

by Tara Reimer
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Grooming to win



Those of us whose horses were outside all winter know that getting them ready for the ring is going to be hard work – but definitely worth it.

Reasons to groom:

Grooming is critical to the health and well-being of horse and rider.

- A bonding time between horse and human.
- Before working or riding grooming is helpful to see how comfortable the person is and how the horse reacts to the person.
- Grooming cleans the horse of dirt and loose hair before a ride to ensure sores do not develop from debris under the tack.
- While running your hands over the horse during grooming, you can check for sore spots on the horse and it will be easier to find cuts, bumps, wood ticks, etc.

Getting started:

- If you want to keep your horse in the barn to shed out, be sure there is sufficient lighting from 6 am to 10 pm.
- Working the horse until there is some sweat will also stimulate winter hair loss.
- Deworm horses to be sure the parasites are not stealing nutrients from your horse.
- Be sure horses have access to free choice minerals because often the hay fed in winter may not contain all the nutrients a horse requires.

The grooming process:

- Always keep your free hand on the horse so they feel your constant presence and so you can anticipate any movement or fear.
- Proper grooming routine starts with a shedding blade until winter hair is gone.
- Do not use the blade on the face or below the knee/hock as there is no muscle there and so it is like running the blade over your knuckles.
- Use a rubber or plastic curry in a circular motion across the entire body, except the head and lower legs, to loosen dirt and hair. A rubber curry with shorter teeth is often preferred – it feels better for the horse. This brush is easier to clean by hitting against a hard surface to knock hair and dirt out.
- Next is the hard or dandy brush, with stiff bristles, used in short flicking strokes across the body, except on the head and lower legs. This is used to remove the loose hair and dirt, so always start near the head at the top and work your way down and always in the direction of the hair.
- The soft body brush is last and is used in long sweeping strokes with the lay of the hair to remove any remaining hair and dirt from the entire body including head and lower legs.
- Pick hooves before and after working your horse and be sure to remove any packed in debris including stones and debris. You will also be able to detect soreness and infection earlier. Many people pick their horse's hooves starting with front left, then hind left, hind right and finishing with front

right. Horses can learn the routine and should be trained to lift their feet for you.

Washing:

- Buy a good horse shampoo. Dish detergent is much too harsh.
- Thoroughly wash the entire horse with just enough shampoo to do the job. Too much shampoo of any kind leaves a residue that can cause irritation once blankets and tack are used.
- Remember to clean your gelding's sheath with clean water.
- Thoroughly rinse the horse until no shampoo is left.
- A sponge with soapy water can be used to wash the horse's face.
- Use either a leave-in or rinse-out conditioner in the forelock, mane and tail.
- After washing (as above), spray a leave-in body coat conditioner all over the horse's body to enhance shine and repel dirt and dust.



Mane and tail

- While the horse's mane is still wet, braid or band it using colored elastics that match the mane color. Banding is an art and takes practice but remember to keep the bands smaller and mane hair should be no wider than the width of an adult's hand. Banding is done to show off a horse's neck and it is a good way to neaten an unruly mane. Some horses have thick long manes that will stay that way to show.
- Before placing a proper fitting blinker over the horse to keep it clean and the mane flat, put some hair gel in your hand and run your fingers over the base of the mane to keep the hairs lying flat.
- Only once the tail is dry should you use product to detangle hairs and repel dust. Run your fingers through the tail until it is thoroughly covered in product and then brush to finish the job. Braiding and wrapping the tail in a bag, while keeping the tail clean, leaves the hair kinked from the braid. That meant wetting the tail in the morning and hopefully combing out the waves. If the product you use repels dust well, you can usually leave the tail as is and brush out the shavings in the morning with a body brush.
- Be sure to cover the horse with a nylon sheet, not cotton, because nylon slides across the horse's body making it shiny while cotton rubs, creating friction that disturbs the hairs.
- If the horse is stabled indoors overnight with doors closed it is likely that the barn will heat up by morning. Therefore do not over blanket as this is very uncomfortable and stressful

for a horse. Always use the nylon sheet but think wisely whether more layers are needed.

