

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt, is grooming a brown horse. She is using a black grooming tool on the horse's face. The horse is wearing a brown leather halter with brass buckles. They are standing behind a dark wooden fence in a grassy field with trees in the background under a clear blue sky.

**COMPLETE**

# GROOMING GUIDE

By *HI Staff*

**HORSE**  
ILLUSTRATED®

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# GROOMING GUIDE

Grooming is an essential aspect of your horse's care.

**B**rushing, picking hooves and bathing are more than never-ending attempts at keeping your horse presentable—they are significant in maintaining his health and happiness. Brushing your horse's coat and picking his hooves are the two most significant grooming tasks and should be done daily.

Currying and brushing your horse improves his circulation and distributes the natural oils that bring out a healthy shine in his coat. Allowing dirt and debris to build up can cause skin irritation and promote the development of saddle sores or other skin ailments. Brushing your horse also gives you an opportunity to assess his overall body condition and check for any cuts, bumps, heat or swelling you may not notice just by looking at him.

It is important to pick out your horse's hooves every day as well to remove dirt and search for anything that could be causing him pain, such as stones, bruises or abscesses. One of the most common hoof issues is thrush, caused by a buildup of moisture and bacteria in the clefts (V-shaped grooves) of the frog that produce a foul odor and black debris. Diligent hoof cleaning and use of thrush treatment products when necessary can help prevent and manage the problem.

The time you spend grooming your horse also gives you a chance to assess his mood—which is especially helpful if you're preparing to ride—and improves your overall bond with him. The better you understand your horse, the easier it will be to detect when something is bothering him.

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"BRUSHING YOUR HORSE'S COAT AND PICKING HIS HOOVES ARE THE TWO MOST SIGNIFICANT GROOMING TASKS."

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## Grooming Tools

There is a wide array of grooming tools, from simple to specialty styles, but the most essential are the curry comb, hard and soft brushes, and the hoof pick.

### Curry Comb

The curry comb is a useful grooming tool that comes in a variety of shapes. It is typically made of plastic or rubber with short teeth arranged in a circular pattern. Select a rubber or soft, flexible plastic curry comb that will contour to your horse's body. Hard plastic curries can be uncomfortable for some horses. Metal curry combs should not be used



as regular grooming tools, although they can be helpful with spring shedding and for keeping your brushes clean.

### Hard Brush

Also called a stiff brush or dandy brush, the hard brush is used to remove large dirt particles and dander picked up by the curry comb.



### Soft Brush

The purpose of the soft brush is to pick up fine dust and dander on the surface of your horse's coat, and to polish the hair to a nice shine.



### Hoof Pick

Regardless of whether or not your horse wears shoes, it is important to pick out his feet daily and before every ride.

Put all of your grooming tools in a small bucket or portable tote and you're ready to get to work.



LESLIE POTTER PHOTOS

## A CLEAN SWEEP

It's important to periodically clean your brushes while grooming your horse so dirt and dust don't get redistributed over his body—scraping them against a metal curry comb will do the trick. You also need to occasionally disinfect your brushes in a diluted solution of bleach or mild dish detergent to kill bacteria that grows over time.



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Safely secure your horse to cross-ties while you are grooming him.



## From Head to Hoof

Before you begin grooming your horse, put on his halter and secure him on cross-ties, or to a well-anchored hitching rail or wall hook with a quick-release knot.

### Feet First

Start with the all-important task of picking your horse's feet first. Facing your horse's tail, run the hand closest to him down his leg to the hoof; this is a good time to check for bumps, heat or swelling. Gently squeeze the chestnut or the area just above the fetlock to encourage your horse to pick up his hoof. If he doesn't pick up

Pick your horse's hooves from the heel toward the toe.



TARA GREGG PHOTOS



Move the curry comb in a circular motion to remove caked-on mud, dirt and dandruff from your horse's coat.

his hoof for you, lean into him so he shifts his weight off of that leg. Holding your horse's foot in the hand closest to his body, grab the hoof pick with your free hand and pick the dirt out starting at the heel and working toward the toe. A hoof pick with a small brush on the back will allow you to sweep away the loose dirt. The order in which you pick out the hooves is not important; however, if you stick to the same routine, your horse will get used to it and may be more inclined to pick up each successive hoof for you.

