Bathing Your Horse: Step by Step

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If you are bathing your horse for the first time, there are a few things you should consider:

Begin by checking the weather. If it's too cool for you to get wet, then it's probably too cold for your horse, too.

Next, carefully choose a good area for bathing. The ground should be concrete or grass, not dirt that could turn into a mud pile and negate the bathing.

Tie him up or, better yet, have a companion hold him still for you. Bathing can dry out hooves so consider massaging petroleum jelly or hoof dressing onto his hooves for waterproofing.

If you are using a hose, begin by directing the water at one of the horse's front feet. Leave the water there until the horse shows signs of acceptance (for example, he stops trying to move away). For an overly nervous horse, you may want to begin by sponging the water onto his back and then gradually introducing the hose.

Let the Bathing Begin

After hosing feet and legs, gradually move up to the body. Once the horse is wet, you can use a sponge to shampoo the coat. Mix a little bit of mild horse shampoo in a bucket of water. Too much shampoo can dry out the horse's coat, leaving it dull and dry. Shampoo one section and rinse. Trying to shampoo the entire horse before rinsing is not recommended. If the shampoo dries, this will also result in a dry, dull coat.

In general, horses don't like having water on their heads, so leave the head for last. Think of a way to make your horse comfortable with the water. You can trickle a little between his ears, or you can allow him to take a drink from the hose. You will want to minimize any rinsing, so if you use shampoo on the head, only use a very small, heavily diluted amount. After washing the head, thoroughly dry ears and nostrils with a soft, clean towel. At least every six months, use a gentle, non-irritating sheath cleaner to clean the sheath of stallions and geldings or the udders of a mare.

Once your horse is clean, use a sweat scraper to remove excess water from the coat. Then rub him down with clean, dry towels. Work a horse conditioner into his mane and tail to minimize hair breakage. Walk your horse until his coat is completely dry, otherwise he may be tempted to take a roll in the dirt.

To ensure the bath goes smoothly, have all your tools on hand. Below is a checklist of equipment for horse bathing.

Equipment Checklist

Hose with adjustable nozzle (large tub of water warmed if no running hot water).

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Three buckets of water - one for rinsing water, one for mixing shampoo for body washing, one for mixing shampoo for head washing.

Several big sponges.

Mild shampoo especially made for horses.

Horse conditioner.

Sheath cleaner.

Sweat scraper.

Clean, dry towels.

Petroleum jelly or hoof dressing.

Rubber gloves to protect your hands.

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