



How to Groom a Horse: Step-By-Step Guide | Mad Barn

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Published on: February 22, 2023

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Veterinary Review: [Dr. Christine Latham, Ph.D.](#)

Evidence Based: This article has 6 scientific references



[Benefits of Grooming](#) | [Schedule](#) | [Tools & Brushes](#) | [How to Groom](#) | [FAQ](#)

Key Insights

- A consistent grooming routine supports skin health, circulation, and early detection of

emerging issues

- A structured approach to coat, hoof, and mane care strengthens comfort and prevents avoidable irritation during work
- A well-organized grooming kit equipped with essential tools improves efficiency and protects sensitive areas
- A step-by-step process from hoof cleaning to final polishing encourages calm behaviour and strengthens horse-human rapport
- A mindful grooming session creates space for health checks that help identify small problems before they escalate

A proper **grooming routine** involves more than just knocking the dirt off your horse's coat before tacking up.

A well-groomed horse is a well-cared-for horse. Learning to groom your horse correctly and following a thorough daily grooming routine can significantly benefit their health and well-being.

Horse owners can also use this time to bond with their horses and check for signs of **health problems** that might need attention. But if you're new to caring for a horse, you might not know where to start.

Even if you're an experienced equestrian, this guide from a former **professional groom** can help you up your grooming game. While there are plenty of grooming tips and tricks, there are no shortcuts to a well-groomed horse.

This article will also discuss the tools every horse owner needs in their **grooming kit**. Keep reading to learn how to keep your horse happy and healthy with a comprehensive, step-by-step grooming guide.

Benefits of Grooming Your Horse

Regular grooming helps your horse look his best. A **shiny, gleaming coat** is a sign of a healthy horse and a source of pride for any horse owner. But the benefits of grooming your horse are more than skin deep.

Horse Health

Brushing may stimulate blood flow to the skin and spread natural oils throughout the coat. **Increased circulation** supports skin health, while natural oils condition hair and make your horse shine.

Removing debris from the coat and keeping skin clean also decrease the risk of common [skin diseases](#). Wet, dirty hair provides an ideal environment for bacterial growth.

Regular grooming also allows you to systematically check your horse's body for early signs of health issues or **skin conditions**. ^[1] Catching problems early means you can seek treatment before the condition becomes severe.

Hoof Health

Keeping hooves clean reduces the risk of hoof conditions such as [thrush](#). Picking out hooves is also an ideal time to **examine feet** for signs of other [hoof problems](#). [2]

Riding

Following a grooming routine before riding is especially important. Tacking up a dirty horse can lead to **chafing under equipment**, which causes discomfort for your horse during riding.

After a ride, a proper grooming routine allows horse owners to check for rubs or other signs of ill-fitting equipment. Grooming after riding also removes sweat, which can damage your horse's hair and lead to [coat fading](#).

Bonding

Horses living in a herd naturally groom each other to strengthen social relationships. [3] If your horse does not have access to [turnout](#) in a group, he might not have a chance to participate in **mutual grooming**.

Research shows that imitating natural grooming behaviours can reduce your horse's heart rate and **promote relaxation**. [4] These results suggest that grooming can increase the bond between horse and rider.

One study found that horses are sensitive to pet-directed speech from humans during grooming. [5] Other studies show that proper care and management, including grooming, can influence **horse-human relationships**. [6]

How Often Should you Groom your Horse?

You should always groom your horse **before each ride**. Pre-ride grooming avoids tack chafing due to a dirty coat and allows owners to check that their horses are happy and healthy before mounting.

Daily grooming is ideal for monitoring changes in your horse's health and catching problems as early as possible. However, daily grooming isn't practical for every horse owner.

On days you don't have time for an entire grooming session, try to run your hands and eyes over your horse's body to check for lumps, bumps, cuts, or swellings. Horses that aren't in work should be groomed at least **once weekly** to prevent skin and coat issues.

Blanketed horses might not get as dirty, but they still need their **blankets removed** regularly to check for skin problems developing underneath. For example, [blanketing](#) over wet or muddy skin may contribute to [rain scald](#).

While regular grooming promotes the production of **natural oils**, frequent bathing may strip them from

the horse's coat. Try to avoid [bathing your horse](#) with shampoo more than once per week.

Grooming Tools and Brushes

Plenty of **grooming products** marketed to horse owners claim to improve skin and coat condition. However, these products can't replace elbow grease and a complete set of basic [horse brushes](#).

Here is a list of essential items every horse owner needs in their **grooming kit**.

