

A Guide to Grooming Tools

The wide array of grooming tools and products available to equestrians today is exciting. Traditional brushes and curries used by horsemen throughout the years are supplemented by innovative products that can enhance the grooming process.

If you're just getting started in building a grooming kit—perhaps you've just leased your first horse—the many choices of grooming tools can be overwhelming. Or maybe you're a parent hoping to surprise your youngster with her own grooming kit to take to her weekly lessons, but you're uncertain about which types of curries and brushes are best for her to learn on. This article is for you. It explains how various tools are used and breaks down the process of building:

- An essential grooming kit for every equestrian
- A deluxe grooming kit for salon-style horse care
- A kit for kids packed with colorful and fun-to-use tools

For a guide to building a bathing kit, refer to “Tips for Bathing Your Horse.”

Essential Grooming Tools for Every Equestrian



Rubber Curry Comb – An economical, long-lasting and essential tool for every grooming box, the rubber curry comb is available in large and small sizes to accommodate large and small hands. Its short rubber teeth softly stimulate circulation in the horse's muscles and skin while loosening debris and shedding hair as the first tool used during the grooming process. If you can only have one curry comb in your kit, this curry is the one to choose.



Sarvis Curry Comb – Another budget-friendly and versatile item for most grooming boxes, this tough plastic curry has long teeth that stand up to long winter coats and is effective on dried mud and manure stains. Some people use this type of curry for the dual purpose of combing manes and tails; others find it useful at bath time as it lathers soapy water on the horse's coat.



Stiff or Hard (Dandy) Brush – Most grooming kits should contain a very stiff bristled brush. This type of brush is generally used just after currying to whisk away the heaviest layer of loosened dirt and hair, and is handy for removing dried mud from a horse's legs. It may also prove useful for brushing mud off hoof walls. The bristles may be made of synthetic fibers or coarse natural animal hair, and the back may be made of either plastic or wood. Extremely sensitive or thin-skinned horses may not tolerate the coarseness of the stiffest of brushes, so check for degrees of coarseness from very stiff to medium stiff to suit your particular horse. Dandy brushes are rectangular in shape with grooves or contours on the sides of the handle for comfort in the hand.

Removing Bot Fly Eggs

If you see tiny yellow spots stuck on your horse's coat, you're looking at bot fly eggs and you'll need a tool to remove them too. The bot fly typically lays her eggs in clusters on a horse's legs, flanks, chin, shoulders or mane, but they can be laid anywhere on the horse's body and can be somewhat spread out. Her goal is for the horse to scratch itself—or a pasture buddy—with its teeth and ingest the eggs so that larvae can mature inside the horse (where it can cause health and digestive problems in its host). To prevent your horse from ingesting the eggs, remove them promptly using a bot egg knife or a Slick 'N Easy Grooming Tool.



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Medium Stiff/Medium Soft Brush – A medium brush is a must-have item for virtually everyone, especially those people with a sensitive horse that cannot tolerate the coarseness of very stiff bristles. Different manufacturers refer to medium brushes as either medium stiff or medium soft, but a medium brush can prove useful when your horse does not require the heavy duty action of a very stiff brush. Medium brushes can be found in both synthetic and natural styles.



Soft Brush or Soft Body Brush (sometimes called a Finishing Brush) – This type of brush is another essential tool for every groomer, and is used last in the grooming session. Its soft, fine bristles are positioned very closely together to remove the finest dust particles from the horse's coat and to smooth out the hair which enhances natural sheen. You can find soft bristle brushes with synthetic, natural or a blend of both bristles, and with both plastic and wooden handles. Body brushes are oval in shape and usually have a leather strap placed over the handle, while dandy brushes are rectangular in shape.



Hoof Pick – The most necessary tool in the grooming kit is the hoof pick. You can find them in all sorts of styles: those with brushes for flicking away dried dirt and bedding, those with fun shapes and colors, and those that are ergonomically designed for comfort in the hand. There are magnetic hoof picks that stick to any metal surface to prevent misplacement, and those that fold away into a pocket. No grooming box would be complete without a hoof pick to remove manure, mud, stones and debris from the horse's hooves.



Pulling Comb – Though some breed-specific guidelines allow for long manes, many horses used in sport disciplines such as hunter, jumper, dressage and combined driving have thinned and shortened manes. Shortened and managed manes make braiding possible for formal events. The simplest tool to pull manes is the pulling comb. You'll find small pulling combs that easily slip into a pocket, and those with either metal or wooden handles that are especially easy to hold.



Shed 'N' Blade – This tool has tiny metal teeth that target loose hair and caked-on mud. Many groomers favor its use during shedding season when lots of hair has to be removed from the horse. Because of the slightly abrasive nature of the teeth, a shedding blade should be used with care and only on the fleshiest parts of the horse so as not to abrade the boney areas such as prominent hips, the face and legs. The shedding blade can also serve a dual purpose at bath time, as you can use the smooth side to remove sweat and water from your horse in place of a sweat scraper.

The Little Extras

Complete your essential grooming kit with a couple of household items. Add a soft towel or rag that you can keep washed and clean. You'll use it for wiping your horse's eyes or nostrils, and for wiping his lips if they're foamy after riding. A separate rag can be handy for wiping sweat or debris from your horse's sensitive parts such as the rectum, sheath or teats. Also add a pair of scissors, which can come in handy for many purposes such as trimming your sport horse's tail or bridle path.

