

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES FOR YOUR FIRST HORSE

By Amie Peck

You have waited your whole life for this – horse ownership. Whether you are 14 or 64, it will be an exciting time thinking of everything you will accomplish together, whether that is winning competitions or spending time on your favorite trail. However, even new owners that feel well educated and ready for this purchase often find themselves wondering what supplies they really need to have. It is best to be prepared with a few essential items if you are planning on buying, or have already purchased, your first horse.

Grooming Kit

A grooming kit is one of the most important items that every horse owner should have. These are supplies that you will use every time you ride your horse. Grooming is important for several reasons; one being that it provides a bonding experience between horse and rider where you can learn your equine partner's personality. It also increases circulation, which helps to promote healthy skin and a shiny coat. While brushing, you are also able to notice any nicks or cuts that the horse may have acquired as well as any possible swelling in the legs. This early detection can help heal any small wounds before they lead to more serious complications. Grooming is especially important before riding, to remove any dust or dirt where the saddle and girth will go – without proper brushing before tacking up a horse can easily develop sores. After riding you will want to groom again, brushing away sweat marks and checking for signs of tenderness from the saddle – an indication that it is not fitting properly.

So what are the tools in a grooming kit? There are several standard items that are important in order to properly clean and polish your horse. They are:

Curry comb – Either made of soft rubber or hard plastic with a handle on one side and short edges or “teeth” on the reverse. This comb is used in a circular motion on the body of the horse to loosen dirt and grime and stimulates the natural oils in a horse's coat. The currycomb should not be used on the face and only the softer rubber styles are recommended for use on the legs.

Dandy Brush – Stiff bristled brush intended to whisk away dirt loosened by the curry comb. This brush should not be used on the face or on horses with thin or sensitive skin.

Body Brush – Soft bristled brush, usually with a hand strap, can be used on the body, legs and face. This is a finishing brush, which removes any additional dirt and dust while polishing the coat.

Mane and Tail Comb – These combs come in a variety of makes and styles intended to remove shavings or hay embedded in the tail as well as to smooth out knots and tangles.

Hoof pick – For dislodging rocks or debris in the horses' hoof. They may be made out of metal, plastic or a combination of the two. Hooves should be picked before and after every ride to prevent stone bruises and to check the overall health of the hoof.

Shedding Blade – A curved piece of metal with short teeth on one side, this item is pertinent in the spring months, especially here in Alberta. The blade is used in a sweeping motion with the direction of the hair to help loosen and remove the winter coat in order to speed up the shedding process. The metal construction is too rough for use on the face or legs.

What you decide to store your grooming tools in is up to your personal preference. There are plastic totes, canvas totes with separate compartments and even Rubbermaid containers. Choose a grooming kit that you find the easiest to carry and the most convenient to organize your brushes in.

Depending on what style of riding you choose to participate in with your horse, you may acquire various other items in your grooming kit. Silicone grooming spray, hair conditioner or detangler, elastics, mane pulling combs, hoof polish, sponges, shampoo and sweat scrapers are items that are not essential but benefit the grooming process.

First Aid Kit

Another important set of supplies that every horse owner should have is an equine first aid kit, in anticipation of minor wounds. It is inevitable that your horse will have small nicks and cuts that will need timely treatment in order to prevent infection or more serious complications. It is the responsibility of every horse owner to be diligent in his or her care of any wounds. This first aid kit is intended to treat minor injuries only - if in doubt contact a veterinarian immediately. Also, be sure to ask a professional how to use each item ahead of time so that you are comfortable in their application before you have to treat a horse. Your first aid kit should include:

Antiseptic wound cleaner – Used to clean and disinfect minor cuts and scrapes. A common wound cleaner for horses is Betadine. Ensure that the antiseptic is diluted with water prior to use.

Wound cream or salve – This speeds healing on minor wounds and cuts and prevents dirt and other contaminants from entering the site. There are many different options for wound creams and treatments.

Thermometer – Used to check your horse's rectal temperature - plastic digital thermometers are easy to read and widely available. Ensure that you always tie a string to the end of the thermometer. Normal resting temperature for a horse is between 37-38.5° Celsius or 99-101° Fahrenheit but can vary depending on the time of day, amount of exercise and other environmental factors. A high temperature can indicate an infection or fever.

Vaseline – Petroleum jelly is useful for so many equine ailments, such as under a draining wound, on minor cuts on the lips and more. It is also an excellent lubricant for thermometers.

Gauze or absorbent padding and self-adhesive wrap – For wrapping and treating minor wounds, often in conjunction with the wound cream.

Scissors – Used for cutting pads or gauzes to fit wounds, among other uses. (If you are like me, pack two. Scissors in a barn are like socks in the dryer). A utility knife with a wire cutter will also be of great use to cut binder twine, open feedbags and for any fencing mishaps.

Epsom salts –Used for drawing out infections, such as a hoof abscess.

These are the bare necessities that you will find very useful as a first time horse owner. Remember that if you are not sure how to treat a wound always consult your veterinarian. Even wounds that seem superficial may become infected and require further medication, or be more serious than they appear.

As a first time horse owner it may be overwhelming to think of all the items that you will require. While purchasing saddles and bridles are usually thought of first, these are essential tools that will benefit the health and well being of your equine partner. With a basic grooming and first aid kit, you are well on your way to a long and healthy partnership with your horse.