

Horses, Humans and their Grooming Products

As I talk with people across the country about working with horses, more specifically about horse care and grooming, quite often people will ask about what type of products they should be using for their horses. My response more often than not is a discussion about the goals of the horse grooming process itself.

First and foremost, grooming is an excellent way to get a feel for the horse. Over the years I have learned to take as much or as little time as necessary to prepare the horse for an enjoyable ride or workout. This time includes going over the horse with my hands to look for skin problems or sore muscles. This is followed by a thorough curry and brushing. The grooming products must aid in this process of cleaning up the horse as well as helping both the horse and myself relax and begin focusing on each other. I also learned to select products that when left on the horse for an extended period of time contributed to the comfort of the horse.

Early in my riding career, I can remember cleaning up the horse for a ride or even a show. I would return the horse to her

WHAT'S GOOD FOR
PEOPLE ISN'T ALWAYS
GOOD FOR OUR HORSES.

BY THOMAS N.
TWEETEN, PH.D.

paddock area after cleaning her up and note that the first thing she would do is roll in the dirt. Why, I would ask? When I noticed that the tails of our horses were dry, I would apply a popular hair moisturizer, only to see filth and grunge continue to collect. The treatments often encouraged rubbing after a period of time. Again I would wonder what might cause these issues.

These and other discouraging experiences led me to question the use of many popular horse and human products. As a chemist, I began to read ingredient labels very carefully, questioning the reasoning for using certain ingredients in horse care products. As a horse owner and trainer, I compared the horse grooming process to that of the human grooming process.

What were the differences that I observed?

First of all, horses are not typically bathed every day. I often ask people how they feel after camping out for two or three days without taking a shower. Most people admit they feel itchy and filthy. Why, I ask. "Were you out rolling in the dirt with your horse?" Not likely. However, many of the products that are developed for human use contain every effective moisturizers, usually different types of oils or emollients that serve as moisture barriers. These products tend to coat our skin, keeping it soft and shiny but at the same time slowly attracting filth and dust. Human products are designed to go on in the morning after a shower or bath, come off the next day and then be replenished again. The same is true of the conditioners that are used for hair. They contain moisturizers that coat the hair, soften it, giving it a nice shine. However, they will attract filth.

In addition, we then apply spray polishes that also coat the hair, giving it a beautiful shine but the ingredients then dry the hair, causing static electricity that also attracts filth.

The alternative for horse grooming is to use ingredients that do not build up on the hair and skin. I suggest selecting products that do not leave waxy or oily residues that attract filth. Select a shampoo that is pH balanced that will not dry out hair and skin. The shampoo should be of the type that does not scum up in hard water (hard water is found in most barns). These soapy-hardness residues leave an oily film on the hair and are hard to rinse out. Most human products are designed for softened water systems.

A wider range of ingredients can be used in detanglers and polishes for human products because they are washed out and applied on a daily basis. Horse detanglers and polishes should contain less waxes, oils and heavy silicones, especially if they are not washed out daily. An alternative is to select products that have humectant-type moisturizers that attract and hold moisture but do not build up or make the hair brittle.

Holistic Horse Fair



Get informed, Get Answers & Get Inspired!

May 17-18, 2008
The Natural Gait ~ Harpers Ferry, Iowa

Presentations on:

- Equine Assisted Therapy
- Acupuncture
- Horse Friendly Horsemanship
- Massage
- Energy Work
- Chiropractic
- Animal Communication
- Aromatherapy
- Shamanic Healing
- Natural Hoof Care
- and more!

Featured Speaker
Michael Gonzalez



Less is More
Horsemanship

Featured Speaker
Asia Voight



Animal Communication

Meet all the
speakers online!

www.HolisticHorseFair.com

10-6 daily ~ \$3/adults ~ 12 & under FREE
Vendors, Sponsors, Speakers Wanted! ~ 608.687.9534



Photo by Kristie Stalbusch.

My second concern dealt with fragrances, for they are equally important in the grooming process. I truly believe that poorly selected fragrances were another reason my horses would roll after being groomed. Fragrances serve one of two purposes in nature: to attract insects for pollination or to repel them. Flowery fragrances, often found in human products, while quite pleasant, will attract insects. Leafy or woody fragrances will most likely repel insects. We put our most cherished items in a cedar chest for a reason.

Nature has given the leaves of plants fragrances that hopefully will protect its food-producing factory. Citronella, lavender and rosemary are such examples.

Overall, the only type of grease I recommend for horses is "elbow grease." Beyond that, I recommend using grooming products that are designed for horse care. That is, select products that do not build up on the coat and do not dry the hair or skin. Select products with fragrances that help the horse blend into nature rather than applying product fragrances that stand out for the insects to find. Unless you intend to bathe your horse daily in the same fashion we humans do in Western culture, choose products that are designed to be left on the horse for an extended period of days without attracting filth or drying the coat. These products can easily and cost effectively be incorporated into a positive horse care program that works for both the horse and rider. 

This article is excerpted from "Horse Care for Comfort and Collection" clinics presented by Thomas N. Tweeten, Ph.D., ATH Science, Inc., prior Lake, Minn.

Hear Dr. Tweeten's popular presentations on horse grooming at this year's Minnesota Horse Expo (see Pages 31-34).

"Developing Grooming Products with a Natural Touch!"



EquiScentials
Horse Care Products

Product Line Includes:
EquiCoat Body Wash Shampoo
Mane & Tail Detangler
Coat Cleaner
Coat Enhancer
Hair & Hoof Moisturizer
Coat Finisher

ATH Science, Inc.

www.equiscentials.com 952-226-4192 (phone & fax)



Purchase any of our products at a location nearest you

- Ace Tack
- Belle Plaine Country Store
- St. Croix Saddlery
- Stone Ridge Equestrian
- Oasis Equestrian Center
- Houle's Feed & Tack
- Pleasant Hills Saddlery
- The Loft Tack Store
- Peterson's Country Mill
- CVR Pet & Western Supply
- Blairview Saddle Shop
- Huuf & Paw

Dealer, Store, Groom, and Training Barn
Inquiries welcome.