Consult your farrier to find out whether your horse should have some hoof dressing or ointment, and if so, your grooming kit is the perfect place to store it. In summertime, be sure to add a bottle of insect spray too.



Grooming Tote – You'll find all sorts of ways to store your grooming tools conveniently, from fabric tote bags to boxes with lids, buckets and totes. Two of the most popular and traditional methods are the wooden grooming box and its modern counterpart, the plastic grooming tote (shown above).



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Deluxe Grooming Kit for Salon-Style Horse Care



Super Soft Rubber Curry Comb – Very soft curry combs with fine rubber teeth are designed to gently loosen dirt on delicate places such as the horse's face and legs.



Round curry with cone-shaped fingers – The Grooma Groomer and the Oster Curry Comb have large fingers that provide massaging effects on a horse's muscles while they loosen dirt, hair and debris.



Jelly Scrubber Mitt – Similar to a curry, these soft rubber scrubbers are handy at bath time and for softly loosening debris on the horse's delicate spots. One side has larger, firmer nubs to produce a massaging action and the other side has smaller, finer nubs perfect for delicate areas. If you use it for bathing, you'll find that it helps create lather.



Face Brush – This is a very small and soft brush that fits in the palm for use on the horse's face. Its diminutive size can be helpful for horses who do not like to have their faces brushed.



Mane and Tail Brush or Comb – While some people prefer to use their fingers only for separating the hairs of tails and manes, others rely on wide-toothed mane and tail combs and brushes. These tools separate tangles and pull out pieces of bedding while leaving the mane and tail soft and glossy.



A Solocomb or a Grooma Mane Master – can replace a pulling comb. These tools will help you shorten your horse's mane without pulling.



Slick 'N Easy Grooming Tool – Some people appreciate using this tool during shedding season in place of a traditional shedding blade. This fiberglass grooming block attracts hair and dirt. It also performs double duty in removing bot fly eggs should the need arise.



Applicator mitt – Available in both sheepskin and synthetic fleece, an applicator mitt can be used after your soft brush to help smooth out your horse's hair to increase shine. It can also be used to apply a thin layer of a hair polish, sunscreen or fly spray.



Detangler – Nothing makes removing snarls, burrs and bits of bedding from your horse's tail or a long mane easier than a detangling product. A must-have for a session of salon-like grooming, detanglers come in liquid or gel formulas. You'll find some that are fortified with vitamins for moisturizing and conditioning, and some that restore manageability, add volume or enhance shine. Because all horses are different, you may want to experiment with different types of detanglers to find the one that works best on your horse's hair.



Helpful Tip

Perhaps you'll want to equip your deluxe grooming kit with some battery-operated power. Consider adding a cordless set of trimming clippers for quick touch-ups on bridle paths, whiskers and fetlocks. The Furminator Equine Tool is the battery-powered approach to speeding the shedding process.



Deluxe Grooming Tote – To hold all your important grooming tools, you might consider the Deluxe Grooming Tote Bag (shown) with many pockets to keep you organized, or the large Ascot II Grooming Box, which has a lid to keep out dust.



Helpful Tip

Apply some detangler to your horse's tail just prior to starting your grooming session to give the product time to work. Then, when you're ready to comb out the tail, the detangling process will be quite easy!

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Kits for Kids



Bright colors and fun shapes can appeal to children while they're learning the process of responsible horse care. Additionally, many manufacturers produce petite-sized tools that are easier for tiny hands to hold. Here are some appealing items for your child's grooming kit—and some great ways to store the items too!



Pony Brushes – Look for pony brushes to suit small hands. Designed to better accommodate the smaller features of a pony's body, the smaller-sized brushes are lighter in weight and easier for children to handle. Your child will need a brush with stiff bristles and a brush with soft bristles.



Soft Rubber Curry in a small size – Your child will need a soft curry to loosen dirt and hair on the horse.

Hoof Pick – Your child must have a hoof pick in his or her grooming kit to learn proper hoof care. For added fun in learning to clean a horse's hooves, consider a hoof pick with a fun color or shape, such as the Jelly Welly Hoof Pick.



Shedding Tools – While a metal shedding blade with its pointed teeth may be inappropriate for your child depending on his or her age, a Shed Flower is an easy and fun to use alternative with slightly gentler action.

Grooming Tote or Bucket – To corral your child's brushes and curries, consider a colorful heart shaped pail, a plastic grooming tote with handle, a grooming box with lid or a fabric grooming tote bag with lots of individual pockets for grooming tools.

Preassembled Kits – You can purchase packages of grooming tools that are attractive to kids. Consider the Roma Ultimate Grooming Kit, which comes in a covered box in pink, purple and blue, or the Oster 7-Piece Equine Care Series Kit, which comes in a soft-sided bag in pink and blue color schemes.



Differences Between Synthetic and Natural Bristled Brushes

When you're considering the type of brushes to purchase, keep the points outlined here in mind:

Natural Bristle Brushes

- Tend to be slightly more costly than synthetic bristle brushes.
- With proper care, stand up to many years of use.
- Made from horse hair, goat hair or pig hair that some equestrians believe produces a better result to grooming.
- Typically have wooden handles that should not be bleached or left to soak.

Synthetic Bristle Brushes

- Available in budget-friendly price points.
- Plastic-backed brushes can be soaked in a mixture of bleach and water.
- Come in a variety of bright color combinations.
- Can be used during bath time with no negative effect of the soap on the brush.

