

the quarterly journal of wholistic equine care

Natural HORSE

M A G A Z I N E

dedicated to your horse

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AGE by TEETH:
What Counts,
What Doesn't**

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LOCKED OUT:
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Does My Horse Need A Bath?

by Stefanie Reinhold

Photos by Nancy McCurdy



How to take a bath. Step 1...



Step 2...



Step 3...

Generally, horses do not need baths. But we know that wild horses take frequent baths in streams and ponds and make it quite a social event. (See the documentaries about “Cloud”, www.thecloudfoundation.org).

We all love a clean horse, and while you can feel free to play with and enjoy water with your horse, temperature permitting, there is a limit to how often you should ‘bathe’ your horse. *For the purpose of this article, let’s define ‘bathing’ as a process where shampoo or horse wash products are used to wash the entire horse.*

We can turn bathing our horse into a pleasurable and bonding experience if we consider a few aspects that make bathing fun and get the desired results:

Teach your horse to love his bath

Horses who have learned to enjoy their bath will find this time a relaxing, bonding experience. It is no fun for either of you to rush through the process and not be able to get the desired results. So first things first: Take the time to teach your horse to trust and enjoy this process.

Pick the right time and place

Bathing a horse in a rush, in a strange environment or during a busy time at the barn will make for an unpleasant, rushed experience and rob you of a chance to use this as bonding time.

The air temperature and available amenities (wash rack, hitching post, suitable ground surface, water) are also important:

- Bathe your horse when you find the temperature pleasant enough to get wet yourself.
- Choose an area where you can freely splash about.
- Have all necessary tools at hand.
- Choose a time of day where you will not be rushed out of the wash rack by others.

Know the whys and hows

Why to bathe:

1. *It’s spring and the horse is nearly shedded out.* A good time for a good washing to remove any debris and dirt that may have built up during the winter months, when the grooming routine may be not quite as thorough due to a long coat.

2. *You are preparing for a show and your light colored horse has a stained coat.* Bathe the horse a day or two before the show, so he can build up his shine again.

How to bathe:

Even gentle shampoos or wash products rob the horse’s skin of the natural oils and in essence dull the coat. This is the nature of the lathering process. Bathing is not a substitute for good grooming and the motto should be: *As little as possible, and only as often as absolutely necessary!*



Step 4, check your work.



Step 5, splash any missed spots.



Step 6, rinse.

Tools needed:

1. Warm water
2. 2 deep buckets
3. Rubber curry
4. 2 large sponges
5. 1 small sponge
6. Shampoo or wash product
7. An old nylon or rope halter

8. Hose with a shower head
9. Sweat scraper
10. Towels
11. Cooling sheet
12. Medium stiff (i.e. natural cactus fiber) brush

The process:

- Wet the horse's forefeet first (as if he is entering a body of water) then all over, with clear warm water, using a sponge. Prepare soapy water in bucket number 2 and use the second sponge to thoroughly lather his entire body. Then work very dirty areas gently with a rubber curry (not on bony ridges). Use a smaller, clean sponge for the face. Work on the hind end, then tail and under the tail last. (If you have a hose with warm water, you will only need 1 bucket for soapy water.)
- Use a sweat scraper to scrape off the bulk of the lather. (Use a wrung out sponge or damp towel on areas that are too sensitive to scrape, e.g. head or loin.)
- Sponge the horse off with generous amounts of clean warm water.
- Repeat the last two steps until the water being scraped off the horse is clear.
- Use a clean medium stiff brush to brush the horse's coat in the direction of growth.
- Walk the horse with a cooling sheet until completely dry.

Tips:

- For sensitive horses, use a very warm, damp towel to clean head and ears instead. Put a very small amount of shampoo (one small cap) in a full bucket of warm water, wet and wring the towel, and gently rub/wipe those areas of the coat with it.
- If the weather does not permit bathing, you can use the warm, damp towel method to clean your horse's entire coat. Then brush and let him dry off under the cooling sheet.
- Never use conditioners on the horse's coat after bathing. The shine will come back naturally after a day or two of thorough grooming.
- During hot summer months: Enjoy bathing your horse without shampoo at any time. Water alone (even cold water right from the hose) will do wonders and feel good! 🍷

Enjoy your horse and be well!

About the author:

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