

Guide to Proper Grooming, Tacking Up and After Work Care

By Jill Kuc

Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. Grooming Your Horse	1
A. Visual Assessment	1
B. Hoof Care	1
C. Curry Comb	3
D. Brushes	4
E. Mane and Tail Brushes or Combs	5
F. Face Brush	5
G. Scratches	5
H. Final Thoughts on Grooming	6
II. Tacking Up and Un-Tacking Your Horse	7
A. Haltering and Leading	7
B. Saddling	8
C. Bridling	9
D. Protective Boots or Polo Wraps	10
E. Un-Tacking	10
III. After Work-Out Horse Care	11
A. Cooling Out Your Horse	11
B. Coolers, Sheets and Blankets	12
IV. Rider Turnout	13

I. GROOMING YOUR HORSE

Proper grooming of your horse is important for many reasons. The obvious reason is to clean off any dirt and mud, but grooming is about much more than that. Grooming also allows you to assess your horse's health and to check him/her over for any injuries, loose or missing shoes, or anything else out of the ordinary. Grooming also allows you time to assess your horse's mood and allows you time to transition from the distractions of every day life into a complete focus on your horse. This guide will tell you the correct way to groom your horse for success.

A. Visual Assessment

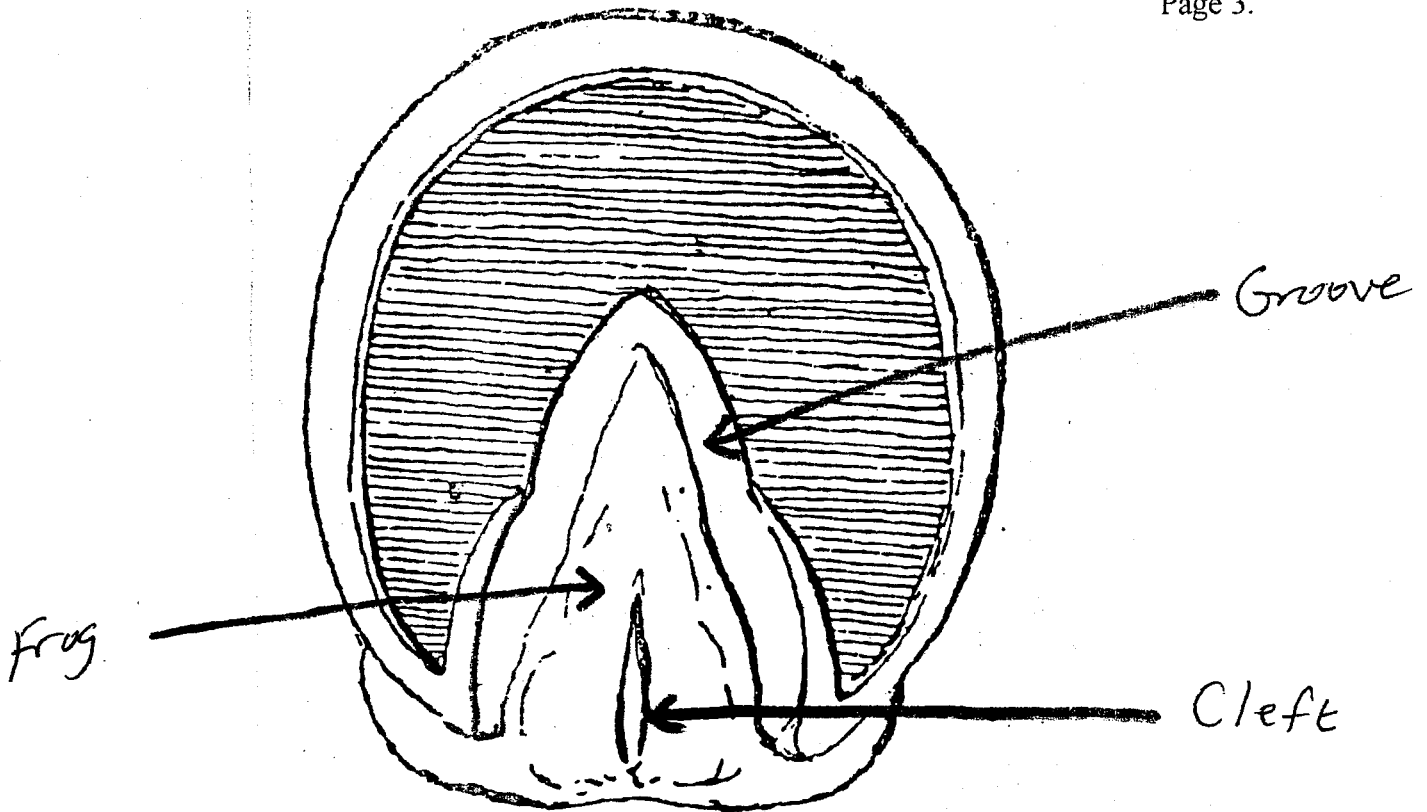
The first step is to do a quick visual assessment of your horse as you bring him out of his stall to groom him in the cross ties or as you prepare to groom him in his stall. Check to see that he is walking normally and that his attitude is normal for him. Take a quick look around his stall to make sure he is passing manure and has a wet spot in his stall. Check to see if he has left any grain or hay uneaten. Know what is normal for your horse so that you can spot anything that is not quite right. Early detection of problems in your horse can make a huge difference in preventing major health issues. Also look over your horse from head to tail on both sides and from top to bottom to make sure there are no obvious cuts, scrapes or swelling that may need to be taken care of.