### **Curry Power**

Use the curry comb to remove any caked-on mud and bring up dust, dander and dried skin from the base of the coat. Move the comb in a circular motion with as much pressure as your horse will tolerate, starting at his neck and working toward his tail. Focus primarily on the large, muscled areas of your horse's neck, shoulders and hindquarters. Many horses enjoy the massage from the curry and will stretch their necks and lean into the

pressure. However, some horses are more sensitive and will become conditioned to resent grooming if you curry too vigorously or with too much pressure. Each horse is different, so gauge your horse's response and react accordingly.

### **The Brush Off**

After currying, use the hard brush. Begin at the top of your horse's neck and work your way back to the tail, using short, quick strokes. End each stroke by flicking the brush away from your horse to remove the dirt and debris brought to the surface with the curry comb. Use a moderate amount of pressure to be sure you are getting more than just the surface hairs. Again, most horses enjoy or at least willingly tolerate this, but more sensitive horses may get antsy. As with the curry, the hard brush is not for bony, sensitive areas. It is also not designed to be used on your horse's face, as the stiff bristles can be uncomfortable or even dangerous around his eyes.

Periodically use a metal curry comb to remove dirt buildup from the hard brush, but do not use it on your horse because it can scratch and irritate his skin. Never use a hard curry comb or brush on your horse's sensitive face; extra soft face brushes or grooming mitts are made for this purpose. Rubber grooming gloves can also be used to gently curry off mud from the face and lower legs.



### **Finishing Touches**

Finish your horse's coat with the soft brush to remove fine dust and debris from the surface. There are several degrees of stiffness available in the softer brushes. Plastic bristles will give you a firmer brush, while natural bristles will be softer. For everyday grooming, a brush of medium stiffness is usually best. For a show-ring shine, use a soft horsehair brush, also called a finishing brush. The bristles are very soft and will not penetrate beyond the outer surface of the

coat, so use it only when you have thoroughly groomed your horse with the curry and hard brush. The soft brush can be used on your horse's face and legs as well. You may also consider using a face brush on your horse's head. This is a small soft-bristled brush that is more nimble than the body brush, making it easier to reach the delicate spots around your horse's eyes and nostrils. Many horses like having their faces brushed and will even close their eyes and lower their heads. Move slowly around your horse's head so he doesn't get startled by sudden movements, and keep the brush away from his eyes. When you're finished brushing your horse, you can also rub him down with a dry, clean towel to collect dust and bring out a healthy shine.

### **Manes & Tails**

Whether your horse's mane and tail are sparse or luxuriously full, they need special attention. Proper care and maintenance will help thin hair grow thicker and longer, and keep equine tresses more manageable.

