DVM

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Once Mother Nature has clothed your horse in his winter hair coat, weight loss, wounds and skin infections are harder to recognize than when his coat was short and slick. Here are some tips that’ll help you uncover—and prevent—problems through the winter.

**Treat Your Horse to a Bath**  
If you have access to a draft-free area, treat your horse to a weekly hand-wash. Using a bucket of warm water and a dampened sponge, address one body section at a time; towel dry. (Note: Not recommended in below-freezing temperatures, unless you have a heated barn.)

**Insider tip:** If your barn doesn’t have hot water, use a wand-like bucket heater in a five-gallon bucket. Most stores that sell stock-tank heaters carry them or can order one for you.

**Insider tip:** Speed the drying process with a human hair dryer (keep it moving to avoid burning your horse’s skin) or an overhead heat lamp.

**Let Down His Hair**  
If your horse wears a tail bag, change it at least every 10 to 14 days, rinsing and reconditioning his tail before re-bagging it. This will help prevent excessive hair breakage at the top of the bag.
Maintain Skin Health
Most winter skin conditions result from a dirty hair coat, which gives bacteria and fungi a foothold. Keep your horse’s skin healthy by vigorously curry ing his body daily. In addition to lifting dirt and skin debris to the surface, it’ll enable you to feel any diminishment in the fat layer over his ribs, indicating weight loss, and any bumps or clumpy hair that could signal a wound or skin condition.

For quick and easy dirt removal after curry ing, spray your horse’s body, mane, tail and legs with a non-silicone hair-care product, then follow with a soft finish brush or vacuum. (ShopVacs are inexpensive and work great.) Bonus: The slippery finish will help make dried mud easy to remove next time.

Spotting Skin Problems Early
Even horses who receive the best of care may develop the occasional skin problem. In most cases, equine skin troubles are minor and require nothing more than a thorough cleansing and the application of an over-the-counter topical remedy. Nonetheless, these conditions are generally itchy, annoying or even painful for horses, so the more promptly you can recognize and address them, the better for all concerned.

When in doubt, of course, you’ll want to call in your veterinarian for a diagnosis as well as guidance in treating the condition.

Scratches (also known as partial dermatitis, greasy heel or mud fever) are skin inflammations on the back of your horse’s pasterns. The condition starts as chapping that is generally brought on by a cycle of alternating wet and dry weather conditions common in late winter and spring. Once the skin becomes cracked and sore, however, bacteria, mites and/or plant irritants often complicate the situation. Examine your horse’s pasterns for signs of redness and/or scurf, possible precursors to scratches. To further prevent it, keep fetlock hair trimmed with a coarse (Size 10) clipping blade.

Rain rot (also known as dermatophilosis, rain scald or mud fever) appears as gray/white clustered scabs that leave behind patches of hairless skin. Moisture and skin damage are the two most significant contributing factors. Rain rot commonly occurs on the head, legs, back, rump and hindquarters. Acute rain rot most often surfaces on the back and hindquarters where the waiting organism is activated by moisture; in the early stages of rain rot, the skin may feel hot to the touch and the hair may stand straight up before scabs begin to form.

Scabs can be curried off with a soft-toothed curry comb; if this is painful and the skin is bleeding or oozing pus beneath, soften the scabs with a greasy ointment before trying to remove them, and then sweep them up to reduce contagion. Topical treatments for rain rot are sold through tack stores.

Warts (also known as viral papillomas) are raised, pinpoint- to pea-size bumps typically clustered around the muzzle and lips but sometimes on the eyelids and genitalia. Most common in younger horses, who have not yet developed an immunity to them, they are spread both through direct contact and indirectly via shared feed tubs, water containers, grooming supplies, etc. They disappear within two to three months, but squeezing or scraping away one or two of the larger growths may stimulate the body’s immune system and provide a quicker resolution.

Sweet Itch (also known as equine insect hypersensitivity, summer itch, summer eczema, Queensland itch) consists of hairless patches and red inflamed skin at the root of the mane and tail as well as on the face, neck and belly, where the horse has been rubbing incessantly. It is caused by an allergy to the saliva of biting midges, gnats, culicoides or no-see-ums, which feed on horses. Once a horse has become sensitized to insect bites, he will likely need oral or topical steroids to stop the cycle and anti-inflammatory drugs to control swelling and ease discomfort. Preventative measures include the use of fans, scrim sheets/fly masks and insect repellents.