B. Hoof Care

Once you have completed your Visual Assessment of your horse, it is time to check his hooves. First check to make sure he has all of his shoes if he wears them. Next, check the outside of his hooves for any cracks or chips which could be a problem. When you are ready to pick out his hooves, make sure to notice if any of his feet feel warmer than the others - this could be a sign of a problem inside the hoof.

Here are the steps to follow when properly picking your horse's hooves:

1. Stand on his left side with your back to his head, facing the rear.
2. Reach down with your left hand and gently pinch the top of his left front fetlock to ask him to pick up his foot. If he doesn't pick it up for you, try leaning your left shoulder into his shoulder.
3. Once he picks up his foot, cradle it in your left hand to support it for him and use the hoof pick with your right hand. (If you are left handed, you may prefer to switch hands).
4. Using your hoof pick, pick out all of the mud and manure from his foot. You will need to make sure to clean out the grooves on either side of his frog as well as the cleft in the bottom center of his frog (see diagram on page 3).
5. Use the brush of the hoof pick to clean off the sole of his foot.
6. Make sure to check the soles of his feet for any bruising and the frog for any signs of thrush. Thrush is an infection of the foot that can make the horse lame. Signs of thrush include a foul odor, black goo or excessively soft frogs.
7. Check to make sure his shoes are on securely and that they are on straight and with no loose or missing nails.
8. Once you have finished with the left front hoof, repeat the process with the left hind, right front and right hind. Remember to always stand next to your horse facing the rear. When you pick the hooves on the horse's right side, you can hold the hoof in either hand and use the other hand for the hoof pick. Do not walk behind your horse to change sides!!!!
9. Make sure to clean the outside of the hoof as well, but take care not to damage the coronary band (the area where the hair and hoof meet).



C. Curry Comb

The purpose of the curry comb is to loosen any mud, dirt or sweat that has accumulated on your horse and to remove any loose hair he may be shedding out. Curry combs come in rubber, plastic or rubber mitts. Any of these will work, so find what works best for you and your horse. NEVER use a metal curry comb on your horse! This will be very painful for him. Metal curry combs should only be used to clean your brushes.

To use a curry comb correctly, place it against your horse's coat and move it in circular patterns. Start with his neck and move down one side of his body. Don't forget to curry under his belly and on his legs and sides. Only use a curry comb above the horse's knees and hocks - the lower legs have tendons and ligaments close to the skin which can be easily damaged.

