

Tried & True Grooming Techniques

1. Clean your tools

Dirty, worn brushes won't get a horse clean. Evaluate the condition of your tools and replace those with mashed or missing bristles, broken teeth or other structural shortcomings.

Next, get your remaining brushes ready for the season. Use a vacuum to remove debris down to the base of each one, then soak them for about 20 minutes in a solution of about one part bleach to 10 parts water. Rinse them thoroughly, and place them in the sun to dry.

Keep your brushes in better shape by incorporating some quick cleaning techniques into your grooming routine. Rub them together briskly when you're done for the day, swiping the dirtiest against a currycomb if need be.

Finally, don't overlook your towels and rags. Take them

home regularly and run them through the washer. If they are getting a bit frayed and stained, treat yourself to new bath towels and relegate the old ones to your grooming kit. Thrift stores are another good source of serviceable barn towels.

2. Shampoo in moderation

Sudsing up a horse and rinsing him clean is uniquely satisfying, but too much shampooing can strip away natural oils, leaving his coat dull and his skin itchy. Here's how to avoid overdoing the cleansing efforts:

- **Make a soapy mix.** The optimum amount of shampoo is just enough to wash away filth, but not so much that the coat is difficult to rinse. A good rule of thumb is one capful of soap per bucket of water. Mix the soap into the water and then sponge it onto the coat as you go for even



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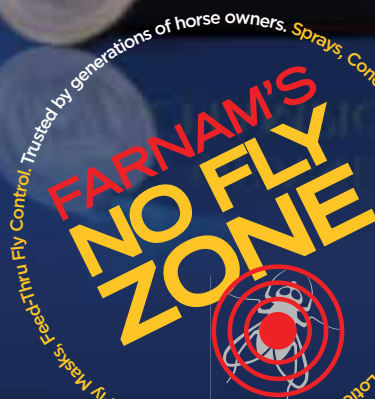
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distribution. Even if your horse is filthy, resist the urge to apply shampoo directly to your sponge or your horse's coat.

• **Rinse diligently.** To make sure all suds are gone, rinse your horse's coat thoroughly and then use a sweat scraper to remove excess water. If any soap bubbles appear while scraping, rinse some more and scrape again.

3. Use some elbow grease

To be effective, grooming requires at least a little physical exertion. When currying, use enough pressure (on amply padded areas of your horse) to free deeply rooted dirt and dead hair. Then use strong strokes of a brush, with forceful finishing flicks, to get rid of the debris.

For the most part, you'll want to work in the direction of the hair growth, but you may have to go against the grain to work out particularly crusty spots.

Be aware that this could cause your horse some minor discomfort, and always use a lighter touch over more sensitive areas.

your horse—the wet hair will stretch and break, leaving the mane and tail looking ragged. Use a wide-toothed comb, again working from the bottom up with extreme patience.

5. Use plenty of water

Don't underestimate the power of plain old water to get your horse clean. After a sweaty jaunt on the trails or a dusty turn around the indoor ring, hosing or sponging your horse down will leave him clean without disturbing the oils in his skin. Doing this regularly allows you to save the sudsy baths for occasions when you need a deep-down clean. Similarly, using a damp sponge to wipe down your horse's face will clean up dust, eye gunk and any nasal secretions quickly, leaving him looking much tidier without the risk of irritating sensitive tissues with product residues.

6. Stay ahead of stains

A light-colored horse can challenge the skills of even the most enthusiastic groomer. The trick to keeping a



The best way to detangle a horse's mane or tail is by hand, picking through individual strands from bottom to top.

4. Handle manes and tails with care

A flowing mane and tail is a well-groomed horse's crowning glory. You need to be careful, however, about how you achieve that look if you're going to preserve the hair. The best way to detangle a horse's mane or tail is by hand, picking through the strands individually from bottom to top. A coating of silicone spray on the hairs will make this process easier. If you want to use a brush, don't do it right after you bathe

light-colored coat—or white markings on any coat—stain free is to treat spots early, before they become set.

New stains can often be removed with a vigorous rubbing with a dampened rag or rough "cactus" cloth. Tackle more stubborn stains with a commercial stain remover, which can typically be used without giving the horse a full bath. By the time a stain is set-in, you may need to head to the wash stall for a full, soapy scrubbing. Purple-hued shampoos

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4 WAYS TO BRING OUT YOUR HORSE'S SHINE

While grooming trends vary among breeds and disciplines, a shiny horse is a head-turner in any arena. Some horses "bloom" more naturally than others, but there are some steps you can take to bring out the shine in any horse's coat.

1. Don't bathe him too often. The deepest shines come from the natural oils produced by your horse's skin. Bathing too often strips this oil, so while your horse may technically be cleaner, his coat may be left looking dull. Skip the soap when you can, removing dirt with brushes and using only plain water to rinse your horse after a sweaty summer ride.

2. Lay on the elbow grease. Regular, vigorous hand grooming spreads oil throughout your horse's coat, contributing to shine. Even after visible dirt has been removed, spend another 10 minutes brushing your horse to bring out a sheen. A soft brush works best for this final touch, or you can use a clean hand towel and wipe over your horse in the direction of coat growth using a slight bit of pressure.

3. Feed him right. Good basic nutrition is the foundation of a healthy coat, so ensure your horse is getting the correct amounts of quality feed. From that start you can consider adding a supplement intended to bring out the best in his coat. These supplements typically include some combination of biotin and omega-3 fatty acids.

4. Use a finishing spray. A light spritzing with a "shine" spray can put your horse's glow over the top. There are many formulations of coat polish to choose from with different ingredients, actions and scents. Some of these sprays can make a horse's coat slick, however, so be careful when applying it to hair you'll need to braid later or on areas where tack will sit.

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remove stains and brighten whites by amplifying the white pigmentation of hairs.

7. Allow mud to dry

The best approach to a mud-encrusted horse is a little time and a lot of patience. It is far easier to remove dry, crusty mud than the wet, messy variety still clinging to the coat.

The serrated edge of a shedding blade is great for scraping the heaviest deposits of dried mud, and a cactus cloth works well on thinner dirt. Use only as much pressure as you need to remove cakey mud—too much will pull at your horse's skin uncomfortably—and



The best approach to a mud-encrusted horse is a little time and a lot of patience.

Working to bring out your horse's natural beauty can be a fun way to spend a spring afternoon. Use these basic grooming techniques to make your efforts as effective and satisfying as possible.

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avoid bony areas such as the legs, face and hips.

When you've removed as much mud you can, switch to a curry-comb. Follow up with a brushing and wipe the coat down with a damp towel to catch any lingering dust. Brush once more with a finishing brush to complete the process.

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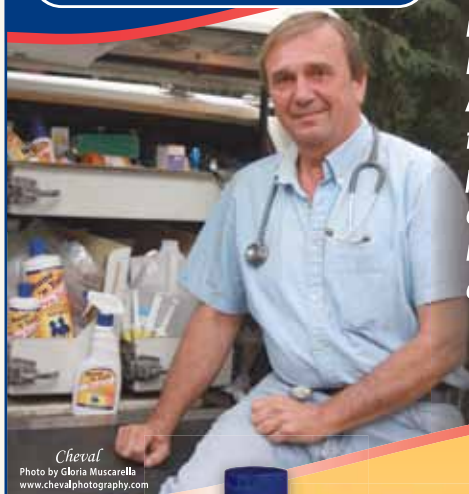
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