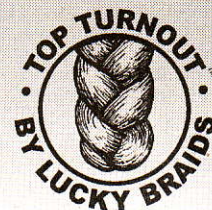


Ruthann's Evolved Grooming Tips™

Grooming, Etc.

© by Ruthann Smith



Tails

Big and natural tails sing of quality care. It is best to gently pick tails with your fingers to organize the hair. If you use a comb or brush, always hold the tail to protect the roots. Then work your way up the tail, gently brushing below your grip. If you hit a knot, work it out from the bottom. As the hair is organized, grip higher on the tail and brush from the bottom up.

For tails to grow well, they need to move freely. This helps the oils move down the shaft and stimulates the roots. We never use tail bags.

Keep tails clean to avoid breakage and rubbing. Careful, though! If you use products that dry them out, such as most shampoos (note the salt/sodium chloride they use to make the lather) and detanglers (which coat and suffocate hair), you make the tails brittle and breakable. Tea tree oil is a natural antiseptic that can kill irritants. However, there are 20 grades of tea tree oil. So, choose quality products to fortify your horse's coat and promote healthy tails.

I advocate an evolved paradigm for the best tail care. If you use a shampoo saturated with aloe vera, simply comb the tail when wet and then fluff it up. You won't need a detangler, which damages tails. If there is mud or dust in the tail, use an enzyme spray to clean the tail to gently comb or brush it. This will promote the biggest, fluffiest, shiniest natural tails.

Yellowed Tails

Detanglers generally coat tails to make them easier to comb or brush. However, this not only suffocates the hair, it also locks in the dirt and urine. A quality enzyme can break the bond between the tail and impurities, leaving it bright. Douse the tail with the enzyme and let it sit to eat away at the dirt-hair bond. If it is an old stain, you may need to tie the tail up to keep it wet longer and repeat. When an enzyme dries it dies. So, keep the hair wet with the enzyme to continue whitening. I have never met a tail I could not whiten in this way.

Choose a fortifying shampoo to keep the tail bright and clean. Steer clear of products with sodium chloride, blue or petroleum products. Look for one saturated with aloe vera, generous amounts of vitamin E and medical-grade tea tree oil to condition hair and skin while eliminating irritants and fungus. And, enjoy a big, fluffy white tail.

Stains

The best way to manage stains is not to use products that strip the coat's natural oils.

Most shampoos and stain removers, including alcohol, dry the coats. This leaves the hair porous and thirsty, grabbing onto the dirt. If a coat is moisturized and nourished, it is much easier to keep clean. The lack of products that don't strip the coats was the impetus for me to create the Lucky Braids Coat Care products.

If you use a stain remover product, I recommend an enzyme that gently breaks the bond between the hair and dirt without drying out the coat.

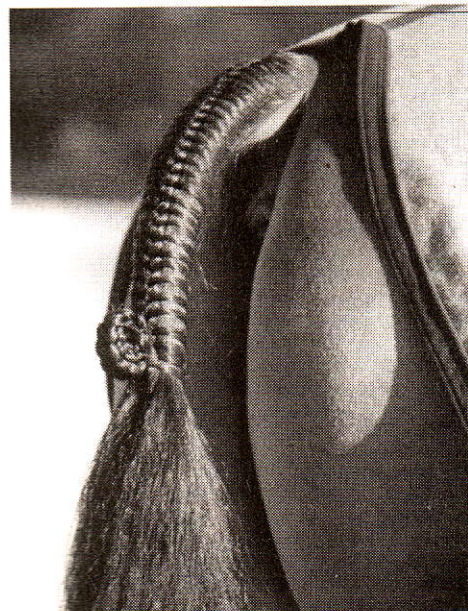


PHOTO: LUCKYBRAIDS.COM

Big and natural tails sing of quality care.

Bridle Fit

Measure your bridle's throat latch fit with your fist. The strap needs to be loose enough to allow a big fist between it and the horse's face. This will allow the horse to turn his head and breathe freely.

If a noseband is too low, it interferes with the horse's breathing. If he can't breathe well, he is sure to resist. While I don't believe people intentionally cut off their horse's air, I see it happen all the time. Drop nosebands need to sit high, not on the soft tissue of the nose.

The horse needs to be able to do his job. Check your bridle fit to keep your horse comfortable and happy to work.

Saddle Pads

Be sure your saddle pad is always pulled way up into the pommel of the saddle. You need the space between

the pad and the withers to allow the horse to move his shoulders freely without pain.

Stretching

Once you tighten the girth or cinch, stretch the horse's legs to avoid pinching the skin. That is, ask the horse to give you his forearm, then pull it forward to stretch the skin out from under the girth. The horse may not understand what you are asking at first, but they generally like to do this. Just be careful not to let him put his leg through the lead, reins or other equipment. If you stretch the horse properly, it is another way to let him be comfortable at his job.

Scratches

Crud on a horse's heels is a fungus commonly referred to as scratches. They can get very, very sore. The good news is they are avoidable. The best prevention is to always be sure legs, ankles and heels are bone dry before you ever put a horse in a stall. The second thing you can do is use a quality shampoo that is not only anti-fungal but also saturated with aloe vera.