Clipping

- Be sure the hair is dry and as clean as possible to prevent damage to your clipper. Cordless clippers are the best. If you have rechargeable batteries for the clipper, be sure the extra battery is already charging. If this is a new experience for your horse or you know they do not like clippers, have an extra handler available to distract them with talking and petting. Give yourself several hours to get the job done and do not rush it. Make it a positive experience for your horse. Have a clipper brush on hand to remove the hair from the blades as you are working. Most horse clippers are harmed with coolant so check manufacturer recommendations first.
 - To prevent muddy fetlocks clip the lower legs from the coronet band, just above the hoof, up to the knee/hocks using a #10 blade – unless you have a breed of horse known for beautiful fetlock hair, which you would not remove.
 - Around the knee/hock joint point your clipper downwards to blend the hair so there is a less noticeable difference between upper and lower legs.
- Work at different angles to get all the fetlock hairs. Splint boots and wraps will stay cleaner and less time will be spent grooming.
- Clip the bridle path with a #10 blade. Halters and bridles will lie flatter and be more comfortable for the horse. Quarter horse bridle paths are trimmed to where the ear bent backward touches the mane. Start about 1/2" short of one full ear length. This is because every time we clip throughout the season we always take a few extra hairs from the mane and the bridle path gets longer.



Face:

- Have good clippers that will finish the job; a #10 blade is recommended.
- Work in an area with sufficient lighting.
- Set up a safe working environment ensuring the horse is settled with a halter around its neck and clipper cords are out of the way.
- Start under the jaw to be sure your horse is okay with you clipping his face.

continued on page 8

- Clip against how the hair lies, and move skin with your fingers to get into tough to reach spots. Clip as far back as the crown strap of a halter and follow the jawline. At first the difference between neck and head will be dramatic but that will lessen as the horse sheds and the face hairs grow back.
- Leave the muzzle hairs alone until show season begins.
- Clip eyebrows by gently but firmly closing the eye lid with your other hand. Leave the eye lashes! Remove the hairs under the eye by gently yet firmly lifting the eyelid up with one finger. Never use scissors here in case you puncture the horse.

Ears:

- Whether you clip the inside of the ears depends on the level of competition you are at and whether your horse is outside with the bugs.
- Hold the ear and clip the outside thoroughly moving the skin to get a smooth finish.
- Clip the edge and tip of the ear from all angles so when you hold the ear up to light it gives a very finished edge.
- If you do clip the inside of the ear, place a rag or cotton balls in the base of the ear to both deafen the noise and catch the hairs.
- You can leave hairs on the inside, but still make neater by making the long hairs shorter.



Tips:

- Clip the legs and face about 3-5 days before the show so it can grow back a little and cover any clipper tracks you might have left.
- The night before the show, clip the bridle path and trim the ear edges and eyes with a #40 blade, if you feel comfortable with clippers. Otherwise stay with the #10.
- Trim the fast growing muzzle hairs on the morning of the show.
- It is preferable to wash horses the night before a show so their coat has time to regenerate natural oils and bring the shine back. (See aforementioned section re washing.)
- Do not comb or touch manes and tails except after they are washed the night before a show. Add a product such as MTG to enhance hair thickness and moisturize hair.

The morning of a show:

- Remove all blankets, wraps and slinkies before exercising

the horse. This is freeing for the horse and allows most of the shavings to fall off.

- Stop at the wash rack and rinse the lower legs and hooves and use a stain remover or shampoo on bigger stains.
- Back at the stall, remove the muzzle and eye hairs with a shaver and check the mane for straightness. If it needs trimming, now is the best time.

Horse eats. You work:

- If you are planning to attach a tail extension to enhance a thin tail and better balance the look of the horse, do this first.
- To groom, first use a soft body brush, kept clean specifically for show clean bodies, and brush the entire horse.
- Use the body wipes over the entire body to pick up any dirt left behind.
- Spray the body shine over the entire body again.
- A clean nylon sheet just for shows is then placed on the horse to keep any dust off.
- Run your fingers through the tail, with detangler and shine product, finishing with a tail brush.
- Spray paint the horse's lower legs their same color in order to enhance the legs by covering any blemishes or clipper tracks. If you do not have paint, at least use baby powder on dry white legs. Rub the powder in and then wipe away excess. For clean legs be sure they are clipped from the knee/hock all the way down to the hoof.