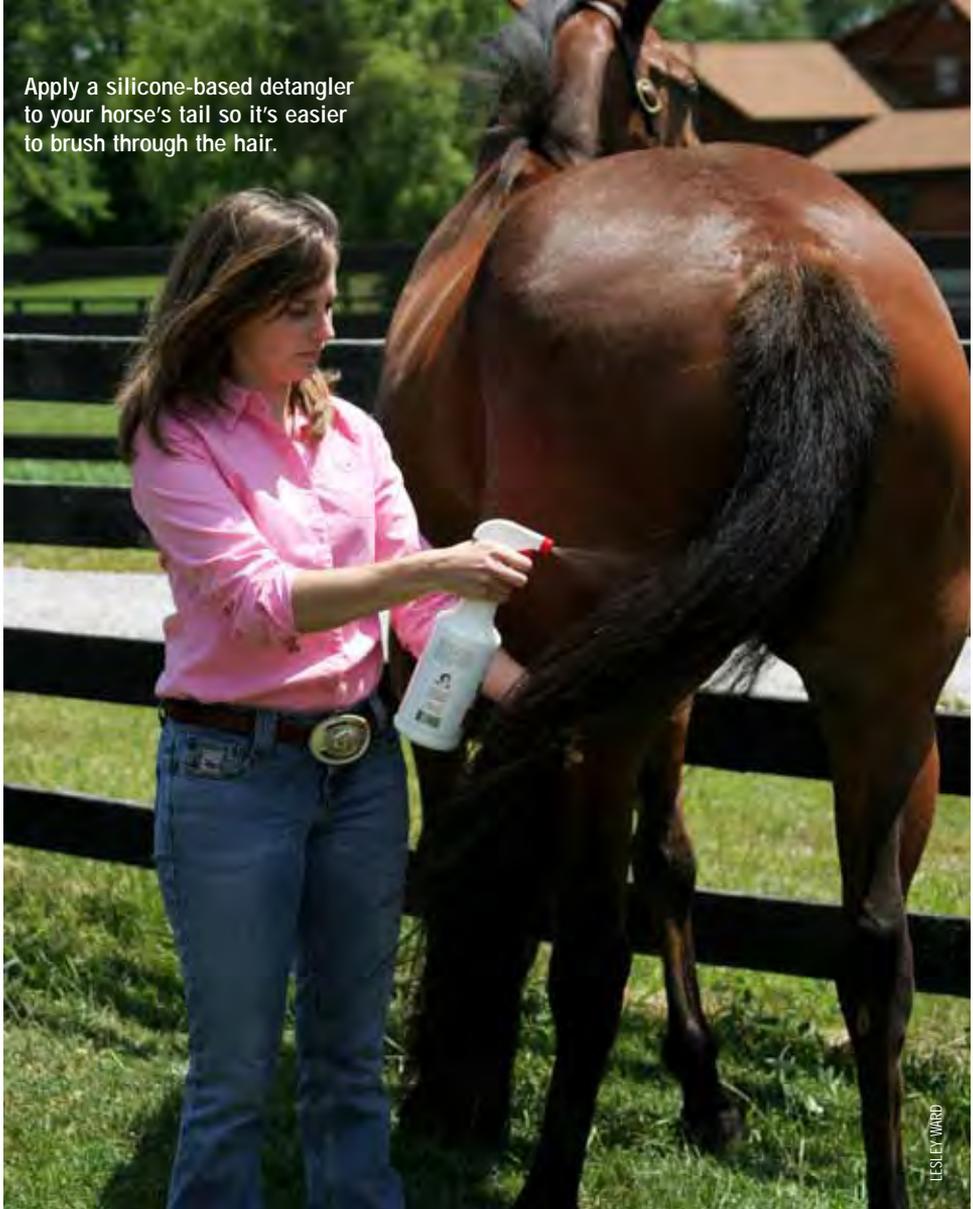
## **MORE GROOMING TOOLS**

- **Wide-tooth comb or hair brush:** to brush out snarls from the mane and tail while minimizing hair breakage.
- **Soft cloths or small towels:** for cleaning the face, ears and muzzle or removing fine dust and debris from the coat.
- **Metal pulling comb:** to keep your horse's mane short, tidy and manageable.



- **Coat polish spray:** to maintain the healthy shine of your horse's coat. Don't apply the spray where the saddle sits to prevent the tack from sliding.
- **Mane and tail detangler:** to prevent hair breakage while brushing out snarls.
- **Sponge:** to bathe your horse or clean away sweat after a tough workout.
- **Sweat scraper:** to remove the excess water from your horse's coat after bathing him.

Apply a silicone-based detangler to your horse's tail so it's easier to brush through the hair.



LESLIE WARD

### **Detangling**

If your horse comes in from the field with his mane and tail in a mess, begin with a thorough detangling. Maintain the hair during a couple of short sessions per week, rather than waiting for it to become a major project. If the hair is knotted, matted in dreadlocks, or just too long and thick, begin by spraying it thoroughly with a silicone-based detangler so it will

be easier to brush out. You will usually experience less hair breakage by using a plastic vented or paddle-style hairbrush or a wide-tooth comb. Begin at the ends of the hair and gradually brush out a little bit at a time. As you move from ends to roots, spray additional detangler as needed.