Hoof Pick with Brush

A **hoof pick** is a hooked tool used to clean the horse's feet. The metal hook removes mud and debris stuck in the [collateral grooves](#) or packed against the sole. Some hoof picks also have stiff bristles for brushing dirt off the foot.

Curry Comb

A **curry comb** has short teeth, nubs, or serrated ridges that help loosen debris from the coat and massage the skin. These grooming tools are usually made of plastic or rubber.

Metal [curry combs](#), sometimes called shedding blades, help clean other brushes but are generally too hard for grooming horses. However, they are useful for shedding out winter coats. Shedding blades can be used with care to remove excess hair from the flanks, neck, and other smooth areas, but should be avoided in areas such as the legs and joints to prevent injury.

Curry combs with large, firm teeth are suitable for removing mud and [massaging](#) large muscles. Fine curry combs with soft teeth are better for more sensitive areas such as the legs and head.

Stiff Brush

A **stiff brush** has long, hard bristles designed to remove the debris loosened by the curry comb. Horse owners also refer to this tool as a dandy brush. The hairs are typically plastic, but more expensive brushes use natural materials such as rice stems.

Medium Brush

A brush with medium-firm bristles can serve a similar purpose to a stiff brush if horses have sensitive skin. **Medium brushes** are also ideal for removing finer particles of dirt and dust. They can have long or short bristles.

Soft Brush

A **soft brush** smooths the hair and distributes oils throughout the coat at the end of a grooming

session. These brushes promote a shiny finish, and most horses find them soothing. A soft brush with short bristles is called a body brush.

These brushes are often made with **natural fibres** such as horse hair. A metal curry comb helps remove dust from soft brushes after use.

Face Brush

A **face brush** is similar to a body brush but smaller. The size makes it easy to use around the horse's face and ears. These brushes have even softer bristles than a body brush.

Mane and Tail Brush or Comb

Horse owners can use brushes or combs to detangle their horse's **mane and tail**. Mane and tail brushes are similar to human hairbrushes and are helpful for thick manes and tails. But using a plastic wide-tooth comb instead is often better for preventing hair breakage.

Sponges, Towels, and Grooming Mitts

A **soft sponge** helps clean more delicate areas of the body, including the eyes, nose, and lips. Horse owners can also use towels to wipe these areas and apply products to the rest of the body.

Grooming mitts made of sheepskin remove dust and perform touch-ups after grooming. Some horses may prefer sheepskin grooming mitts over other brushes on sensitive areas.

Scissors and Clippers

Scissors and clippers help keep your horse trimmed and tidy. These tools help maintain unruly hairs on the legs, ears, and face. You'll also need a pair of scissors if you plan to bang your horse's tail or trim his mane.

Manes are most commonly trimmed by "pulling", to both thin the mane and reduce the length, but scissors can be helpful if large knots that are impossible to extract.

Long body hair is best trimmed using clippers, although thorough grooming and shedding are often enough to maintain a healthy coat length and thickness in most horses. [Body clipping](#) is more common in show horses and heavily exercised horses that may benefit from clipping to prevent sweat accumulation during seasons when horses cannot be rinsed after exercise.

Detanglers and Conditioners

Detangling products help horse owners brush through knots in their horse's mane and tail while minimizing breakage. Coat conditioners can help **moisturize** the skin and coat, but they can't fully replace the benefits of natural oils and regular grooming.

How to Groom a Horse: Step-by-Step

Here's a **step-by-step guide** for horse owners to follow for a basic grooming routine. Regular grooming sessions take at least 20 minutes, depending on how dirty your horse is.

1. Pick Hooves

After securing your horse, **picking his hooves** is the first step in any daily grooming routine. Teach your horse to lift his hooves when asked and [stand quietly](#) while you handle his feet.

Support the lifted foot with the hand nearest the horse and use the metal hook of the hoof pick to remove caked mud, rocks, and other debris from his feet. Work from **heel to toe** and check for abnormalities as you clean the area.

If your horse **wears shoes**, take the time to check they aren't loose. The brush side of the hoof pick can help clean debris along the edges, sides, and soles.

Picking hooves first ensures that you remember this essential task and gives the feet time to dry out before applying hoof dressing or other products.

2. Curry Horse's Body

Start currying your horse's body using a curry comb to loosen dirt, loose hair, and caked-on mud. Begin at the top of the neck and work in a **circular motion** across the large muscles of your horse's body towards his hind end.

A standard **rubber curry** is ideal for the neck, shoulder, back, chest, barrel, and hind quarters. Avoid currying directly over the bone. A hard plastic curry can help break up large mud patches, while a shedding blade helps remove loose hair during shedding season.