Be Picky

Picking your horse's feet often is very important to your horse's health. It can prevent thrush, stone bruises and drying of the hoof, which can lead to cracking. You should pick the horse's feet each time before taking the horse out of his stall or in from a paddock, and before and after work. Remember, no hoof no horse. So, pick their feet often. It will also help keep the barn aisle clean.

Shortening Manes

Whether you ride English or western, the objective of short manes is the same: The mane should create a clean line on neck. This compensates for any irregularities in the top line and lengthens the neck. This cannot be achieved with scissors. If you cut the mane, it does not sit flat on the neck. It is not able to maintain the clean line. I recommend pulling the hair out to thin the mane and teasing and cutting with a large clipper blade to shorten or clean up the line. If the mane is tapered, it will sit well on the neck.

Cooling Out

Those who rehabilitate horses have told me they believe 80 percent of lameness is caused by warming up and cooling out improperly. Warming up should be done slowly. Cooling out also takes time. The trick is not to let the horse get cold. The horse's kidneys are the most important part to keep warm. The kidneys are over

the flanks, just behind the saddle. If it is cold and you are walking out or even grooming, it is a good idea to keep the kidneys covered.

Calming Techniques

I use three handy ways to calm horses naturally and quickly.

1. Rub their eyes. If you cup your hand over the horse's eye and gently rub, it turns the most fearful aggressive to buttercups. This act is my favorite thing to do for horses.

2. Tap just below the forelock at a consistent and quick rhythm. Eventers do this to lower the heart rate before the vet check. Jumpers get this point cold lasered before big classes. It leaves them relaxed but clear-headed.

3. Pull their ears. If you cup your hand around the horse's ear, with your thumb pressed on the inside of the ear, and pull, horses relax.

These are handy things you can do while waiting at the ring, clipping or helping the vet.

Trimming White Legs

You want to trim legs for clean lines when you show. However, there is a point of diminishing returns. The hair protects the skin. It is an important tool to avoid scratches, scurf, sunburning and drying out. I see a lot of people making legs essentially bald, especially white ones. Without enough hair, skin is very vulnerable. Even though you see legs trimmed all around, it does not mean it is the best practice for the horses.

I advocate only trimming the back of the ankle and pastern, and the long hair up the tendon. I like to cut around the coronary band with scissors so the hair is not so short as to dry the hoof. Leaving hair long at the ergot on horses that show in boots helps wick moisture off legs to reduce fungus.

If you trim this way and totally dry the legs before putting the horse in the stall, you can avoid most problems.

Grooming Halters

Grooming halters are handy tools. I often see people groom in regular halters and clip the throat latch to the right side for grooming. While this allows you to clean the horse's face better, it is dangerous. If the horse puts his head down to scratch his leg or eat, he can put his hoof through the loop and consequently break his leg or neck. If you want to groom well, use a grooming halter. It is just a headstall and makes for easy access to the horse's face. If you do use a grooming halter, please remember that is for use in the barn and not for leading a horse outside. You want a full halter for that so if the horse pulls back he won't pull out of it. Safety pays. ■

© by Ruthann Smith

Ruthann's Evolved Grooming Tips™

Safety



Leading

Lazy leading can cause death and serious injury. No joke.

Here are things to keep in mind:

1. When holding the lead, never wrap it around your hand. If the horse pulls back, the lead will pull tight and can rip your fingers off. Instead, fold the length of the lead and grip around, rather than through, the folded lead.

2. Always lead a horse or pony with your right hand below the halter and the length of the lead in your left hand. Using two hands gives you some back-up should the horse bolt.

3. Your body position. Always stand at the horse's shoulder as you lead it. Ask your horse to walk up next to you and be consistent about it. That way, you can always keep one eye on the horse to anticipate his thoughts and movements in order to keep safe.

4. Never throw the length of the lead over your shoulder. I have personally heard of two people breaking their necks as the horse suddenly took off, and the lead hooked the person around the neck to break it and hurl them to their death.

Please be careful. If you always lead horses properly, you can avoid a host of dangerous circumstances.

Doorways

Always, always, always open a door fully before leading a horse through it. And be sure it won't swing closed. Open "wide enough" does not cut it – invariably a horse will hit his hip and scoot. I have seen this cause big gashes. Even if the door just brushes his hip, in the future that horse will rush through doors in fear. One day, he'll run someone over and hurt them. It will be your fault. Please be careful to avoid problems. Always open doors all the way before passing through them.

Gates

Gates can also be the root of dangerous habits, though there are simple and easy ways to troubleshoot.

First, always close gates. That is, if you are taking a horse out of the paddock, always turn to close the gate before walking away. This will keep loose horses from running through half-open gates and hurting themselves. It will also keep gates from swinging into passersby. Plus, closed gates look neater and keep the hinges in

better condition.