### **Picking by Hand**

If you want to spare the mane and tail as

much breakage as possible, you can carefully pick through them by hand. Starting with a small section, carefully pull the hair away from the tangle. Continue slowly, separating several hairs at a time, until you've worked your way through the entire mane and tail. This method takes patience and dedication, but it will pay off by allowing the hair to grow thicker over time. Brushes tend to yank out and break off more hair than this approach.

### **Banging a Tail**

When it comes to choosing a "hairstyle" for your horse, refer to your horse show or breed association's rule book. Some horses must be shown with long, natural tails, while others such as eventers and dressage horses usually have their tails "banged," or trimmed, straight across the bottom.

To bang a tail, have a friend hold an arm under your horse's tailbone to simulate how he will carry his tail when he is being ridden. Run your hands down the tail almost to the bottom (usually between the hocks and fetlocks), and use either scissors or a pair of clippers to make a straight cut.

Pull snarls out of your horse's tail by using your fingers, working with small sections at a time. This will minimize hair breakage.



LESLEY WARD

## THAT'S A WRAP

If your horse's tail needs time to grow, or you want to keep it clean and snarl-free for a show, consider using a tailbag. The skirt of your horse's tail easily fits into the bag, which attaches below the tailbone. Never wrap it around the tailbone as

it could compromise blood circulation. You can braid the hair to prevent it from getting tangled inside. Be sure to check and redo the tailbag weekly.

You'll need to make sure your horse is protected from pesky flies. Many tailbags have tassels at the end so a horse still has a defense against biting insects.

## Pulling the Mane

The most natural and traditional method of shortening a mane is to pull it. The process isn't painful, but some horses object to having their manes pulled, so there are some grooming tools designed to cut manes with a natural edge (as opposed to the blunt cut of scissors). If you need to braid your horse's mane for shows, however, you will most likely need to thin it down while shortening it, which means it will need to be pulled.

Work with a small section of hair that measures about 1 inch across. Run your fingers down to the longest few hairs at the bottom and tease the rest of the hair back toward the roots with a small metal mane comb. You can wear rubber gloves for a better grip on the hair. When all but a few hairs are teased back, wrap them around the comb and quickly yank them out. It may take a few sessions to get your horse accustomed to mane pulling, so never do more than he can tolerate in order to keep things as pleasant as possible for him. If he is resistant, just do a few sections each day, pulling as few hairs as possible. You will need to keep up with mane pulling every few weeks, however, or it will become unruly and make for a very long task the next time.

## Training Braids

To train your horse's mane to lie over to one side (traditionally the right), you can braid it. First, wet and comb the hair. You may add spray gel or a mane-braiding product for additional grip. Separate the hair into 1- or 1½-inch sections, and firmly braid each section downward, finishing with a small elastic designed for manes. Leave the braids in for a few days, and

when you comb them out, the hair should stay trained to that side for a number of days or weeks.

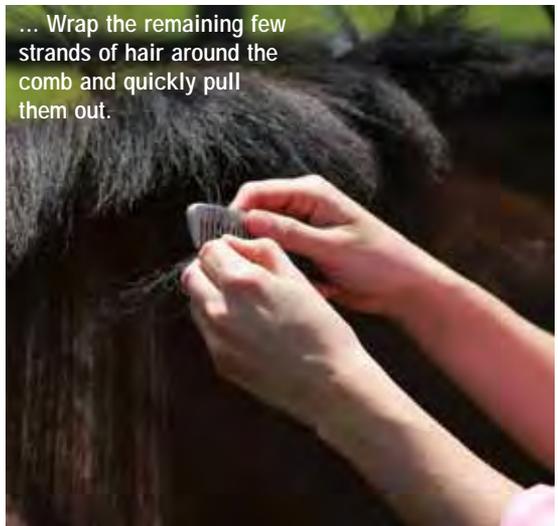
## Bridle Path

When you've finished pulling the mane, this is usually a good time to trim your horse's bridle path. The hair grows very quickly and will need to be maintained frequently. Beginning just behind the ears, use either scissors or clippers to crop a 1-inch section of mane as short as you can. It is better to begin

Hold a 1-inch wide section of hair in one hand and tease it upward with the mane comb in the other hand ...