Pay attention to your horse's reactions during this step. Some horses enjoy **vigorous currying**, while others prefer more gentle pressure. If your horse appreciates the massage effect of currying, they may like a curry comb with large rubber teeth.

3. Curry Face and Legs

Soft, flexible rubber curry combs with **fine teeth** are more comfortable for the horse's face and legs. Use light pressure on these sensitive areas to loosen mud and hair. Some horses also prefer a softer curry comb for their girth area, belly, and spine.

4. Remove Debris with a Hard Brush

Currying will bring dandruff, dirt, and loose hair to the surface of the horse's coat. Next, remove the debris with a stiff **dandy brush**. Work again from the front of the horse to the back, brushing in the direction of the hair.

Short, quick strokes are the most effective for lifting dirt away from the horse's body instead of pushing it back into the hair. Most horses tolerate stiff brushes on the large muscles of their neck, back, and hindquarters.

5. Lift Dust with Medium Brush

Medium brushes with dense bristles can help lift large debris off more sensitive areas such as the face and legs. However, these brushes are best used after a stiff brush to remove finer dust particles from your horse's body.

Use longer strokes with a medium brush in the direction of hair growth and **flick your wrist** to lift dust away from the horse's body.

6. Comb through Mane and Tail

Applying a detangler to your horse's tail before combing it will help the brush glide through the hair more easily and limit breakage. Use detangler sparingly, as needed, on the horse's mane before riding, as some products can make the [reins](#) slippery.

To brush your horse's tail, stand to the side and gently grab the tail in your hand. Use a wide-toothed comb to carefully work through the hair from the bottom to the top. Firmly grasping the hair just above where you're working will avoid tugging.

Use your hands to work through tangles and avoid forcing a knot out. Excessive or aggressive brushing can lead to breakage. Some owners use scissors to keep their horse's **tail trimmed** above the fetlocks so they can't step on it and rip hairs out.

7. Polish with Soft Body Brush

Use a soft **body brush** as one of the last steps to polish your horse. Brushing your horse's mane and tail may have released some dirt onto his coat, which the soft brush can help remove.

Long, sweeping strokes in the direction of the hair will help remove the final layer of dust and **distribute natural oils** for a shiny coat. A sheepskin grooming mitt can also help add a final polish, and a face brush is ideal for smoothing hair around the eyes and ears.

8. Wipe Eyes and Nose

Horses can get crud around their eyes and nose. Use a clean, soft towel or sponge to wipe these areas gently. You can also use towels and sponges to **clean delicate areas** around your horse's dock and groin.

9. Apply Products

Wait to apply **coat conditioners** after you finish brushing your horse. If your horse is dusty, these products can bring more dust and debris to the coat surface.

A moisturizing conditioner can help keep your horse's coat in good condition, especially if your horse

gets **frequent baths** that remove natural oils. Spray conditioners evenly over your horse's body and use a soft body brush, grooming mitt, or towel to distribute.

Other products, such as baby oil, can add shine and moisturize your horse's nose and mouth. Ask your veterinarian about selecting **safe products** for your horse's skin.

Adding a [fat supplement](#) to your horse's diet can also support skin health and coat shine. Fat may promote **sebum production** in the horse's skin, which gives the coat a shiny appearance.



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- Skin & coat condition
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Hoof dressings can help support your horse's hooves depending on the season and climate. Talk to your [farrier](#) to find out if they recommend one for your horse.

10. General Health Check

Whenever you groom your horse, carefully check for any signs of **injury or illness**. Minor cuts can become infected and lead to bigger problems without proper management. And any abnormal swellings, discharge, or behaviours can be a sign of underlying issues.

Contact your veterinarian if you notice anything concerning while grooming your horse. Even if you don't have time for an entire grooming session, a quick **daily once-over** can help catch minor issues before they become serious.

Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some frequently asked questions about horse grooming:

Regular horse grooming supports healthy skin and coat condition by removing dirt, spreading natural oils, and helping owners notice problems early. Horses in regular work should be groomed before every ride to reduce tack irritation and check for injuries. Even horses not being ridden benefit from grooming several times weekly to prevent buildup of mud, dandruff, sweat, and debris that can contribute to skin issues.

[How often should a horse be groomed to maintain healthy skin and coat condition?](#)

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oils, and helping owners notice problems early. Horses in regular work should be groomed before every ride to reduce tack irritation and check for injuries. Even horses not being ridden benefit from grooming several times weekly to prevent buildup of mud, dandruff, sweat, and debris that can contribute to skin issues.

What grooming tools should every horse owner keep in a grooming kit?