To paint hooves:

- Do not wear good clothes or boots and DO wear gloves as hoof polish magically gets onto everything. Store the polish in a plastic baggie.
- Work on a clean surface like a piece of plywood or cardboard, to protect the nice concrete in the barn.
- Have someone hold the horse still.
- Bend or squat to work on hooves as kneeling is not safe in case you need to move quickly.
- For a shinier more polished look, use sandpaper over the hoof to smooth the surface. Be sure hooves are clean inside and out and dry before painting. Paint the hooves black, if the hooves have black pigment and the breed allows, or clear, if the hooves are clear and the breed suggests this. Paint all four hooves the same color. Start at the top inside

corner and paint a solid straight line across the top of the hoof to the outside corner. From here, fill in the rest of the entire hoof wall.

Just before showing:

- Remove the horse from feed and remove all blankets.
- Use a clean very soft body brush on the face to remove any debris. Baby wipes work well for wiping the horse's face including eyes, ears and nostrils clean. (These are good for keeping your own hands clean as well.)
- Apply facial highlighting cream heavily on the eyes and muzzle and wipe your hands clean on the edges of the ears. You can get different colors of cream. Clear is the most versatile but the black really accentuates black skin.
- Unless starting with a riding class, spray a final coat product that gives sheen to the horse.
- Use a woolly mitt to wipe down the horse one last time for a shiny coat. This also ensures no stray shavings are attached to the horse.
- If it is fly season, be sure to use a lot of product on the legs especially if you expect your horse to stand still in the class.

Remember to always end the ride on a good note, with a massage that also loosens sweat and built up dirt/hair. Take pride in your well groomed horse and know that your efforts are noticed by both your horse and others. Proper grooming is necessary – for the horse's sake. 



Groomed to win: Tara with her horse *Ida Liked A Dun*, Reserve World Champion Open Halter Gelding at the American Buckskin Registry Association World Championship show.

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Clean brushes = an important part of grooming tactics.

By Mary Johnstone

Techniques vary depending on whether you have synthetic or natural brushes.

Synthetic Horse Brushes

Start by raking the brush vigorously across a curry comb or other rough brush. This will begin to clean out the worst of the dirt. After most of the visible dirt and hair has been dislodged, you can either use a hose, preferably at a high pressure, to wash out the remaining hair and dirt. Or, if you only have a limited water supply in buckets, scrub "brush against brush" with frequent water changes, until the water looks acceptably clean.

In the winter, if your barn has limited water and your family can ignore the mess, take the brushes home and clean them there!

If the brush will be used on different horses you may want to bleach the bristles. Skin ailments/conditions such as ringworm and rainrot can be spread from horse to horse by sharing brushes and other grooming equipment.

Bleaching the bristles is the best way to get a horse brush clean, but may contribute to deterioration of the bristles. Fill a bucket with water and add a capful of bleach. Drop the synthetic brush in the bucket of bleach-water and allowed to sit for an hour. Rinse thoroughly and your synthetic brush will be clean. Synthetic horse brushes may also be washed in the dishwasher. Prewash the brush and run an empty load in your dishwasher afterwards, for sanitary reasons.

If you have multiple horses it might be easier to have a complete set of grooming equipment for each horse, marked with different coloured tape or paint.

Natural Fibre Horse Brushes

These must be cared for more gently. Rake the horse brush vigorously over a curry or similar rough grooming tool. A vacuum may remove the final debris.

Use water sparingly with a natural fiber brush, especially if the brush has a leather back or straps.

Instead of completely submerging the horse brush in water, wet only the tips of the bristles in diluted bleach to sanitise and rinse thoroughly before leaving to dry in the sun. Direct sunlight will kill most types of bacteria on a brush. Do not put the brush over a heat source such as a radiator as you will loosen the bristles and crack any wood back to the brush. If you have leather straps or backs to your natural brushes, treat with a leather conditioner to keep them soft and workable after cleaning.