D. Brushes

There are many types of brushes for your horse. A dandy brush is a hard-bristled brush used to remove dried mud and caked on dirt. Some horses are too sensitive for this type of brush and prefer a brush that is a combination body brush/dandy brush. These types of brushes have hard bristles in the center of the brush, surrounded by softer bristles around the edge. These brushes are great for removing the dirt the curry comb has loosened. A finishing brush is very soft and can be used last to brush off any remaining dandruff, dust or small amounts of dirt and to bring a shine to the horse's coat.

When using a brush on your horse, always brush in the direction that the hair lies. Brushing against the hair can be uncomfortable for your horse. Be aware that in some spots, the horse's hair changes direction and so should your brushing. When you brush the horse, make sure to flick the brush away from the horse at the end of your stroke to pull the dirt and dust away from the horse instead of just moving it to another spot on the horse. Don't use a dandy brush below your horse's knees or hocks for the same reason you would not use a curry comb there. Other brushes are fine to use on the whole leg.

As you are brushing your horse (and even while currying him), use your other hand to feel your horse for any cuts, bumps, heat or swelling you might not see on your visual inspection. Make sure to run your hand over his whole body, including both sides of all four legs.

It is important to make sure that your horse is clean everywhere where his tack (or sheets or blankets) will touch so that he does not get irritated by the tack rubbing over dirt.

E. Mane and Tail Brushes or Combs

You should brush or comb your horse's mane each time you groom him in order to get out any knots or anything they have gotten stuck in their mane such as briars, hay, etc. You should **only** brush or comb your horse's tail when it is clean and has a detangler product, such as Show Sheen, in it. When you brush or comb your horse's tail, begin at the bottom and work your way up. Take a small section at a time and work through from bottom to top, easing out the knots and debris. It takes many years for a horse's tail hairs to grow to full length, so be careful to break as few hairs off as possible!

F. Face Brush

Many horses like to have their face brushed if you are gentle. Always cover the horse's eye with one hand while you are brushing near it with the other to avoid brushing dirt or dust into his eye. You can use a small face brush or a soft finishing brush. Some horses even like to have you brush inside their ears, but others don't like their ears touched at all! Make sure you listen to the signals your horse is giving you.

G. Scratches

Also called pastern dermatitis, dew poisoning, greasy heel, or mud fever, scratches is not a condition itself; it's a description of a problem commonly seen on a horse's lower limbs. Scratches is caused by a variety of skin conditions including viral, bacterial, fungal, or parasitic infections. The best way to prevent scratches in a horse is to keep their lower legs very clean. This means making sure to clean the front of your horse's back legs - the area that sometimes gets black spots or even black patches on them. Prevention is much better than correction, so clean his legs well each and every time you ride. If you see the black stuff accumulating, gently scrap it off with your finger nail or very gently with a rubber curry or rubber mitt (don't use a plastic curry for this). Additionally, make sure to clean the area on the backs of your horses feet just above his heels and below his fetlock - another area where this infections can occur.

H. Final Thoughts on Grooming

If you find anything out of the ordinary while grooming your horse, or if you have any difficulty picking up his feet or performing any other task of grooming, please make sure to let someone know. Ask one of the working students to help you or make sure you (or a working student) let your instructor know right away. If it is your own horse, you will have to decide what, if anything, needs to be done to correct the problem. The instructors, staff and working students are here to provide any assistance you might need. If it is a lesson horse, the working students and instructors will work together to decide what's best. We would rather have you tell us about something that is not a big deal, than to not tell us about something that turns out to be one!

The time you spend grooming your horse sets the tone for your ride that day. You and your horse will both perform better if you have taken the time to make sure he is clean and in good health, with no loose or missing shoes, and no injuries or illness. Additionally, your instructor or judge will see that you have taken the time to prepare yourself and your horse for your ride.