A complete equine grooming kit should include a hoof pick, curry comb, stiff brush, medium brush, soft body brush, face brush, and a mane and tail comb or brush. Sponges, towels, grooming mitts, scissors, and clippers are also useful for cleaning sensitive areas and tidying hair. Detanglers and coat conditioners can support grooming, but regular brushing remains the most important part of coat care.

Why is grooming important before riding a horse?

Pre-ride horse grooming helps prevent dirt and debris from causing rubbing or discomfort under tack. Brushing also gives owners a chance to inspect the horse for cuts, swelling, loose shoes, or sore areas before mounting. Cleaning sweat, mud, and loose hair from the coat improves comfort during exercise and helps reduce skin irritation in areas where saddles, girths, and other equipment make contact.

How do I groom my horse?

A proper horse grooming routine usually begins with picking out the hooves, followed by currying the body to loosen dirt and hair. Stiff and medium brushes remove debris and dust, while mane and tail care comes next. Finishing with a soft body brush, wiping the eyes and nose, and checking for injuries helps leave the coat clean, polished, and comfortable for the horse.

How long does it take to groom a horse?

A thorough horse grooming session generally takes at least 20 minutes, although heavily soiled horses may require more time. Grooming duration depends on factors such as coat condition, mud buildup, shedding season, and whether mane and tail care are included. Horses with winter coats or thick tails often need additional brushing to remove loose hair and tangles without causing unnecessary breakage or discomfort.

Can grooming help me detect health problems in my horse?

Daily horse grooming helps owners identify cuts, swelling, heat, skin irritation, hoof problems, and other signs of illness before they become more serious. Running hands over the horse's body during grooming can reveal abnormalities that may not be visible from a distance. Regular checks under blankets, around tack areas, and along the legs and hooves are especially useful for spotting early changes that require veterinary attention.

What type of brush is used on sensitive areas of a horse?

Sensitive areas on a horse are best groomed with softer brushes and flexible rubber curry combs that use gentle pressure. Face brushes with soft bristles work well around the eyes, ears, and muzzle, while

medium brushes are often more comfortable for the legs and belly. Using stiff brushes too aggressively on bony or delicate areas can cause discomfort and make some horses resistant to grooming.

How should a horse's mane and tail be brushed to avoid hair breakage?

Careful mane and tail grooming helps reduce hair breakage by working through tangles slowly and using the right tools. Many owners use a wide-tooth comb and apply detangler sparingly before brushing. Starting at the bottom of the tail and working upward helps loosen knots gradually. Holding the hair above the section being combed also prevents pulling on the roots and reduces discomfort for the horse.

Should horses be bathed often?

Frequent bathing can strip natural oils from a horse's coat, even though occasional baths help remove sweat and dirt. Most horses do not need shampoo baths more than once weekly unless they are heavily exercised or prepared for showing. Regular brushing is usually more effective for maintaining coat condition, while excessive bathing may contribute to dry skin, dull hair, and irritation in some horses.

Why is hoof cleaning important?

Routine hoof cleaning supports equine hoof health by removing packed mud, stones, and debris that can trap moisture or contribute to conditions such as thrush. Picking out the feet also allows owners to inspect the soles, frogs, and shoes for signs of injury or loose hardware. Cleaning hooves daily is especially important for horses living in wet conditions or working regularly under saddle.

Can grooming strengthen the bond between horse and owner?

Horse grooming can strengthen the bond between horses and owners by creating calm, consistent physical interaction that many horses find relaxing. Research suggests that grooming may lower heart rate and imitate natural social grooming behaviours seen within herds. Spending quiet time grooming also helps horses become more comfortable with handling while allowing owners to learn their horse's preferences, sensitivities, and normal behaviour patterns.

What are the most common grooming mistakes?

Common horse grooming mistakes include skipping hoof care, brushing too aggressively on sensitive areas, and tacking up before removing dirt and sweat from the coat. Some owners also rely too heavily on grooming products instead of thorough brushing. Failing to check under blankets, ignoring minor cuts or swelling, and roughly brushing tangled tails can all contribute to discomfort, coat damage, or missed health concerns.

Summary

Consistent grooming routines play an important role in maintaining your horse's skin, coat, and hoof health while giving owners a daily opportunity to spot emerging problems. Grooming also supports

comfort under tack and strengthens the horse–human bond through regular handling and contact.

- Grooming promotes circulation, spreads natural oils, reduces skin disease risk, and helps identify health issues early
- Clean hooves reduce the likelihood of thrush and provide a chance to assess shoes, soles, and hoof condition
- Pre- and post-ride grooming prevents chafing, removes sweat, and helps detect equipment rubs or soreness
- A complete grooming kit includes picks, curry combs, various brushes, mane and tail tools, sponges, and conditioners to support thorough daily care

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