

"Ground Manners - Banish Bathing Blues"

By Lynn Palm

Bathing is a basic grooming procedure that a horse needs to learn. Introduce this lesson only when a horse accepts basic training commands. A wash stall is an ideal teaching spot, but these techniques will work outdoors along a fence.

Step By Step Bathing Success

Stand the horse in a straight position with his right side along the wash stall wall. Use a hose with a nozzle that releases a soft stream of water, and make sure the water temperature is comfortable.

Stand off the horse's left shoulder, keeping a loose tension on his longe or lead rope. Let him look, smell, and investigate the wash stall. When he relaxes, hold the hose a few feet from him. The hose can be a scary object. Move slowly and give your horse plenty of time to get used to it. Turn the water on so it trickles from the hose onto the floor. Again, let him get used to the running water. If he moves forward to get away from it, hold up your hand and give him the command to "whoa." Reassure and praise him to encourage him as he accepts the hose.

Slowly move the hose toward your horse. With the hose pointing downward, slowly move it close enough so that water falling on the floor splashes up on his foreleg. When he accepts this, bring the hose up and direct water on his leg. If he lifts his leg to avoid contact with the water, move with him and maintain the water's touch. If he wants to sniff the hose or play with the water, let him for now. These are signs of acceptance.

Gradually move the hose up the foreleg to the shoulder. To give him more reassurance, hold the end of

the hose in your hand and stroke him



with that hand at the same time the water is touching him. Work from front to back, letting a gentle stream of water run along his topline and barrel. Introduce water to the hind leg area by using the same steps as on the foreleg. When the horse accepts the water on his hind leg, then move the water up the hind leg, across the hindquarters, and back to the shoulder and neck area.

Face Washing

Many horses do not like getting their faces wet. Start with a soft damp sponge to teach your horse to accept this important grooming procedure. Hold the side of the halter and bring the sponge up the crest of the horse's neck, behind his head, and rest it on his poll. Once he accepts it, bring the sponge between his ears and down to his face. With short, soft strokes, gently wipe his face, ears, and head. If he brings his head up, move with him, keeping contact with the sponge until he relaxes his head and neck down. This step may take some time and practice to master.

Once your horse accepts a sponge with water, introduce the hose. With the hose turned off and in your hand, bring it up the crest of his neck and hold it on his poll. When he accepts

this, repeat the same procedure except this time with the water turned on to a very gentle stream. Hold it on his poll, and let the water trickle down his face. Gauge his reactions to know when he accepts the feel of the water on his face. Finally, teach the horse to accept the hose being brought up directly in front of his head with the water applied directly to his face.

Incorporate a bathing lesson into your daily training—even if it means just getting your horse's legs wet with a hose—until he learns to accept bathing without the blues.

How long will it take for a horse to learn to accept bathing? Horses, like people, are individuals. There is no set amount of time that should be spent on this lesson. Your horse will tell you through his reactions when he is relaxed, accepting, and ready for the next step.

The hardest thing for us is to be patient and take the time the horse needs to accept these new experiences. Time spent in teaching this lesson will pay you back many times over in a horse that accepts and trusts everything you want to do with him.

Need more help learning how to teach your horse to accept bathing? Let me show you how in my DVD "**Advancing Basic Training.**" Bring the popcorn because this 90-minute visual is packed full of training techniques to help you teach your horse how to accept ground tying, bathing, clipping, brushing, and trailer loading. You can order this and other educational products or inquire about our courses by calling 800-503-2824 or visiting us online at www.lynnpalm.com.