... Wrap the remaining few strands of hair around the comb and quickly pull them out.



LESLEY WARD PHOTOS

Use scissors or clippers to trim a 1-inch section of your horse's bridle path just behind his ears.



LESLEY WARD



Make sure you have all the tools you will need to bathe your horse within reach.



ELIZABETH MOYER

conservatively, since bridle paths have a tendency to extend after each trim. If you have an Arabian or ride saddleseat, bridle paths are often cut much longer to accentuate the neck.

## Bathing

Horses don't need regular baths, but it's

good to give them a thorough washing once in a while. Brushing alone can't remove all the dirt and dander that builds up on the coat and in the mane and tail. Before you begin bathing your horse, safely secure him on the cross-ties in the wash rack, if one is available. Another option is to have a friend hold your horse, but she needs to be willing to get a little wet!

### Stocking the Wash Rack

There are a few important tools you'll need to wash your horse. Make sure you have a sponge, water bucket and access to a hose. A rubber mitt is an optional tool for scrubbing your horse's coat.

Place your shampoo, conditioner and any other tools you may need within reach. A sweat scraper is helpful afterward to remove the excess water from your horse's coat. Remember to

Get your horse accustomed to the water by spraying his legs before moving up his body.



Once you've wet your horse's body, start scrubbing with the soap and sponge.



LESLEY WARD PHOTOS

use the sweat scraper only on well-muscled areas, including the neck, shoulders and hindquarters.

### **Lather, Scrub, Rinse**

Before you lather up your horse's body, start with the mane and tail so you can wash away the soap that runs down his neck and legs when you scrub his coat.

If you're using a hose, put a nozzle on the end that will allow you to keep the water at a low pressure. Start spraying your horse's legs first to let him get used to the water, and slowly work up the neck to the mane. You can also squeeze a wet sponge over the mane to get it wet. Use either method for wetting the tail or dunk it in a bucket of water.

Use your fingers to work the shampoo into the mane and tail and scrub dirt away from his crest and dock. Rinse out all of the shampoo and apply a small

## SCRUB-A-DUB-DUB

Bathing your horse is an important part of the grooming process, but don't get overzealous. Bathing too often can cause your horse's skin and hair to dry out, and frequent exposure to soap and water can strip his coat of its natural oils. Dry skin will become irritated, and hooves can weaken over time from repeated wet and dry cycles.

amount of conditioner if you choose to. Thoroughly rinse the hair again.

You're now ready to wash your horse's body. Wet his entire body with a hose or sponge. Next, apply soap directly to the sponge or add a couple of dollops to a bucket of clean, warm water and dip the sponge into the lather. You may need to reload your sponge with shampoo several

times. After you've worked your horse's coat into a soapy lather, rinse thoroughly.

Most horses don't like to have water sprayed directly on their faces, so use a damp towel to clean around your horse's face and ears.

### **No Cold Showers**

Weather is an important element to consider when bathing your horse. If the temperature is above 50 degrees Fahrenheit and the wind isn't too strong, your horse should be fine.

The winter months usually aren't conducive to bathing, but if it's necessary, make sure you do it in an enclosed space, preferably with an overhead heater and warm water. Dry your horse completely with towels and have coolers ready for him when you're done bathing. An alternative to a full bath is to soak a towel in hot water (wring out the excess water) and wipe your horse down to pick up the surface layer of dust from his coat.

Grooming your horse daily and giving him a bath when necessary will help keep him healthy and happy. Use this time to strengthen your bond with him and get to know what is normal for him, mentally and physically, so you'll be better able to detect any health issues that might arise. **HI**



Thoroughly rinse your horse to remove soap residue that could cause skin irritation if left to dry.



Use the sweat scraper to remove excess water from your horse's coat after bathing him.

# HORSE

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