Second, when turning a horse out, always open the gate all the way, walk through it and turn the horse around to face the gate before quietly letting him go. This will help you manage the gate as well as not get kicked.

Cross Ties

Horses break their necks when they can't break loose from a tie. If a horse panics and sits back on the ties, you want the ties to break. While this is common knowledge, I most frequently see solutions wrought with myth.

Most importantly, you want the ties to break at the halter, not the wall. If the cross tie lets go at the wall, the length of the tie can swing to hit the horse, and maybe you, in the head.

I recommend putting thin cable ties or zip ties onto the halter. Set them in a small loop to hook the ties onto. Even if you put the cable tie on one side, most horses will relax if one side lets go.

When I am braiding a horse's mane, if there is no breakaway on the halter, I always tie yarn to the halter on the side I am braiding. That way, the tie will let go before sweeping me off the ladder.

Be sure the breakaways will break. Hay string is not a sure bet: The string does not have consistent properties and is not dependable. In fact, I have never seen it break when it should. In an emergency, you cannot reach a quick release snap. Turtle Snaps are smart, letting go at 400 pounds of pressure. There are Velcro based safety ties, but you better be very sure you have them set so they'll actually let go when they should.

Tying in a Stall or Trailer

Horses tied in stalls and trailers should be able to break loose. I have personally known horses that broke their necks for not being able to break loose while tied in stalls and trailers. It only takes two seconds for them to pull and snap their necks. That is why I would never tie a horse outside to a trailer. You'd want him to break loose, but not outside. And you certainly wouldn't want him to pull the trailer over on top of himself. I recommend Turtle Snaps or zip ties in the halter. Also, if the horse can reach another in the trailer, be careful. I have seen horses really beat up by others in transit. ■

Ruthann's Evolved Grooming Tips™

In The Stall

© by Ruthann Smith



Clean Water

Water is perhaps the single most important thing to a horse's health and well-being. It should be fresh daily to aid in digestion, body temperature regulation and cellular metabolism. Every day you should wipe the inside of the bucket with your hand and dump out all the water. I recommend washing buckets with soap and a brush once a week. Water needs to be clean to be tasty and encourage drinking.

Water Placement

Every choice regarding water should promote drinking. Buckets are best placed at the front of the stall as that is where horses tend to hang out while they watch the aisle. At the last Pan Am Games, a dressage horse from Trinidad had to get fluids twice. Later it occurred to me that his water was in the back of the stall. Had it been in the front, where he spent his time, I bet he would have been drinking much more.

Watering Schedule

Horses should always have plenty of clean water. Horses drink after eating. Watering after dinner and again at night helps assure they are comfy, warm and healthy all night.

Always note how much a horse is drinking. If he has stopped drinking he will get, or is, sick. So, keep tabs.

When shipping, offer horses water every five to seven hours. To encourage drinking, pour apple juice or Dengie Hi Fi into fresh water.

Hay

Shake loose each flake to make sure it is not moldy, dusty or containing dead animals. Moldy hay can kill a horse. Dusty hay should be wet to reduce coughing and bumps.

Hay should be placed under water buckets. This encourages horses to dunk their hay as they eat. As messy as it can be, this is the best practice for the horses as it aids digestion.

Bedding

The way to save money on bedding is to pick stalls often. Using less bedding just means you need to take more out, the horses are uncomfortable and there is

more impact on their legs as they stand on less cushion. Using mats is not a substitute for deep bedding. In fact, mats without ample bedding can promote injury. When a horse tries to stand up, it can slip and strain itself. I like to bed horses deeply (10 to 14 bags per stall) and pick the stalls several times a day. That way, I only have to add bedding once a week.

Urination

If your horse has been out of the stall for more than an hour, be sure to let him in the stall to urinate before bathing or other activities. Horses off the track are trained to urinate when they hear a particular whistle. Conditioning your horse to go at the sound is a handy way to keep him comfortable and save time as well. Whistle when he goes and soon he'll think to go when you whistle.

Snaps

Believe it or not, snaps often cause injuries. For example, if the horse gets his nose or eye caught on the lever it rips his flesh. Keep watch and you'll start to notice horses with scars on the edge of their nostrils. Those scars are likely from snaps. The solution is simple: When you hang your buckets, be sure all fasteners are positioned with the open side toward the wall. If the horse can't access the troublesome lever or edge of the opening, the risk of injury is minimized.

Hay Bags

Horses are built to eat off the ground. It is good for them. However, some grind their hay into the ground and people opt to hang hay bags. As neat as this can be, it can be very dangerous. Once the horse eats the hay, the bag sags. The horse wants more, paws and get his hoof through the net. This is a very ugly scene. The horse panics and flails himself all around. The solution is to enter the stall, with the horse blinded by fear hurling himself around, to cut him loose. This is to be avoided at all costs. And, it is easy to do. Just tie the bag very high. Loop the rope around the bottom and through the hook as many times as possible. The horse should have to reach up to eat when the bag is full. When it is empty, it should not hang below his chest. And, remember to place the hay near the water or put a bucket near the bag to aid digestion. ■