

## Grooming: Step by Step

Good grooming, when combined with good nutrition and horse care, will make your horse shine like a million bucks.

By Jill Cullinan Haight

While the basis for having a shiny coat and a healthy horse stems from good nutrition, grooming is an essential part of properly caring for a horse. In addition to a healthier, shinier coat, daily grooming gives you the opportunity to thoroughly examine your horse for injuries, swellings or parasites. The hands-on approach of grooming also creates a bonding experience for both the horse and caregiver.

### Healthier, You Say?

Your horse's skin is the largest organ in its body. The horse's haircoat insulates and protects the skin. The horse's skin consists of two layers; the epidermis (which is the outer layer that you see), and the dermis (which is the inner layer). The dermis contains hair follicles, oil glands or sebaceous glands, sweat glands and blood vessels. Appropriate nutrition provides the skin with necessary oils, proteins, and nutrients, while exercise and grooming produce good circulation and skin movement, which stimulates the sebaceous glands to produce sebum, the horse's skin oil. The sebum or skin oil distributed through the hair coat results in a beautiful and healthy, protective shine.

### Ready, set, groom!

Begin your daily grooming routine with your horse securely tied or cross-tied in a halter. Halters with a throatlatch snap or grooming halters are ideal because they allow you to thoroughly groom your horse's head. Begin grooming on the horse's left side at the top of the neck, working downward and back towards the hip. Repeat on the right side, following with grooming of the face and legs.

#### 1. Curry with Fury

The comb is used to bring dirt, dandruff and loose hair to the surface of the coat and to massage skin and muscles beneath the coat. The curry comb should be worked in a circular motion along the horse's body. Firm pressure can be applied on heavily muscled areas of the horse, and light pressure should be applied to bony areas – such as legs. Curry combs are available in several varieties, including rubber, plastic and metal. Rubber curries are gentlest to the animal's body during grooming, and metal curries should only be used on very thick, heavy winter coats.

#### 2. It's a Dandy

When you finish currying, your next tool is a dandy brush or mud brush – a hard, stiff, long-bristled brush. This brush is used to penetrate hair and to reach the skin's surface. The dandy brush sweeps larger particles of dirt from the skin and hair. Brush along the direction of the hair in short, firm strokes. The dandy brush is also helpful for dried, caked-on mud or for grooming horses with a thick winter coat.

### 3. The Bod

Thirdly, the body brush, a medium-stiffness, short-bristled brush is used to remove the dander, dust, loose hair and debris from the coat's surface. Your horse should be brushed from head to hoof with the body brush, following the direction of your horse's hair until its coat appears clean. The body brush is helpful in distributing your horse's natural oils throughout his coat.

### 4. Towel PowerTail brushing

Following the body brush, a stable rubber or damp towel should be used to wipe down the eyes, ears, lips and nostrils. For a final touch, use a finishing brush (a medium-length, soft-bristled brush) or a soft grooming mitt over the entire horse. This will remove any dust and leave a smooth, polished-looking coat.

### 5. Long Hair Care

Manes and tails must be groomed with special care to avoid pulling out or breaking hair. Coat sheen sprays are used primarily in the mane and tail to detangle and condition the hair. The special properties of these sprays help eliminate tangles and minimize hair loss. To begin grooming the mane or tail, spray a light mist of a coat sheen spray into the mane and tail. Beginning at the bottom of the mane or tail, gently pick out any tangles by hand. Once the mane and tail are free of tangles, begin brushing from the bottom of the tail, working toward the top. This method will minimize hair tangles and breakage.

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### Bots and Ticks

Grooming time is the perfect opportunity to examine your horse for minor cuts, swellings, or parasites, like bot fly eggs or ticks. Bot fly eggs are small, cream-colored eggs attached to the end of the hairs – and they are commonly seen on the horse's legs. To remove the eggs, use a bot knife

(available Hoof Care at your local feed or farm supply). Simply scrape the knife over the affected hairs, and the eggs will detach from the hair. Remove eggs to prevent infestation of the hatching larvae into the horse.

While ticks are not as common as bot fly eggs, they can definitely wreak havoc on your horse's health. Ticks are found most frequently at the bottom of tail bone, in the mane or the ears of the horse. If a tick is found, remove it immediately with tweezers. Be SURE to remove the entire tick and do not leave the head of the tick attached to the horse. After you remove the entire tick, drop it into alcohol. Also, rub a dab of alcohol on the area of the horse where the tick was found.

Finally, each of the horse's hooves should be cleaned and inspected. Begin by picking up the horse's foot and picking it out thoroughly. To properly pick the horse's hoof, begin at the heel area and scrape toward the toe. Repeat this process until the hoof is clean. Hoof dressings or conditioners may also be applied to aid in keeping healthy, pliable hooves. For additional information on hoof care, see the Winter 2003/04 issue of *ec* magazine, available at your nearest feed store or online at [www.ecmagazine.net](http://www.ecmagazine.net).