Please do not come into the ring with dirt or mud on your horse. He will not perform to the best of his abilities if he isn't taken care of properly. A good grooming, combined with a proper tack-up routine, could easily take you 20-30 minutes, but it's time well spent caring for and bonding with your equestrian partner.

II. TACKING UP AND UN-TACKING YOUR HORSE

You should always present yourself and your horse to the arena in a professional, neat manner - this is called proper turn-out. A horse should always be ridden in tack that fits correctly. The tack should be inspected every time you ride to make sure there is no loose stitching and no dry rot. You must also check to make sure the holes on the billet straps (the straps the girth attaches to) are not stretched out or ripping. All keepers on the bridle should be securely fastened and no loose straps should be dangling anywhere.

A. Haltering and Leading

The correct steps to follow when haltering your horse are:

1. Always stand on the left side of your horse facing forward to put the halter on. **DO NOT** stand in front of your horse facing his head!
2. Hold the crown piece of the halter in your right hand and use your left hand to slip the noseband over the horse's nose as you raise the halter up.
3. Gently pull the crown piece over each of the horse's ears, making sure not to fold his ears up under the halter.
4. Hook the clasp on the left side of the halter that passes under the horse's throat.

The correct steps to follow when leading your horse are:

1. Make sure that your leadline is attached to the center ring on the bottom of the halter's noseband. Hold the leadline under his chin with your right hand and gather the remainder of the leadline in your left hand. **NEVER** wrap the excess line around your hand because it can quickly tighten around your hand if the horse should pull away from you. Always loop the excess line back and forth in the palm of your hand for safety.
2. If the horse is in his stall when you halter him, make sure to open the stall door fully before leading the horse through the doorway - a horse can crack his hip if he bangs it on a slightly open door as he passes through!
3. Always lead your horse from his left side and walk next to him, not in front of him. Your horse should walk at the speed you choose and should stop when you stop.

4. If you are placing your horse in cross-ties in the barn aisle, make sure to attach both cross-ties before unlatching the leadline.
5. When leading a horse back into his stall, again make certain that the door is fully open before leading him through the doorway. Once inside the stall, turn the horse around to face the door and use one hand to close the door. Then, unhook the clasp of the halter and gently lower the halter off his head, making sure not to catch his ears. Exit the stall, making sure to securely latch the stall door closed behind you.

B. Saddling

The correct steps to follow when saddling your horse are:

1. Always stand on the left side of your horse to put the saddle on.
2. Put the saddle pad in place on the horse's back. Make sure to "tent" the front of the saddle pad up over the horse's withers to prevent it from putting excess pressure on his withers.
3. Place the mattenes pad (if the horse uses one) on top of the saddle pad, making sure not to push the saddle pad down against the withers.
4. Place the saddle gently onto the horse's back on top of the pad(s). Place the saddle slightly forward of the correct position and then slowly slide it backwards until it comes to a rest in the correct spot. Place your hand under the knee roll of the saddle to make sure the saddle is resting behind the horse's shoulder and is not pinching it. Also make sure the saddle is not too far back where it could put pressure on the horse's kidneys.
5. Once the saddle is in the correct spot on the horse's back, attach any straps from the saddle pad or mattenes pad to the billet straps of the saddle (the straps the girth attaches to). If the saddle pad straps do not reach or do not have loops to attach them, tuck them under the billet straps of the saddle so they are not hanging out and flapping around as you ride.

6. Attach the girth to the right side of the saddle first, making sure to thread the girth (or the billet straps on a dressage saddle) through the strap at the bottom of the saddle pad. This helps keep the saddle pad from slipping back. Then walk in front of the horse to the left side and gently the girth to that side, again passing the girth or billet straps through the strap on the bottom of the saddle pad. Gradually tighten the girth on one or both sides by going up only one hole at a time, until the girth is snug. Be very careful not to over-tighten the girth or it could cause the horse discomfort - this can happen too easily if you use a girth tightener, so use extra care if using one! Too loose of a girth can allow your saddle to slip to the side or even under the horse's belly! So a snug fitting girth is what you should be aiming for.
7. Adjust your stirrups to the correct hole if you are not riding in your own saddle and know what holes they should be on for you. Run the stirrups back up so they will not get caught on anything or bounce against his sides as you lead your horse to the ring. You should *never* lead a horse with the stirrups hanging down. If you have stirrups that cannot be run up, gently cross them over the saddle.
8. Before mounting, always re-check that your girth is tight since many horses will hold their breath while you tighten the girth initially. Again, take care not to make the girth too tight - snug is best!

