

HOOF CARE FOR A SOUND HORSE

MAINTAINING A SOUND, WELL-BALANCED HOOF IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF CARING FOR YOUR HORSE.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY THOMAS N. TWEETEN, PH.D.

AFTER TEACHING ME HOW TO LEAD AND BRUSH my horse, my dad showed me how to care for my horse's feet. This not only included the daily cleaning of the underside of the hoof before and after riding, but also how to trim and maintain the hoof. While both Dad and Grandpa knew how to use a forge and shape iron, they always brought in a competent farrier to put shoes on our work horses. I became responsible for maintaining the hooves of our cow ponies, with occasional advice from the farrier when he came out to care for the work horses. I too took time to share this same advice with my children as they grew to enjoy horses. However, as we evolved into showing horses, we depended on the professional skill of a trained farrier.

Like effective grooming of the horse's coat, there are some things that the horse owner can do to more effectively care for the horse's hooves. Of course the routine job of cleaning out the pads on the underside of the hoof is important for horse comfort. Using a pick that is not too sharp will minimize damage to the hoof as one carefully removes filth. Inspecting the hooves after a ride is important to be sure no stones or rocks are logged in the crevasses between the frog and the hoof pad.

Like hair and skin, the hoof can dry out without proper moisturizing. A dry hoof becomes less flexible to shock, resulting in chipping and cracking that can lead to lameness. There are a lot of remedies for moisturizing the hoof; many are commercially available and of course some are home remedies. I prefer products that do not leave the horse's hoof greasy or oily. Greasy types of products provide a good moisture barrier but tend to attract filth and grit, resulting in surface abrasion to the hoof wall.

I also stay away from hoof-care products that contain micro-nutrients such as certain vitamins. Some of these products can contribute nutrients to the hoof but also feed the

bacteria and fungus present on the hoof itself. I feel it is far more effective to provide your horse with good nutrition as part of a balanced feeding program. My feeling is the same for grooming products that are used to maintain the horse's coat.

Now, I prefer to use a product that allows moisture to absorb into the hoof wall and pad while

still leaving a very thin protective moisture barrier on the surface of the hoof. This barrier should act similar to the protection provided by the periople, the material that is secreted as part of natural hoof growth.

This type of product, often found in cream form, should be applied lightly to the hoof surface and worked into the coronary band. It will absorb into the hoof wall, leaving a mossy feel. When applied lightly on a regular basis, it should not

build or leave an oily or gummy layer. The hoof moisturizer should also leave the hoof pliable to flex as the hooves strike the ground with each step. One product that can effectively do this is Hair & Hoof Moisturizer made by ATH Science, Inc., a Minnesota company.

The process of working the hoof moisturizer into the coronary band and back bulbs of the hoof is effective in maintaining a healthy hoof. In addition, the massaging action stimulates blood flow in this growth area of the hoof.

Hoof moisturizing products can be effective for preparing hooves for showing. Often hooves are shaped and sanded to give a pleasing appearance. This process removes the natural hoof wall protection, allowing the hoof to dry out faster and lose flexibility. Applying a light moisturizing cream after sanding will replace that protection and can often leave a natural shine to the hoof. If liquid hoof colorants are used for showing, they should be removed at the end of each show. These materials can serve as moisture barriers, causing the hoof to dry and lose flexibility.

Effectively maintaining the horse's hooves is indeed an important part of horse care that will then contribute to the comfort of the horse. A horse that is comfortable will be more trusting and more easily collected when ridden or driven. 🐾



Farrier Dan Rettmann trimming hoof.



Hoof trimmed and moisturized with hoof cream.



Before hoof trim, grease-based moisturizers used to care for hoof.



After hoof trim.



Hooves before trimming.



Hoof after trimming and sanding, with moisturizer applied.



Hooves after trimming and sanding.

From *Horse Care for Comfort and Communication* clinics presented by **Dr. Thomas N. Tweeten** of ATH Science, Inc., Prior Lake, Minn., www.equiscentials.com.



Hoof after trimming, sanding and moisturizing, with black shoe polish applied.

Author's note: In May I had the pleasure of visiting with several friends who were speaking along with me at the Holistic Horse Fair at the Natural Gait near Marquette, Iowa. They suggested that I consider adding communication to the title for the series of talks and articles that I share with horse owners. Hence, I will begin my second year of contributing horse-care articles to *Horse & Family* magazine under that title.

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