



MAKE YOUR HORSE'S COAT BEAUTIFUL

As Winston Churchill said, "There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man," and nothing is more pleasing to the eye than a slick, shiny, dappled coat that is rich with color and glint. Your horse's hair coat tells a lot about his overall condition and can influence how you feel about him, how judges place him, and even how he feels about himself.

IMPROVING YOUR HORSE'S COAT, MANE AND TAIL

BY KATHERINE LARK

PHOTO BY LISA KISER

Feeding for Shine

The first step to a lovely coat is a sound program of nutrition and deworming. A balanced ration and regular worming assures your horse the building blocks he needs for healthy skin and hair.

To further enhance his coat, you can add supplements of fatty acids, biotin, a B vitamin, or corn oil to his diet...but the best ingredient I have ever found for stimulating spring shedding, adding incredible shine and other health benefits is old-fashioned linseed jelly. It can strengthen your horse's lungs (it is great to feed to a horse with a cough), and because it is a mucousy laxative, it keeps his bowels lubricated as well.

To make the jelly, soak a small handful of linseeds (or flaxseeds) overnight in a non-metal pot of water (a quart or so). In the morning, boil the seeds for at least an hour, stirring constantly. You want the seeds to crack and release their gasses. The jelly will get very slimy and thick. Add the entire mix-

ture to some wheat bran, add water until it is wet, and watch your horse gobble it up. You can feed the jelly once or twice a week—but be careful, because it is very rich. A little is good, but a lot can be dangerous.

Never feed raw linseed. The seeds have to be boiled thoroughly, or their gas will cause flatulent colic. If you don't have the time or are worried about using the jelly, pure, cold expressed linseed oil can be fed. Add one ounce of linseed oil to your horse's grain once a week. You can get linseed oil at a health food store (buy edible linseed oil) and keep it cold, since it becomes rancid quickly in the heat.

Grooming and Bathing

A good grooming routine will help keep your horse's coat clean and will stimulate the production of sebum—the natural oil that makes him shine.

There are two schools of thought on bathing horses. One is totally against it, the other, totally for it. The reason some oppose frequent bathing with shampoo is that the soap and chemicals can strip the horse's coat of needed oils.

I believe that anything in excess can be damaging. It is very healthful to rinse the sweat from your horse's coat when he needs it. Plain water works just fine without stripping your horse's natural oils. Use warm water on his large body muscles and back, and cold water on his legs.

When your horse needs a good scrubbing, go ahead and do it. But be sure to rinse him thoroughly. After a bath, I mix up a cup of Uni-cure (a moisturizer/skin and hair conditioner for people) in a gallon of water, sponge it into the horse's coat, mane and tail, and leave it on. I use it full-strength on dry spots, and have even used it when cleaning geldings' sheaths.

Shedding

For a horse that is hard to shed out, supplemental feeding with MSM can help. MSM (methylsulfonyl methane), is a source of sulphur, which stimulates shedding. Many herbs that are said to put dapples on a horse's coat, such as nettles, are high in sulphur and silica.

You can use MSM for two to four weeks to get the old hair to loosen. Or you can use a yellow sulphur salt block instead (in addition to your regular salt/mineral block). Your horse will eat what he needs of it.

Since the sun will bleach a horse's coat, he will look better if he has shade during the day in summertime and is turned out at night.

Let Your Horse be a Horse

Let your horse get muddy now and then—it's good for his skin, just as a mud pack is good for human skin. Let him get soaked by rain or collect rainwater to rinse him with. Nothing softens hair better than rainwater.

Let him roll in the dust; it absorbs sweat and excess oils, and keeps flies at bay. Let him graze fresh food in safe pastures, nibbling at the herbs and grasses nature designed for him to eat. Massage his body. You don't need to learn specific therapy techniques unless you have an unsoundness to work on. Massage him for simple pleasure to make him feel good.

Keep your horse well-fed, free of parasites, clean, exercised, and happy, and his good health will show, especially in how his coat shines. ■

Katharine Lark has taught riding for over 30 years in Virginia, Florida, and Colorado. She now lives in New Mexico and does her teaching with a pen, writing for several national horse magazines.