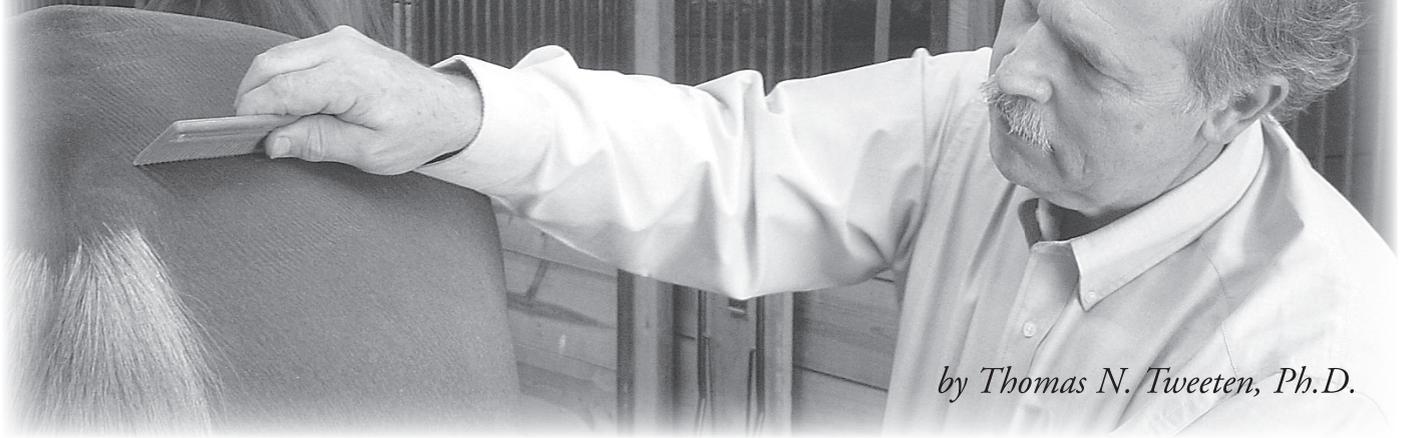


Grooming in the Fall

Horses shed twice a year.



by Thomas N. Tweeten, Ph.D.

Over the past several weeks as I have cleaned up my horses for riding, I have noticed that the summer coats are beginning to shed out.

It is easy to see the shedding process in the early spring when the horses start losing their winter coats as the days start becoming noticeably longer. However, it is not so obvious in the late days of July and into August when the summer coat begins to shed.

I believe it is important to groom these summer coats out in a way similar to how I work out the winter coats during early spring. The main difference is that we don't have to deal with the fine down undercoat that the winter coat has. It is important to effectively remove the loosening summer hair, as it can still provide a heat barrier if it is not groomed out.

For those of you who have had a chance to see one of my clinics on grooming over the years, you know I like to share with you a rather different approach to the grooming process. Please note that I use the same grooming technique year round, not just during shedding seasons. This is because grooming to me is a way to get a better feel for my horses before I begin working with them.

I start by using my hands to gently go over the horse to look for sore spots or warm areas that I did not notice leading my horse from the stall or paddock area. Using my hand with a gentle massage action over the body will quickly reveal any problem areas if they are there. The horse will respond with a sudden skin twitch to a more notable reaction like a movement away from me or an attempt to bite or kick. Getting a more reactive response then requires a more thorough examination, possibly from your veterinarian, equine chiropractor or massage therapist. A gentle skin twitch may signal that you are tickling the horse, there is a bruise from a bite or kick, or there has been some pressure from improperly fitting tack.



I then begin grooming with my currycomb. As I have often explained, this tool is simply a mane-and-tail comb — but NEVER used on manes and tails, only the body of the horse. Why do I consider it so effective? It is a relatively inexpensive tool that can accomplish so many grooming tasks. First of all, it works as a shedding tool without damaging the hair. Because many of us are still riding or showing our horses into the fall season, we should try to minimize hair damage caused by tearing or scraping across the coat. In addition, damaged coats will require excessive use of grooming chemicals to counteract the dullness caused by the scraping tools.

I use a short, sweeping motion with the currycomb, similar to the motion I use with my stiff dandy brush. Remember, we want to curry, not comb the body of the horse. Always curry or brush in the direction the hair lies on the coat. This same motion also tends to massage the area as well, helping the horse to relax. Once the body has been curried, I quickly remove excess filth with my dandy brush. I use a soft jelly curry or rubber curry to go over the lower legs to remove filth. I like to get as much filth removed dry. Wet mud or manure will more easily stain the hair.

As in the winter, the summer coats tend to be a bit dry and static electricity can build up while grooming, especially with the use of plastic grooming tools. I like to then spritz the coat with a light, preferably natural, moisturizer. Stay away from products that have oils or heavier silicone ingredients, as they will either

attract dust or dry the coat.

I like to clean the face of the horse by dampening a cloth with the same natural moisturizer product, then gently toweling the face and poll area. Make sure your horses are not spooked by a towel around their head area.

At this point, I use a pick to clean the hooves. If they feel dry, I apply a light hoof cream. I avoid heavier, oil-based ointments that will pick up soil and grit. This combination can create an abrasive action on the hoof wall as the horse passes through grassy pasture or trail areas.

My horses are now ready to work. If I am preparing my horse to show, I will use a finer, softer finishing brush to remove any remaining dust. I then will use a leave-in coat polish, consisting of hair conditioners and light silicone materials to give the coat a bright shine. Oils and heavy silicone sprays will attract filth and limit the ability of the coat to transfer heat from the horse's body.

I am a firm believer in grooming the horse after a workout as well. Simply, it is a way to say thank you to my horses. It also helps me to relax and reflect on what was accomplished or may be done better.

At this time of the year, our horses are often quite sweaty after their workouts. In my years of working with horses, I have found many horses do not like to be hosed down. The sound of the water rapidly coming from the hose seems to bother many horses. I have noted that using a hose with a very gentle spray nozzle may work. I have switched to using a sprinkler can. Horses

that fear the hose will stand quietly while I gently sprinkle water over their necks and shoulders.

Here again I use the currycomb. The back side of the comb works well as a squeegee. After several sprinklings, I remove the excess water using the squeegee action of my currycomb. I then use the currycomb to groom out the horse. Again, the massage action of the comb helps the horse to relax. With the horse's body still warm, the currycomb can then be used to more easily work the natural oils of the skin out onto the coat. I often use a coat moisturizer to aid in the cooling process. I like the products that have citronella to help minimize problems with insects. Once cooled down, the horse is ready to be put back into its paddock or stall. Often our horses are so relaxed they won't even roll.

It is important to keep in mind that horses do shed their coats in late summer. Choosing tools and grooming materials that meet the needs of caring for the horse is as important as properly fitting tack. Effective grooming is an integral part of good horse care that will lead to a horse that is comfortable. You will then more easily get collection. 🐾

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