C. Bridling

The correct steps to follow when bridling your horse are:

1. Stand on your horse's left side facing forward with your right shoulder next to his shoulder.
2. Place the reins over his head and then unclip the cross ties from his halter, making sure to keep a hand on his halter at all times.
3. Remove the halter from the horse's head, keeping your right hand on his nose at all times and the reins over his neck.
4. Hold the bridle in your right hand and place your left hand under the bit. Raise the bit to his mouth and insert it into his mouth above his tongue. If your horse doesn't open his mouth to take the bit, slide your left thumb into the groove between his front teeth and his molars to encourage him to open his mouth. Then pull up on the bridle to place the bit in his mouth.

5. Once the bit is in his mouth, gently place the crown piece over his ears, one at a time, making sure not to fold his ears up under the bridle.
6. Making sure that the noseband is straight and that it is passing under the cheek pieces of the bridle, buckle the noseband so that you can fit only two fingers under it.
7. If the horse has a flash noseband, attach it snugly making sure that the buckles are not near his mouth and the loose end is secured in its keeper.
8. Attach the throat latch of the bridle, making sure you can fit your fist between the underside of his jaw and the strap.
9. Check to make sure there are no loose straps and all buckles and keepers are securely fastened.

Note: Depending upon the type of bridle and noseband used, there may be some variations in the steps needed for bridling your horse; however, the steps listed above work for all Hidden Creek lesson horse bridles.

D. Protective Boots or Polo Wraps

If your horse wears protective boots, make sure they are positioned correctly and securely fastened. If you like to ride in polo wraps, make sure they are put on correctly and are securely fastened. Remember to remove all boots or wraps prior to entering the show ring or you will be eliminated!

E. Un-Tacking

1. After riding, make sure to run your stirrups up again or cross them over the saddle before leading your horse into the barn. You should also loosen your girth a hole or two to allow the horse to be more comfortable and to signal to the horse that he is finished working.

2. To unbridle the horse, stand next to the horse's left shoulder facing forward. Make sure to keep the reins over the horse's head and to have the horse's halter hung over your left arm. Unbuckle the straps that go around the horse's head - noseband, flash noseband and throat latch. Gently lower the bridle from behind the horse's ears, making sure not to bang the bit into the horse's teeth, keeping your right hand on the horse's nose. Let the bridle hang over your arm as you ease the halter up over the horse's nose and ears and fasten the clasp. Keeping hold of the halter, bring the reins back over the horse's head and re-attach the cross ties. If you are un-tacking in your horse's stall, you may not need to halter the horse after removing the bridle.
3. To remove the saddle, unbuckle the girth on the left side and then on the right. From the left side of the horse, gently lift the saddle off his back.

III. AFTER WORK-OUT HORSE CARE

It is important to remember that your riding session does not end when you dismount. You must take care of your horse *before* you take care of yourself!

A. Cooling Out Your Horse

You should walk your horse to cool out after each ride, ideally until his breathing has returned to normal. This may take 5-10 minutes (or longer) depending upon the weather conditions, the activity level of your ride and your horse's conditioning.

Once you have un-tacked your horse, make sure to brush and/or curry off all saddle marks and sweat before putting the horse's sheet or blanket on or returning him to his stall. In warm weather, you can hose your horse off with cool water to help him bring his temperature back to normal and to rinse the sweat off. In cold weather, you may have to hand walk him with a cooler on until his sweat dries and his temperature has come back down. ***Do not put a sheet or blanket on a warm, sweaty horse and do not put any hot horse back in a stall.*** You must help him recover to his pre-workout condition before you put him away.