Hives (also known as urticaria) are raised welts and bumps caused by an acute allergic reaction to things like vaccines, systemic or topical drugs, plants, topical sprays, pollen, or insect bites or stings. Although they usually disappear on their own within a few hours to a day and a half, steroidal medications may be necessary if hives are related to a severe allergic reaction (which may be accompanied by difficulty breathing and/or severe diarrhea. In this case, contact your veterinarian immediately).

Photonsensitivity, a result of sun exposure combined with other complicating factors, almost exclusively affects pink skin, resulting in purplish, blister-like lesions that weep or slough away and scab over. If you think your horse has photosensitivity, contact your veterinarian. He may prescribe topical or oral steroids and other anti-inflammatory drugs to keep your horse comfortable; he may also test your horse’s liver function for signs of damage.

DR. EDGAR J. BALLIET III
VMD, Balliet and Associates
“Whenever fungal or bacterial issues come up while treating horses, Mane ’n Tail Pro-Tect antimicrobial OTC products are my first line of defense. The Pro-Tect products are safe, affordable and do an excellent job: Shampoo for rain rot; Skin and Wound Spray Treatment for abrasions; Skin and Wound Cream Treatment for tail itch; and Thrush Treatment. The Pro-Tect line is a ‘must-have’ for your equine first-aid kit.”
Massage for humans has been around for centuries, but it is usually thought that Equine Massage Therapy is a product of the modern competitive age.

In fact, it is believed that the ancient Chinese used massage techniques on both animals and people as early as 3,000 B.C. In addition to pre- and post-competitive applications, massage therapy is currently enjoying a resurgence as horse owners become interested in the treatment of the whole horse and the holistic and alternative therapies available.

Besides being a tool for remedial treatment of specific injuries, massage therapy is popular as a preventative tool. The branch known as sports massage therapy, which specializes in preparing the musculature for exertion, is especially important in the competitive lives of equine athletes.

The direct physical effects of specific strokes and the pressure of equine massage release tension within the muscles. Massage therapy also fosters the well-being of the horse by improving circulation, either soothing or stimulating the nervous system and aiding in digestion.

A horse doesn’t have to be an athlete to benefit from massage therapy. Ever seen horses galloping in a muddy field, slip and catch themselves? Imagine how you would feel if the same thing happened to you; you might pull a groin or some other muscle and feel the effects for days.

Here are some signs to help determine whether your horse might benefit from massage therapy:

- Shortened strides
- Sore back
- Stiffness and/or unwillingness to bend to the left or right
- Problems picking up the canter, bucking during transitions
- Tripping and stumbling
- Change in demeanor

Mini-Massage Makes a Difference

Here’s a simple technique to help loosen up horses that tend to come out of their stalls feeling particularly stiff. It works so well and takes so little extra time that you might try it on all your horses.

Perform this mini-massage when your horse is already tacked up and ready for schooling, or as you’re leading him to the ring.

Placing your hand just behind the cantle, gently palpate his topline—the muscles right along the spine—from the loins to the croup and all the way to the base of the tail, to see whether you can feel any knots or areas of stiffness that need special attention.

Then return to your starting point and massage the length of the spine behind the saddle. Press your thumb and fingertips firmly into the muscle with a kneading, not a poking, motion, pausing wherever you find a knot or stiffness, until the muscles feel consistently pliant and relaxed.

"There are some people who just curry a hole in the dirt and get on," says Susan E. Harris, author of Grooming to Win. “But grooming is about more than looking good. When you groom your horse, you’re getting a hands-on interaction that is going to help establish trust and a bond between the two of you. You’re also going to get to know him physically. You’ll notice an injury or a tick earlier and know just what sort of physical shape he is in. That’s good horsemanship, but you can’t have it without good grooming."

Susan E. Harris is an international clinician and artist from Cortland, New York, who has taught, trained, shown and judged in many equestrian disciplines. She has also written and illustrated a number of popular horse books, including Grooming to Win, Horse Gaits, Balance and Movement and the U.S. Pony Club Manuals of Horsemanship. Her column, “Commonsense Horsemanship,” appears regularly in EQUUS Magazine. For her thoughts on braiding, see p. 17 of this guide.