

## "Step-by-Step: Tips for Bathing your Horse."

### It's Bath Time

By Lindsey Finn.

Frequent grooming and a good nutrition program are the foundation for keeping a horse's coat looking shiny and healthy. An occasional bath is part of any good grooming regimen and sometimes a bath is simply needed if your horse is exceptionally dirty. Most horses do not need to be bathed frequently as too much shampooing can actually make the coat dull by stripping oils from the skin. Bathing is a great way to have a little fun and bond with your horse at the same time.

#### Be Prepared

When purchasing bathing products for your horse, make sure that they are labeled for equine use. Those intended for other species might cause an adverse reaction or change the natural pH balance of the horse's skin. Before using any product on a horse, always read the product label and follow the directions to obtain the best results.

#### 1. Safe and Secure

Begin by having the horse secured in crossties or tied to a grooming post with a halter. If warm water is available, it may offer more comfort to the horse, however cool water will work just as well and is refreshing in the heat of summer.

#### 2. Ready, Set, Get Wet!

First, use a water hose with a nozzle to spray the horse's legs to get him used to the sound and feel of the water. Then, start hosing at the top of the neck and work down the neck and back. Wet both sides of the horse and underneath the belly, and be sure to get every part of the body wet before soaping.

#### 3. Soap Suds

There are two methods for the application of soap to the horse's body depending upon the type of shampoo that is preferred. If you are using a ready-to-use shampoo, apply the shampoo in quarter-sized amounts to a bathing mitt and begin scrubbing the horse's body. If you are using a concentrated shampoo, pour a small amount of shampoo into a bucket, dilute with water and then apply the soapy mixture with a sponge or mitt.

#### 4. Rub-A-Dub-Dub

Start at the top of the neck and use the sponge or mitt to work the shampoo over the horse's body. If using a mitt, scrub in a circular motion to loosen the dirt. Work from the horse's neck and mane, moving to the body and chest and then down the legs. Don't forget to wash between both front and back legs. Once the horse is soaped up, the directions may call for leaving the shampoo on for several minutes. Watch your time and be careful not to allow any shampoo to dry on the horse, as this can irritate the skin. If your horse is really dirty it might be necessary to rinse and repeat this step.

#### 5. Rinse Cycle

When it is time to rinse, start again at the top of the neck and rinse down and back towards the tail, rinsing both sides of the horse. Be sure to rinse all of the soap off of the body and out of the mane. You will know all of the soap is out of the horse's coat when the water runs clear.

#### 6. Face

To wash the horse's face use a smaller sponge than on the body. Wet the sponge and gently wipe the horse's head, being careful not to get excess water into the ears, eyes or nostrils. If your horse's face is especially dirty, dilute a little shampoo in a bucket of water and repeat the steps above. It is better to rinse the horse's face with a sponge rather than to spray your horse in the face with water. While some horses tolerate being sprayed in the face, most horses do not like it.

#### 7. Tail End

After washing the body, it is time to work on the tail. First, wet the entire tail completely. Then, apply shampoo to the tail and work it into lather. Be sure to clean the tail bone as well, this can help to promote more tail hair growth. After lathering, rinse the tail until the water runs clear. For a healthy, easy to groom tail, apply conditioner to the entire tail making sure to get plenty on the ends of the tail. While the conditioner is on the tail you can hand pick the tail to detangle it and help minimize hair breakage. After several minutes of conditioning, rinse the tail until the water runs clear. If your horse has a long, full mane, you may wish to condition the mane using the same process as with the tail.

#### 8. Dry

A sweat scraper should be used to remove the excess water from the horse's body every time you bathe or hose a horse. Removing excess water is necessary because water acts as an insulator, trapping the heat against the body and preventing a hot horse from cooling down. A sweat scraper is simply a "squeegee" for horses, and it is used in a similar

manner. To sweat scrape your horse, begin at the top of the neck - while applying a little pressure, pull the scraper down the neck following the direction of the hair. Continue to repeat this process working your way down the horses back and finishing with the belly.

After the bathing is complete and you have removed the excess water with a sweat scraper, let your horse dry while securely cross-tied or by hand walking in the sun. Hand walking on a hard surface or in grass will lessen the amount of dust that will settle on the horse and will help speed drying. Remember to never turn a horse out to pasture while still wet as they will immediately roll and undo all of your hard work! If you must wash when it is cold outside, keep your horse inside away from drafts and use a cooler or an anti-sweat sheet for drying. Think of a cooler as a bath robe for horses - it will help wick water out of the coat and allow your horse to dry quicker and stay warm.

#### 9. Final Touches

Applying a spray-on hair polish can add extra shine to a lackluster coat. While the horse is still wet after sweat scraping, spray him with the polish being careful to avoid the saddle area as it can cause the saddle to slip. Usually a hair polish also contains detanglers so it can also be sprayed in the mane and tail. Spray the tail all over with the detangler, especially the ends, and use a wide tooth-comb to carefully comb the tail.

#### Bath Time DO'S and DON'T S

Do wear appropriate clothing. You will get wet, so wear clothes that can get dirty. Always wear closed-toe shoes or boots.

Never wash a horse without shoes on: this is very dangerous and could result in damage to your feet if the horse spooks and steps on them.

Do have patience. If you are unsure of your horse's history, spend a little extra time introducing bath time. Remember, bathing is unnatural for horses, and they put up with it because we ask them to.

Do use comfortable water pressure and temperature. If your hose has different settings on the nozzle, use a shower-like setting. Pressure that is too hard or water that is too hot or cold will not create a relaxing experience for your horse.

Do give yourself plenty of time. Bathing will generally take at least 20 minutes plus time to dry your horse.

Don't bathe the day of a show. Bathe your horse a day or two before the show to allow natural oils to return to the skin.

Don't wash on a cold day unless absolutely necessary, and have a warm place for your horse to dry. There are many products designed to "spot clean" without water, check your local feed store.

#### Power Wash

For a quick and effortless bath, wash and rinse at the turn of switch with a powerful, easy to use shampoo spray system. Healthy Hair Care's Herbal Horse Wash with its unique delivery system offers a great alternative to the traditional bath. For more information on Healthy Hair Care products, visit [www.healthyhaircare.com](http://www.healthyhaircare.com).

A small bucket is great for keeping the bathing supplies together and is a handy way of transporting everything at one time.

Lindsey Finn recently graduated from the University of Georgia where she competed for the UGA Varsity Equestrian team and majored in Animal Science. She is a brand new Floridian, working as an Equine Nutrition Consultant for Seminole Feed. In her spare time, Lindsey loves to shop, read books and search for a new Florida home for her and Derby, her 12 year old TB gelding with whom she has competed with in the hunters and equitation.