B. Coolers, Sheets and Blankets

It is important to know how to safely put on and take off a horse's cooler, sheet or blanket. Failing to follow the correct steps and/or attaching the straps incorrectly can result in injury to the horse or yourself! Always make sure you have a clean horse before putting on a sheet or blanket. Any mud, dirt or sweat, especially on the withers, topline, hips and shoulders, can cause the horse to get rubbed and develop sores!

The correct steps to follow when putting on a horse's cooler, sheet or blanket are:

1. Stand facing your horse on his left side, holding the cooler, sheet or blanket over your arms with the front of the blanket over your left arm and the back of the blanket over your right arm.
2. Making sure that the horse knows you are there, slowly lift the cooler, sheet or blanket over his back and spread it into position centered on his back from withers to tail.
3. Fasten the front straps (those that attach over the horse's chest) first. These may be buckles or clips. If they are clips, make certain to clip the opening side towards the horse and make sure that the clip fully closes.
4. Next, fasten the two straps that pass under the horse's belly. The strap attached to the cooler, sheet or blanket towards the front of the right side attaches to the back buckle on the left side. The strap attached to the cooler, sheet or blanket towards the back of the right side, attaches to the front buckle on the left side. The straps should crisscross under the horse's belly when correctly fastened.
5. If the cooler, sheet or blanket has a tail strap, it will go under the horse's tail. Make sure to stand on the left side of your horse, facing the horse's tail. Gently lift his tail and slide the tail strap under it. ***Never stand directly behind your horse, you could get kicked!***
6. If the cooler, sheet or blanket has two leg straps attached just in front of the hind legs, there are two methods for fastening those.

The first method (and the one used on most Hidden Creek horses) is to crisscross these straps between the horse's back legs. The strap attached in front of his left hind leg will pass in front of that leg and attach behind his left hind leg. The strap attached in front of his right hind leg will pass in front of that leg and attach behind his left hind leg. Again, make sure to stand next to your horse to fasten these straps and not behind him!

The second method is to pass the left strap around the inside of the horse's left hind leg and attach it to the cooler, sheet or blanket behind that same leg. You will do the same with the right strap; however, you will loop it around the left strap before attaching it behind the horse's right hind leg.

Whichever method you sue, make sure that the clips close completely so the don't come un-hooked.

- 7 Once all straps are securely fastened, check to make sure that the belly straps are not hanging low enough for the horse to catch his foot in them when he lays down. Check also that the leg straps or tail strap do not hang down low enough to catch the horse's hock when walking or foot when laying down. The leg straps or tail strap should be loose enough not to cause discomfort, but should hang above the hocks when fastened.

When removing a cooler, sheet or blanket from your horse, simply reverse the steps above. When putting a cooler, sheet or blanket on your horse, always work front to back. When removing one, always work back to front. Try to remember that when only one part is fastened, your horse should be wearing a cape for safety!

IV. RIDER TURNOUT

You will only ride as well as you look! Show respect for yourself and your horse by always making sure you look presentable. Shirts should be tucked in and belts should be worn, especially in clinic or show settings. Girls' hair should be tucked up into your helmet or worn in a low ponytail or braid. For shows, hair should be worn under a hair net on tucked into a "show bow" that has a fancy hair net attached. Loose hair can fall over your eyes making it hard to see and can be distracting to the judge or instructor.

You don't want to dress in any way that takes away from the beauty of your horse and your partnership together. Further, you don't want to dress in baggy clothing that could get caught on something and cause you harm. A properly fitted and snugly fastened safety helmet is essential! For shows, boots and half chaps should be clean and shiny. Remember that your riding boots should always have at least a one inch heel to prevent your foot from sliding too far into the stirrup.

The more professional your appearance and the more professionally turned out your horse is, the better prepared you will both be to have a successful ride.